

City of Durham Human Relations Commission's 2020 Annual Report to City Council

February 15, 2021

Dear Esteemed City Councilmembers,

The City of Durham Human Relations Commission (HRC) hereby submits our annual report. Should the City prefer this report to be delivered as a virtual, live presentation, we would be willing to make one or more commissioners available for such a presentation and discussion.

As always, we welcome the City Council's input regarding matters impacting human relations in Durham. We take our direction from the community. As Council and community members, you hold deep knowledge and great responsibility for how to improve our city in this regard.

Our roster of active commissioners is as follow:

1. Erin N Carson
2. Andrea M Hudson
3. Jeffrey R King
4. Darius J Whitney
5. Christina L Crosby
6. Amanda J Smith
7. Thomas W Cadwallader
8. Joy M Spencer
9. Farah M Campbell
10. Emily C Loftin
11. Maria L Solis-guzman
12. Stacy D Whitenight
13. Terrick Willis
14. Eric O Chacon
15. Nathan Plummer
16. John Rooks, Jr., Chair
17. Mikel L Barton, Vice Chair

There are no vacancies at this time, which is very welcome after a period of high turnover due to various reasons. Ten commissioners have been appointed within the past seventeen months. Seven commissioners have been appointed in the last year and have yet to participate in an in-person commission meeting.

The current HRC subcommittees are as follows:

Standing Committees

Annual Awards - Committee Chair: John Rooks, Jr.
Community Outreach - Committee Chairs: Mikel Barton, Joy Spencer
Policies & Procedures - Committee Chair: Nathan Plummer
Social Media - Committee Chairs: Andrea Hudson, Jeff King

Ad Hoc Committee

Public Housing Accountability - Committee Chairs: Christina Crosby, Thomas Cadwallader

2020 Year in Review

As we are all aware, 2020 presented severe challenges and it thus changed the ways in which the HRC came together and responded to our charge. We did not have meetings in April or May. Our Annual Awards event was cancelled. We began meeting monthly again via Zoom in June. No official reports were filed with the City Council.

The HRC did create one new ad hoc committee, the Public Housing Accountability Committee, to help address the public housing crisis at McDougald Terrace, and support the residents immediate and structural needs. This committee's work is ongoing.

The HRC drafted and submitted a We Are The Ones Fund Letter of Support to the City Council, which fully supported this inspiring funding initiative and the larger work of fostering true safety and wellness in Durham.

The Outreach Committee led an HRC-facilitated Covid-19 Speak Up event on October 13, 2020 to seek reflections and ideas for mitigating the harmful impact of this public health crisis and related economic crisis. A specific emphasis was placed on residents facing the worst of the crisis, including Durham's Latinx community and our undocumented residents. The event was bilingual and we were grateful for City-sponsored Spanish and English interpretation.

As a response to the serious needs we learned about during the Speak Up, chief among them being rent and utility assistance, the outreach Committee produced and distributed a Covid-19 Resource List. The resources are based on commissioner research and existing localized lists.

2021 Goals

The HRC is looking forward to hosting the Annual Awards event this year after a one year hiatus. The event is currently in development. We are imagining a virtual ceremony to recognize community members who have made big contributions to bettering human relations in Durham during this most challenging of years.

The HRC has been engaged in commission-wide conversation about our priorities for 2021. While not knowing exactly where this process will lead, it is clear that several issues are rising to the top of our shared priority list. They include:

- The eviction crisis, the unavailability of affordable housing and related issues
- Gun violence and police/community relations
- Adequate healthcare and a specific focus on Black infant and maternal health

The HRC is also placing a greater priority on social media engagement during this time of greater isolation. To that end, we have expanded the social media committee from one commissioner to five members. The chairs have also expanded from simply using Facebook to new channels via Twitter, Instagram on YouTube, and plan to increase our presence and degree of engagement throughout 2021.

The HRC welcomes insights and suggestions for areas of focus this upcoming year from city council members.

We wish to express our appreciation to the City Council for your steadfast commitment to working toward justice for all residents of Durham, as well as your inspired leadership during this particularly challenging moment in our city's history. Thank you as well for your continued support of the HRC, including but not limited to your willingness to be advised by the reports, recommendations and resolutions produced by this commission. Our work is rooted in the wisdom, interests and perspectives of our commissioners and that of the myriad community members we draw upon for guidance.

The Commission also wishes to express our appreciation to Neighborhood Improvement Services and their administrative support, which is critical to our overall progress towards unity and equity in the Durham community.

Sincerely,

The City of Durham Human Relations Commission