

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2021 - 6:00 P.M.

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Glenn Morgan
Patricia Osborne
Gary White
Carrie Louer
John Papagiannakis
Jenny Rosado
RAYSHMA ALI

The Regular Meeting of the Human Rights Commission was held at the Municipal Building Council Chambers, One Main Street.

The meeting was called to order at 6:15 p.m. by Chairman Glenn Morgan.

OLD BUSINESS

Minutes from the previous meeting on January 11, 2021 were discussed and motioned for adoption by Chairman Morgan. Vice Chair Osborne motioned and Gary White seconded. All members voted I to adopt the minutes.

NEW BUSINESS

Following Old Business, Chairman Morgan Called for the New Business portion of the meeting. He announced the HRC will celebrate Black History Month by selecting the winner of the Woodbridge Township School District Martin Luther King Jr. Essay Contest.

Chairman Morgan announces the guest speakers for the night are from the Genova Burns Law firm, Dan Pierre & Sharina Rodriguez, to present the survey that will go out to see if any implicit bias is in the Township.

Dan Pierre begins to give his background, which includes working for the Attorney General's office and currently the Labor attorney at Genova Burns. Sharina Rodriguez is in the employment litigation sector at Genova Burns.

Vice Chair Pat Osborne makes a statement on Black History month & how it should be celebrated throughout the year and not only focus on the famous Black's such as MLK, Rosa Parks, Jackie Robinson, but celebrate the every day families. She says legislation has to focus on equality and American Ideals.

Due to some technical difficulties, Sharina began the presentation without the PowerPoint giving an overview of Genova Burns. There are 70 attorney's dedicated to a vast amount of legal issues. They have about 160 public

sector clients including 55 municipal clients. Genova Burns has served Woodbridge Township for 30 years including services such as updating policies and representing the town. Sharina explains because of the relationship and the nature of the project, she & Dan are extremely excited and passionate about the survey and diversity study.

Sharina continues to say that Genova Burns will provide inclusivity training, equal pay audits, affirmative action plans and an overview of policies on topics such as harassment and others. Genova Burns also has a history of accolades and accomplishments distinguishing the talent of the law firm including being named a 2021 "Best Law Firm" by U.S. News & World Report & Best Lawyers.

Sharina begins to explain what the Diversity & Inclusivity study will entail.

The Review portion will start with an Employee Handbook review, Union/Employee Grievances, Township Hiring Data, & Statistics on Employee Promotions. The Investigation stage will look at equal pay audits, employee rights poster inspection, & personnel related complaints.

Upon completion, Genova Burns will Train employees on diversity & inclusivity. Everyone in every department will be trained including a training that occurred on Jan., 21, 2021 that involved Mayor's Office & Directors.

The fourth step is the Survey to township residents. The sample size is 400 residents randomized by cold calling and text invites. The survey will be completed by a third party company called Mercury and will aim to get a sample based on most recent census data.

Mercury is a national public opinion research firm with approximately 5,000 clients including politicians, governmental agencies, fortune 100 companies, and professional sports teams with over 20 years of polling and research experience.

Some of the survey questions will include: Woodbridge Police Department, most important issues for the Township to address, rate the governmental services, personal experiences of discrimination- either by Township Police Officers, at Township events, by Township Officials, within the Community (i.e., other residents, and/or at Public Schools.

Demographics that Mercury will aim to capture in the survey include: Specific Town, Race, Gender, Household Income, Duration of Residency, Sexual Orientation, Level of Education, Age, & Marital Status.

Dan and Sharina explain that all of these elements will lead to Reform. The aim is to govern with the social equity toolkit.

Dan & Sharina's presentation concluded at 7:30 and Chairman Morgan then opens the floor for questions from the Human Rights Committee that were prepared by Chair of the Genova Burns Subcommittee Carrie Louer. Most questions were answered throughout the presentation. Questions can be viewed in Appendix A of this document meeting items.

PUBLIC

At the conclusion of the presentation, Chairman Morgan opened it up to the public.

Amber Jarret of Woodbridge Proper asked questions on transparency and making the survey public and how it will be made public. Dan explains that they intend to be here to answer any questions they want because transparency is important. He also states they will be back for a future meeting date to explain the results of the surveys. Dan also credits Township leadership for being open to suggestions and conversations.

Sharina adds that they will also be looking into township grievances so they can have the a full picture of issues they might be having.

Member Carrie Louer adds that in a conversation she had with the township's director of communication she feels as though the goal is to make the survey completely transparent. Transparency brings change because it puts pressure on to make change.

Dan agrees but emphasizes that you owe it to employees to keep certain aspects confidential.

Amber expresses concerns about training and including or removing upper management to which Dan and Sharina again explain the training process and the different levels. She adds that she feels there is a lot of nepotism within the township and asks if this is something they will look into. Dan and Sharina explains they are looking at the entire picture. Sharina notes that educating employees is important too because sometimes employees do not know what to report.

Don Green from Iselin asks if Genova Burns has ever done something of this magnitude to which Dan responds no, because Woodbridge is unique. Most towns stop at the employee field, but Woodbridge is reaching out to residents which is unprecedented. Genova Burns has done employee inclusivity 100s of times, but never a combined employee and resident overview.

Mr. Green asks if there is anything Dan and Sharina see without diving deep into data yet. They respond that they do not want to make any assumptions to keep biases out as best as possible.

Jimmy Fraje Woodbridge Township asks why the town chose Genova Burns. Dan explains that it is because of the relationship and the firms extensive background in labor and discrimination. Dan and Sharina explains that being objective is important and so is being passionate. They both put this assignment on the top of their priority list and they treat it will due attention. Sharina adds that because they are the Township's attorney they have access to some confidential issues that a different law firm would not have access to.

Pat Osborne chimes in to inquire how recommendations will be made to the Board of Education. Dan says that they will gather data and meet with the Board of Education to share their findings.

Bob Louer of Avenel questions the nature of the survey and who generated the 50 question survey to which Dan answers Mercury did. Mr. Louer continues by asking how the respondents phone numbers will be generated and Dan says that they voter registration is one database they pull from.

Mr. Louer discusses culture change and how this would be implemented if the data suggests there is a cultural issue such as nepotism. He feels as though it should go beyond training. Dan says they will look at policies, trends, and then how it can be changed and the process they will need to take to change it. Mr. Louer says they hope that Genova Burns sees that there is an issue of trust and transparency and Dan replies that he understands and this is why they are taking their time on this.

Ms. Jarrett asks why the number required is so low thinking that 400 is way too low for a township our size. She feels this would disproportionately represent some cultures and groups that will not be represented. Dan and Sharina explain that Mercury has a goal of how many respondents in each category they need to gather to conclude their survey. They will not stop until they reach 400 surveys that accurately represents the diversity representing in Woodbridge Township. This data is pulled from the previous census. He further explains that 400 respondents does not necessarily only mean 400 calls. This could take 10,000 or more calls until they hit the required number.

Victoria Berch says she loves the idea of surveys. She inquires about when the Municipality wanted to start this initiative. Dan says fall of 2020.

Charity wants to know why outside input was not requested when putting this survey together to which Dan explains that surveys are not usually conducted with public input as that would be the role of the if the survey will be ongoing or duplicated. Dan explains that once the data comes in they can see the trends and know if further surveys and studies will be needed.

She continues by stating this survey already seems bias as landlines are predominately in white older people, while texting is younger, millennial, Gen Z, technologically savvy people. How do they build a target audience if some of these things are not available to certain groups. Dan says that this is a fair point and again explains there are targets for each demographic.

Donna Stewart from Perth Amboy asks if Dan volunteered or if Genova Burns asked him to represent this case. He said that his involvement with this project was natural because of his relationship with the township.

Mr. Green again asks how the survey will make additional changes within the community to which Dan replies they will take the data and

Jimmy Dabrowski brings up the police national accreditation and how anyone can get this. He also says there seems to be a conflict of interest who

appoints the Human Rights members and now he appoints Genova Burns as the law firm to conduct this survey. He explains that an unlisted Youtube Video is posted on the HRC website. Vice Chair Osborne jumps in saying that being accredited is necessary to make sure policies are put in place. She says the Rutgers is accredited to make sure the degree means something. She adds that the video is not on the website.

Vice Chair Osborne thanks the audience for being patient with all the technical difficulties.

Charity returns to the microphone to ask if Mercury find phone numbers because voter registration would not be enough. Dan says Mercury uses voter registration as one of the many methods.

Charity asks if the public can contact them with grievances they are have experienced. Dan told the public he brought his cards for them to contact him but cannot be legally retained.

Charity voices her concern over trust to which Dan shows the public that he has been taking notes the entire time and says that he is listening and plans to discuss with administration. Sharina adds that the public should take some comfort in the fact that Genova Burns has a 30 year relationship instead of a new firm that would try to appease their new client. She also states that she and Dan have great work ethics.

Charity asks who is on the Genova Burns subcommittee. Carrie chimes in to say that she chairs it along with Glenn and Rayshma.

Vice Chair Osborne asks for the public to keep in mind that they are dealing with volunteers and hope to have Dr. Bonnie Nolan, Recreation Department leaders, Board of Education, and Affordable Housing/Homeless, and hopefully Senator Vitale & Craig Coughlin.

ADJOURN

Chairman Morgan called for a motion to adjourn. Gary White motions and Carrie Louer seconded.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm.

Questions for Genova Burns

Glenn:

- Who is Genova Burns? Introduce yourselves.
- What have you been tasked to do?
- What is your approach?

Pat:

- What other municipalities has Genova Burns audited, if any?
- What is your relationship with the Municipality of Woodbridge?
- What specific aspects of injustice will you be looking for? What entities in Woodbridge will you be assessing?

John:

- Who else have you worked with?
- How will you stay independent and objective?
- Will you talk with employees of Woodbridge? Will Mercury talk with employees?

Gary:

- How will you communicate the results of their assessments?
- Was your law firm involved in developing and writing the township's handbooks and policies? If so, what quality checks do you have in place to keep the assessment unbiased?

Jenny:

- How do you make recommendations as a result of your work?
- Will there be updates given to the Commission on your progress?
- When should we expect results?

Rayshma:

- What would you recommend for transparency in the community? What have other communities done?

Carrie:

- What is Mercury's role in developing the survey for the community at large. Will we get the results?