

**Minutes
City of DeKalb
Human Relations Commission
September 8, 2020**

The Human Relations Committee (HRC) held a regular meeting on September 8, 2020, in the Second Floor Training Room at the DeKalb Police Department.

A. ROLL CALL

The following members of the HRC were present: Larry Apperson (Chair), John Walker, Norden Gilbert, Nadine Franklin, Lisa King, and Joe Gastiger.

No members were absent

Other City officials/staff present: Alderman Scott McAdams, City Manager Bill Nicklas, Assistant City Manager Josh Boldt, Interim Police Chief Bob Redel, Information Technology Department Jeremy Alexander, and Management Analyst Jason Blumenthal.

B. Approval of Agenda – Additions/Deletions

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Mr. Gastiger and seconded by Mr. Norden with an amendment to the agenda by adding review of housing issues as the first item under old business. Motion was approved by a unanimous voice vote.

C. Approval of Minutes – July 7, 2020 Regular Meeting

Motion to approve the minutes of July 7, 2020 was made by Mr. Gastiger and seconded by Mr. Norden. Minutes were approved by a unanimous voice vote.

D. Public Participation

Management Analyst Jason Blumenthal read an email from resident Herb Rubin from the fifth ward in relation to police-community relations in our community to the HRC. The email can be found as an addendum.

E. Old Business

1. Police-Community Relations/Building a Better Community
 - i. Review of Housing Issues

The HRC discussed the ongoing housing issues such as the common lease, and landlords that have not been complying with the City's building code, that are seen as landlords who put their

renters at risk due to safety hazards and violations that have not been fixed over a duration of time.

Chair Apperson also said that he has received a letter from Jacob of the DeKalb Tenant Association explaining the issues that have been seen over time.

ii. Updates on Community and Human Relations Commission
Recommendations. – City Manager Bill Nicklas

Chair Apperson asked City Manager Bill Nicklas to speak on this item. Mr. Nicklas first wanted to agree with Mr. Rubin from his email that was read for public participation. He said that the DeKalb Police Department (DPD) has made progress, but they still have a lot to do. The largest issue is how to have Police Officers and residents engage each other to create a tighter knit community based on trust and familiarity. This can not happen from one person alone, but everyone as community members need to commit to this by working together and by engaging each other. Mr. Nicklas continued to say that the DPD has committed to support the protesters by kneeling with them and marching with them against police brutality. He went on to say that the City is two weeks from buying police body cams which will increase the amount of accountability for Police Officers.

Mr. Nicklas also mentioned that the City is improving its hiring practices. He mentioned that the City has hired a Social Worker that is working within the Police Department. Chair Apperson asked for clarification from Mr. Nicklas to what extent would the Social Worker be involved in non-violent situations. Mr. Nicklas responded with that there has been good dialogue between the Police Officers and the Social Worker and that the department is still testing out this new structure and trying to feel out the Social Workers capabilities within the Police Department. Chief Redel noted that the Social Worker is not handling calls, she is handling individuals that need mental health assistance. Ms. King asked if Police Officers will be able to utilize the Social Worker as someone they can talk to after they have experienced an intense situation. Chief Redel answered that the department has started talking internally about how to go forward with the social worker position, and how officers will be able to utilize this position for their own mental health. Redel continued by saying the department is incentivizing officers to see counselors by giving them bonuses if they go and talk to a counselor. Mr. Nicklas continued by stating the City



is working on reorganizing the Police Department. He continued by saying they are in the process of raising fines for landlords who do not make attempts to fix their properties and to comply with City policies. In regards to this topic, the City Council as well as City Administration have been working on acquiring properties in the Annie Glidden North neighborhood which they have succeeded to do which will hopefully allow them to work on decreasing the amount of gang activity that is seen in that area.

Mr. Gastiger wanted to revisit the social worker quickly, and he asked if the City pays for that contractual work. Mr. Nicklas answered that the City does pay for that contractual social worker. Mr. Gastiger asked for a thought to be considered which is since the City works so closely with Northwestern Medicine, this organization should contribute to offering social worker services to the City. Mr. Nicklas said this was a good consideration.

Mr. Nicklas went back to recommendations that were provided by residents of DeKalb and the HRC. Mr. Nicklas stated that the City already has some form of citizen control since all decisions go through City Council, and City Council is elected by the public. It is an aspect the City can continue to work on.

Mr. Gastiger and Mr. Norden commended Mr. Nicklas, Chief Redel, and other City Staff for the work they have been doing to begin implementing these recommendations to create a better community for everyone. Mr. Walker agreed and stated that this is a great start, but we need to strive to further these relationships between Police and residents. Mr. Walker furthered saying that residents also need to understand that a lot of the Police Brutality that is going on is not in our community. DPD Officers do not kill people, and residents need to recognize this. He also noted that the Police need to take a vested interest in residents lives to show that the Police do care about them. Mr. Apperson piggybacked off Mr. Walker by saying this is why he asked about the scope of the Social Worker because if the Social Worker takes some of the work load from the Police Officers, they could conduct more foot patrol directly in neighborhoods which could lead to increased police-community relationships. If residents knew police officers on a first name basis, this would lead to more trust in the community. Mr. Nicklas agreed this would be a god step for the future. Mr. Walker said one thing to think about though is Police safety, especially in the Annie Glidden North (AGN) neighborhood. These areas are the worst he has



ever seen them in the 23 years he has worked in this area. It is a good idea, but Police need to proceed with caution in these areas.

Ms. Franklin asked Chief Redel about the issue of parking restrictions in these areas, which are forcing people to park on streets such as sleepy hollow, and the residents of this area have safety concerns for the amount of people that are parking in this neighborhood. Chief Redel said they have never had any complaints about this issue. Mr. Nicklas said this was brought to their attention about one year ago, as well as other areas in the community facing the same issues. He continued saying that there was just as many people that did not want to establish any parking restrictions, as there were people who did want them, so no changes were made. If the feelings change in regard of what residents want to do, they could recommend addressing this issue once again.

Mr. Nicklas continued saying that the City is also looking at redeveloping the AGN area which will create more long-term, higher paying jobs, than those residents currently have access to. Mr. Walker agreed with Mr. Nicklas that this is what this area needs, and hopefully this is a good start to cleaning it up. Ms. King agreed with these sentiments and added that we need to start prioritizing these neighborhoods as much, if not more than we prioritize other neighborhoods in the DeKalb community. She also thinks there should be more of a distinction between NIU Police and DPD because it seems like there is not a clear distinction.

Ms. King then asked about required training for Officers. Chief Redel answered that DPD Officers go well above the required training. Officers are required to be involved in one training per month. They are currently sending officers to Racial Intelligence Training & Engagement (RITE). COVID-19 has made training more difficult, but regardless of it, the Police Department is mandated to reach a certain amount of training for its officers annually. The DeKalb Police Department does not aim for the minimum requirements though. Ms. King said she does not doubt they reach the mandated training. Her point is that DeKalb population is seeing a change in demographics. With the change in demographics, the DPD Officers need to interact more effectively with the changing population. What she thinks is that all Police Departments are not proactive in cultural training and implicit bias. This needs to be one of the DPD's top priorities. Chief Redel said that he agreed. He said that after the trainings, it needs to be the responsibility of Sergeants and other officers to keep each other accountable. A part of the job is learning on



the job and understanding what works and what does not work when speaking to a suspect or a victim. But it is also on Sergeants and other Officers to keep each other accountable by saying to each other that you did not speak to that person in the right way, and that the specific individual can do better. Ms. King reiterated that diversity and implicit bias training needs to be made a priority for the DPD. Mr. Nicklas agreed with Ms. King and continued saying that a lot of the issue he thinks also is that Officers do not have familiarity with these populations, and have not had many interactions which he feels contributes to a lot of the police brutality being seen across the country. We need to create opportunities where Police Officers can make these interactions with the community.

Mr. Walker spoke up and asked about the hiring process within the DPD. He said that he notices there is a lack of diversity on the DPD, and that this should also be addressed. Chief Redel said that they do recruit, that the Human Resources Department is responsible for this. A lot of times the HR Department tries to recruit students in Law Enforcement programs from Illinois Universities and Colleges. Chief Redel continued saying that he wants to start doing targeted recruitment from the black community in DeKalb. Mr. Walker said that this is a good start. He said that one of the larger issues in his perspective is that racism is a generational issue. He is not putting blame on anybody, but racism stems from how someone is raised. Mr. Gastiger said that if the Police Department wants to make a commitment to improving police relations in the community, the department needs to hire black police officers and to begin having conversations with these individuals. Mr. Walker added to this saying they do not necessarily need to be black police officers, they need to be good officers that have a tie to the community, and someone the community is able to trust.

Ms. Franklin said that she would like to start to have more discussions amongst the community to show where and how racism begins amongst individuals. Mr. Nicklas agreed with what she said and added that they have started having these conversations in the community and are planning to continue them going forward, but they also need to be enduring and more regular. He believes that familiarity will be able to begin the process of residents knowing each other, and this will lead to residents trusting each other. Ms. King asked if the DPD will continue the Officer Friendly program. Mr. Nicklas said yes, the department is still involved with that program. Ms. King continued saying that Chief Grady of NIU operated this program and that it



seemed quite successful. NIU Police were engaging students in positive interactions. She said she knows it still must be difficult within the city, but that it would be a valuable program. Mr. Nicklas said he agreed but the only problem is that the campus is more densely populated whereas the city is more of a suburb, and it is more difficult to engage with residents. Ms. King said there are times where there are groups of people standing around that the Police could engage in. Mr. Nicklas said he agrees with her, the department needs to find the best opportunities for these types of situations though. Mr. Walker inserted that Police still need to be careful in these areas though, because it is still a dangerous area. The bottom line is to get residents to build trust with police in a safe environment for Police and residents.

Chief Redel stated that he agreed with Mr. Walker and added that the department has a new black female officer from Chicago and she has said that she gets more disrespect in DeKalb than she did in Chicago. The abuse Officers are taking is at an all time high. It is also hard to compare the NIU Police Department to the DPD because at any time the DPD may have 60 open cases while NIU will only have 2. He continued saying that the only way to move forward is to have a mutual respect on both sides so that trust can be created between DPD and residents. Ms. King said that she gets Chief Redel's point but that Black people are the individuals that are facing discrimination and that have historically been at a disadvantage and it is going to take more than that to establish mutual trust. Police need to be more honest with residents and put a more conscious effort in engaging residents outside of Police calls. One example she specifically mentioned is that no one is standing out in front of Jewel, but there are people that stand out in front of Rocky's the entire day. Police need to be able to engage these people. She says she thinks that the DPD needs to try some new approaches and that it would not cost that much. Mr. Walker said that he thinks the Police get blamed for a lot of the issues in this town, but the fact is that this type of lifestyle is embedded in these peoples life's because that is how they have been living their entire life. He thinks that Officer friendly would be a great program within that area if it is conducted in an effective manner.

Chair Apperson said with everything in consideration it was a good time to wrap the meeting up and going forward with more action regarding what they spoke of that evening. Mr. Gastiger said before they wrapped up, he wanted just to add that maybe they should have a way to recruit volunteers for the areas that they know people are hanging out in front of. Maybe it is not fair to



put all of this on the DPD. Possibly consider the thought of having one Police Officer with volunteers from various community service groups engage these audiences and have positive interactions with them trying to create familiarity. Chief Redel did say that they usually do have Officers near that area Ms. King spoke of in their squad cars doing various things, but the department is trying to push Officers to get out of their cars and to engage the public more. That is a repeated thing that they keep on hearing is that Officers need to be engaged with the community, and this is something that they are trying to do more of. He continued saying that they need more good ideas to try to build trust within these neighborhoods. He said since he is been apart of the HRC, the conversation has been better, and that he feels enlightened by all of the ideas that have been communicated because they are great steps in making a more close-knit community. He also said that they do have volunteers that volunteer their time to learn more about the DPD and what they do, but also learn about opportunities where they can help Officers. Ms. Franklin brought up law enforcement programs through Kish and the local High schools and trying to utilize those more. Mr. Nicklas said that these individuals shadowed County Officers to get an experience of the job they do. He said they were also involved in learning more about the profession.

Chair Apperson concluded the meeting said there was great discussion and that it takes a lot of discussion for changes to be made. He said they will look more at the housing issues next time, and more updates on the police community relations. He said this crime incident review board seems like it is the next stage of this process and that the HRC is willing to help with this matter if they can. Mr. Nicklas said that they can, he said it is still a raw idea, but he would like the HRC's thoughts on it.

F. New Business

1. None

G. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Gilbert and seconded by Ms. King. Minutes were approved by a unanimous voice vote.



PLEASE NOTE That in addition to these minutes are all public comments that were submitted to the HRC for public comment. This includes the chat feature of the Zoom meeting, as well the link to the video of the HRC meeting at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K572sFy5hxM&t=1s>.

Jason Blumenthal, Management Analyst

Minutes approved by the Human Relations Commission on:

