



Meeting Minutes

May 5, 2016

The Human Relations Commission (HRC) convened for its regular monthly meeting at 6:02 p.m. on the above date at the Glenn McNairy Branch Library, with **Chair Zac Engle** presiding.

Present: Commissioners Arbuckle, Murphy, Engle, King, Issifou, Perry-Garnette, Wils, Phillips

Human Relations Department Staff: Dr. Love Crossling, Director; Jodie Stanley, Education & Outreach Coordinator

Council Liaison: Marikay Abuzuaiter

Absent: Commissioners Burkart, Hawkins, Cobbler, Wesley-Lamin and Brown

I. Call to Order

Chair Engle called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

Chair Engle invited visitors to introduce themselves. Addy Jeffrey shared that she was proud to be affiliated with a number of active groups in Greensboro, including the Immigrant Rights Working Group, City Community Working Group, and the Latino Community Coalition. She clarified that on this occasion, she was representing herself, and wanted to share personal reflections and speak to the Vo family incident. Jeffrey emphasized her regard for many members of Council, and while she understood the need for making tough decisions and following protocol, she was profoundly disappointed in Council's treatment of the Vo family at the May 3 City Council meeting. When the Vo family heard through the newspaper that Council was planning to view the video of their daughter's shooting, they asked to see the video. Throughout the process, it appeared that the family was being treated as inferior, in a condescending manner. After the viewing and during the council meeting, the elderly mother was sitting in council chambers, weeping quietly while others around her, staff, members of council and former members, were laughing and making light of parking and other mundane topics. Jeffrey was perplexed, certain that someone would take note of the mother's grief and step in to address or acknowledge it and extend appropriate sympathy. Even after several Guilford College students spoke as speakers from the floor, it never happened. Jeffrey's frustration increased after seeing the family's motives openly questioned and their failure to communicate cited

as the reason they weren't able to see the video sooner. She stated that many people were saying that the family was being pushed by activists, and she considered that option, but to her, it was like a code, another way of saying that the family was surely too stupid to understand the issue or speak for themselves. Jeffrey encouraged the HRC, as the conscience of the City, to think seriously about the future. She admitted her thought that such videos would soon be made secret by State legislature, that the HRC and City's efforts going forward may be a moot point. She asked Commissioners to put themselves in the family's shoes, think about what they've gone through, and to take into consideration the disrespectful treatment they've received. She asked the HRC to make a strong statement in a show of support for the Vo family as members of our family, and of our community.

Chair Engle thanked Jeffrey for sharing her thoughts on a very difficult situation. He acknowledged the necessity of following procedure, requesting that all observe a brief moment of silent meditation.

II. Moment of Silent Meditation

Chair Engle called for a moment of silent meditation.

Citing a full meeting agenda, and the need for some commissioners to leave early, **Chair Engle** made a motion to approve the April minutes.

Motion: To Approve the April Minutes

- **Commissioner Garnette** moved.
- Seconded by **Commissioner Phillips**.
- The motion was unanimously approved by the Commission.

III. Recognition of Visitors and Presentations

Chair Engle recognized visitor Sallie Hayes-Williams, representative of Mayor Vaughan and Nelson Johnson's City-Community Working Group, who meet Mondays from 8-10am. She shared the work they had done to host a community conversation and kickoff event featuring Michelle Alexander and invited all to be part of developing next steps by joining them at upcoming events:

City-Wide Town Hall Meeting	June 12	Providence Baptist Church	3 pm
Pre-Town Hall Meeting (Faith Community)	May 12	First Presbyterian on Elm	9:30 am
Pre-Town Hall Meeting (Youth)	May 19	Shiloh Baptist Church	6 pm
Pre-Town Hall Meeting (HRC/IAC)	May 24	Location TBD	6:30 pm

Addy Jeffrey, also a member of the City-Community Working Group, stated that while they are talking about police, they are pro-police. She gave the example of the many Greensboro Police Department nominees at the recent Notable Latinos event. She cited the importance of transparency, that when people want it, it needs to happen. Hayes-Williams agreed that the group is pro-police and very committed to community feedback.

Chair Engle thanked Hayes-Williams for also serving as a member of the Police Community Review Board. The chair then welcomed Adamou Mohamed, Kathy Hinshaw and Stephanie Brabec as they briefly stated their names and introduced themselves.

Chair Engle made a motion to suspend the rules of the meeting to allow the speakers in attendance to have the commissioner's full attention.

**Motion:
To Suspend the Rules**

- **Commissioner Wils** moved.
- Seconded by **Commissioner Arbuckle**.
- The motion was unanimously approved by the Commission.

Chair Engle invited those that wanted to speak, to do so.

Andrew Young introduced himself and stated that he wanted to add to some of what Addy Jeffrey was talking about. On the point of full disclosure, he stated his position working closely with many refugee groups and his displeasure at the way Tuesday's events unfolded at the council meeting. Two years previous when Ms. Vo was shot, he reached out to SEAC (Southeast Asian Coalition). He defined SEAC as a youth agency that works to empower Asian youth, a small organization based in Charlotte that was doing amazing work. After the shooting, it seemed that not one person in this town knew how to reach the Vietnamese community. It was appalling, and the usual excuses were used – cultural barriers, language barriers, etc. Young found it very easy to track the family through his own contacts. He contacted SEAC, who had connections to the family. What did it say about Greensboro that it took a Charlotte group to find the family and contact them? Newspaper quotes indicated that the family was fine with the Police Department's findings and statements. Young found out from talking to the family that those statements were false. Young gave brief insight into his own background, describing his diverse family and Chinese-American heritage, and stated that sadly, that what happened was old history. A woman diagnosed as bipolar at 23 years old, a real person; chronic mental illness was common, and this young lady arrived in the country with a diagnosis. He asked commissioners to reflect on the history of the Vietnam War. The United States left Vietnam in 1974 and the country was falling apart. Ms. Vo, the firstborn, was Amerasian, which means she had an American father. More than likely she was the child of an American vet. The family came to the US in the 90's, and in 2009 she received full citizenship. Young guessed that citizenship was granted on the basis of a medical waiver, since she would have been eligible. She was killed at the age of 47. Her mom stuck with her mentally ill daughter all those years. They walked a lot and were well known in the community. Young speculated that because of her mental illness, there were many service providers that knew her well – Cone Health was surely involved in treatments, doctors, etc. Earlier this year, an 18 year old holding a screwdriver and attacking his mom, was shot. He was mentally ill. Young cited data that shows that a large percentage of those shot by police were mentally ill. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) states that Asians use mental health services 1/3 less than whites. Young stated that the story being told is not the full story. The story being told is that she was taken to Moses Cone and died two days later. Young was told that the family was prevented by the police from being with their daughter when she died. After the way the family was treated on Tuesday, and the behavior of City Council, Young stated that he

was ashamed to be part of this community and a Greensboro resident. His desire was to shed some humanity on this entire situation.

Adamou Mohamed, a member of the immigrant community, representing the International Advisory Committee, started by saying that Greensboro claimed to be a welcoming city, but we were far from it. What he saw on Tuesday was a lack of compassion and consideration for a family that just watched their daughter die again. Mohamed expressed understanding for the fact that Council had an agenda and work to do, but former council members and other attendees were given the freedom to crack jokes and carry on with others present. Meanwhile, there was no recognition or acknowledgement of the family. Mohamed stated that we are all human beings. When it came to speakers from the floor, the Mayor, as she had done before, limited immigrants from speaking. This was an opportunity for the immigrants in attendance to speak on behalf of the family. Instead, deference was given to Matheny, a member of the upper class, to speak. Mohamed asked why they received such treatment, suggesting that perhaps the impression is that immigrants don't have voting power. He stated again that Greensboro claimed to be a welcoming city when it was not. Why does the International Advisory Committee exist if not to speak for immigrants? Why was the family not given the opportunity to view the video at another time – why right before the council meeting? The family had to sit there with no acknowledgement. Mohamed recalled hearing some say that the family and those around them had an agenda, but this was not an excuse for treating them badly. He stated his hope and desire for the Human Relations Commission to, in some way, help family members get the closure they needed. This type of treatment was becoming a trait of the City's, and this proved what Mohamed suspected – that the City was not welcoming.

Council Member Marikay Abuzuaiter asked to speak for a brief moment, expressing apologies for having to leave early for another appointment. She stressed that she was listening and appreciative of the comments and sentiments expressed. She expressed agreement that the family should not have been in chambers after the viewing, accepted personal responsibility for any mistreatment or disrespect, and expressed a desire to receive updates on future comments in the meeting.

Chair Engle observed that it seemed there was a lack of process for viewing videos.

Irving Zavaleta introduced himself, and started by saying that these were repeated behaviors. Council claims to support the international community, then they did not. Zavaleta emphasized that the family needed to be present in chambers after the viewing. Perhaps an apology was not the popular or politically correct action to take, but the family was inappropriately disrespected. What happened, and continued to happen, was nothing more than privilege, white supremacy, and citizenship privileges. Vo was a US citizen, but not the kind that fit the norm. There was work to be done, otherwise we would keep perpetuating racism in this case. Zavaleta stated strongly that he expects action, transparency, and at least a statement from the HRC.

Lewis Pitts thanked Chair Engle and the Commission for the opportunity to speak. He pointed out that discussion had been held around the human side, that power was given to the government on the condition that they are transparent and accountable to the people. He asked all to consider the stark facts: that an officer gunned down a mentally ill woman, the ridiculousness of a two year delay, and the secrecy over the past two years. The Vo shooting happened just a few months after Ferguson. Nationwide, there are many shootings by police officers. Pitts remarked that council

watched the video then the family watched the video, and that the family, according to their attorney, felt she was needlessly shot. Was this transparency? Pitts stressed the respect he feels for human beings and wished Marikay Abuzuaiter was still present, that he respects those that feel human emotion. Pitts pointed out that Yvonne Johnson made a motion to vote to view the video in the spirit of transparency. The family asked that it be released to the public. Council members have made excuse after excuse, saying that it was not as critical because it happened two years ago. Pitts made the statement that he would accept nothing short of the HRC writing a strong statement and taking a bold stance and asking Council to release the video to the public. He said he would not fall for a nice façade, that we need to do it right this time.

Commissioner Arbuckle stated that she had emailed Council asking that they release the video, making the point that there are multiple ways to handle a small lady holding a weapon. She acknowledged concern with perceived issues, and shared her opinion that mental health intervention can occur with the Greensboro Police Department, and that we have the opportunity to understand and fully appreciate the actions of those in the police department, and also hold them accountable. She expressed regard for the eloquent statements and appeals of those present.

Chair Engle asked if it was confirmed that the family wants the video released. Several in the room expressed a strong sentiment that yes, the family was asked and wants it released. Engle pointed out that once the video was released, the family risked someone posting it on Youtube. He asked all present to consider the gravity of releasing the video, stating ‘Once public, always public.’ He also encouraged commissioners to consider three main priorities in developing a policy. He first stressed the importance of transparency and the ability to watch the video to settle disputes or resolve concerns, especially if the individual requesting to see the video, was involved in the matter. His second concern was respect for the privacy of those involved, and he pointed out that current legislature is woefully lacking in addressing privacy concerns. Engle’s third and final point was that in the name of accountability and stewardship, the policy should consider holding the requestor somewhat responsible for excessive charges related to the cost of PIRT requests.

Commissioner Perry-Garnette thanked all in attendance for coming and speaking, stating that she had requested this topic to be added to the meeting’s agenda. She stressed that there is always a demand for compassion and no excuse for the lack thereof, admitting her embarrassment and stating that what made her feel better were the speakers and the words they shared. She shared that as mother to a mentally ill son, this issue terrified her. It was very relevant to her, not a moot point at all. She cited another case where what actually happened and what was printed in the paper were very different stories. Perry-Garnette shared her belief that this was, in addition to being about the immigrant community, about mental health and illness. She pointed out that this was not the first time parents have shared concerns about the treatment of their mentally ill children. The lower you are on the food chain, the more likely you are to experience problems. It was her opinion that this was about the disenfranchisement of the underserved, and about the importance of body worn cameras and policies related to video release. She stated her intention of asking the HRC to make a bold statement and reminded her fellow commissioners that one of the benefits to and role of being a commissioner was to take a stand. Perry-Garnette added that talk was cheap, it was time to take a stand; she thanked all present for being there.

Commissioner Wils brought up the concern about privacy, pointing out that if he was in the situation, he would consider privacy, but would be far more concerned about being treated with the

utmost respect. He stated that the talk of privacy agreements seemed nothing more than a red herring. He stated that if the family is going to the lengths of requesting release, privacy is a moot point.

Sallie Hayes-Williams added that she was pro-police; the desire for transparency was a good thing, but when trust goes down, their job gets harder. If police have trust, policing is improved. She shared her opinion that releasing the video is a step towards transparency and earning trust, and that she agrees with the commissioners and those present, that a strong statement should be made about releasing the Vo video, and that a policy be created around video release.

Chair Engle clarified that his comment about privacy pertained to public record, that people have the right, for their own protection, to refuse the release of the video. **Commissioner Phillips** expressed agreement and his concern with the way the news media might manipulate videos. He suggested that a video could perhaps be made available to the public for viewing. General discussion was held around how a video might be released, and the point was made that once a video is released, what the public does with the video is outside of their control. **Commissioner Issifou** commented that perhaps someone could first talk to the family about the ramifications of releasing the video. Lewis Pitts stated the importance of releasing the video to the public, and Addy Jeffrey appealed to the HRC to make a statement asking council to release the video to the public.

Motion:

Request that Council Vote to Release the Video to the Public

- **Commissioner Perry-Garnette** moved.
- Seconded by **Commissioner Wils**.
- The motion was unanimously approved by the Commission.

Commissioner King thanked all of the speakers for coming and speaking, and mentioned the sorrow she felt over the conversation about the need for mental health awareness and that people with mental illness were being shot by police. She invited all present to session two in the mental health awareness series, expressing that more work needs to be done in this arena.

Commissioner Perry-Garnette proposed a motion addressing a policy for the release of footage taken by body worn cameras. **Chair Engle** asked commissioners to consider his priorities (privacy, transparency and asking that cost be shared by those making voluminous requests) in voting for a policy. **Commissioner Phillips** suggested that perhaps it needed to be included that the request needs to be made by the person that was involved, or the family member/guardian. Lewis Pitts stated that according to the public records act, these were materials that were the property of the people, and he cautioned them not to leave the requesting in the hands of the people that were most susceptible to pressure to not have the video released. He spoke about the ordinance he created, the People's Ordinance, and encouraged commissioners to consider voting in support of it. General discussion was held around who might be given the power to release the video. Some were in support of leaving the decision with City Council. Chair Engle pointed out that Council is an elected body, that it may be better to leave a decision like video release to an appointed body to minimize any perception of conflict of interest. **Commissioner Phillips** expressed concern again with the media, pointing out that they can slow the video and edit to have a desired effect. Pitts countered

that statement by saying that those were the messy aspects and just a reality, but that is democracy. He expressed a need for other mechanisms to hold the media accountable. Visitor David pointed out that residents have the expectation of privacy, but in reality, even at the HRC meeting, they were in a public space with at least three visible phone cameras.

Chair Engle stressed the importance of voting in support of a policy now, provided the three priorities he mentioned were taken into consideration, with the understanding that specific details could be settled at a future time.

Lewis Pitts encouraged commissioners to start with the understanding that the video was already a public document, giving the analogy of starting with the correct foot so you don't fall later. He stated that you cannot start by defining it as a secret item then make the exception to release it. This was footage taken by body worn cameras, worn by police officers, with footage being a public record, not a secret. He pointed out that in the People's Ordinance, the majority of police officers' actions will be supported.

Chair Engle stated some concern that the public record concept trumped privacy. **Commissioner Perry-Garnette** pointed out that State law prevents certain information from being shared, that she had received documents with names redacted. Chair Engle asked Lewis Pitts to specifically point out how the People's Ordinance addressed privacy. Pitts read from the ordinance, which deferred to State law as the authority and standard by which privacy would be monitored. Chair Engle pointed out that State law does not currently address privacy. Pitts agreed, and stated that if this was a concern, he was willing to amend the People's Ordinance to adapt the language about privacy as stated below:

To replace 4 a)2) on page two of the People's Ordinance:

“Release of the footage would violate important and compelling privacy right of any individual depicted in the footage, as determined by our elected City Council.”

Commissioner King asked Dr. Love Crossling if this policy would be sent to the City attorneys. Dr. Crossling confirmed that the layers of language would be assessed by the City attorney. Commissioner King expressed concern that the result of their efforts would be biased. Dr. Crossling pointed out that discussion needs to be had about how the video release policy impacts police officers. She also pointed out that privacy has not been defined; was it the crime of passion being shown over and over, or was it a matter of blurring out the nightclothes in the video? The public is questioning the meaning of privacy in this situation, and Council has not had the opportunity to fully address that question yet.

Commissioner Perry-Garnette admitted that while they were unable to decide the particulars, she wanted to go on record making a motion to support the People's Ordinance for the release of body worn cameras. **Commissioner Phillips** asked if this ordinance had been presented to the HRC before, and expressed concern over voting on something that he was unfamiliar with. He also shared that because the State was also known to be having conversations about the issue of body worn cameras, to some degree it didn't matter what was decided, State law may trump whatever decision was made. **Chair Engle** expressed understanding and agreement with Phillips' statements, but was able to reach an agreement about the People's Ordinance with the amended statement.

**Motion:
To Support the Amended People’s Ordinance**

- **Commissioner Perry-Garnette** moved.
- Seconded by **Commissioner Wils**.
- The motion was passed 7-1 (Phillips).

Commissioner Perry-Garnette stated her desire to pass a motion expressing displeasure about the treatment of the Vo family by Council and their lack of respect and regard for them in a difficult time. **Chair Engle** expressed his concern over voting for something without having spoken personally to the Vo family or watching the council meeting video. He clarified that it was not a lack of trust in the speakers, but a desire to have a more personal understanding of what happened. **Commissioner Phillips** agreed, stating that he did not know enough about what happened to make a statement. **Commissioner Wils** proposed a friendly amendment to the motion, that it would state “strong concerns shared by community members” as opposed to “displeasure over treatment and lack of respect”. **Commissioner Freman** asked for clarity on the statement being made. **Commissioner King** disagreed, stating that she did not need to see the video for herself, because she appreciated the passion of the people that spoke and she believed them. **Commissioner Issifou** pointed out that to him, it was not as much of an issue to have not seen the council video, because the speakers had, and were left with the perception of mistreatment and disregard. Their perception was all the HRC needed to make a statement. **Commissioner Wils** expressed his desire to present a unified response and concern, and frame the message in a way that a strong, but unified, message could be sent. Visitor Kathy Hinshaw expressed her outrage at the council’s treatment of the family, stating that this was only one example. She talked about her concern that all of the work they have been doing with the international community has been tarnished.

**Motion:
To Make Council Aware of Strong Concern from Community Members
Regarding the Vo Family During the May 3 Council Meeting**

- **Commissioner Perry-Garnette** moved.
- Seconded by **Commissioner Wils**.
- The motion was passed by a vote of 6-1 (Phillips). One abstention (King).

Chair Engle asked the HRC to consider supporting a motion for a resolution that would encourage Council to petition that Governor McCrory’s executive order include protections against discrimination for sexual orientation and gender identity for not just state employees, but all residents of North Carolina.

**Motion:
To Support Expansion of the NC Executive Order to Include Protection Against
Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity to All NC Residents**

- **Commissioner Wils** moved.
- Seconded by **Commissioner Perry-Garnette**.
- The motion was unanimously approved by the Commission.

Commissioner Wils passed a motion standing in solidarity with Council in their opposition to HB 2. Phillips pointed out the duplicity of making such a stand, as Council already made the statement.

Motion:

To Stand in Solidarity with Council in Their Public Opposition to HB 2

- **Commissioner Wils** moved.
- Seconded by **Commissioner Perry-Garnette**.
- The motion passed by a vote of 6-1 (Phillips). One abstention (Murphy).

Visitor Simon Taft spoke up, with encouragement for brevity from **Chair Engle**, sharing personal stories of tragedy in connection to the impact of HB 2. He thanked commissioners for their statement and standing with the transgender community, who were deeply hurt by the passing of a harmful bill.

Chair Engle extended an apology to invited speaker Jim Hoffman, founder of a new nonprofit for veterans, American Heroes for North Carolina. Hoffman introduced himself as an attorney, West Point graduate and retired Army ranger in the airborne division. He declared his pride in having served his country and his desire to give back to those who sacrificed to serve. He addressed some of the stereotypes veterans face, from homeless to hero, and how his nonprofit was designed to address the stigma, shed light on the many contributions made to society by veterans, and the importance of encouraging veterans in their path to success. He cited a study which showed that most veterans have a higher annual income than non veterans, and more veterans are involved with the government and community service than non veterans. Hoffman shared his thoughts on what he called the “sniper effect”, attributed to the movie and true story where a veteran was shot by another veteran suffering from PTSD. According to a study done by Veterans Affairs, only 10% of veterans were suffering from PTSD, most were not drastically affected. He invited all present to attend their event on May 21 at the Field of Honor.

With permission from **Chair Engle**, Director Crossling clarified that the time granted to speaker Jim Hoffman in comparison to the requested brevity from Simon Taft was due to the fact that Hoffman was formerly invited to speak on his work with veterans, resulting from previous conversations and requests from commissioners. Crossling thanked Simon Taft for attending, and for his courage in speaking up, acknowledging the difficulty and pain of the situations caused by HB 2. **Chair Engle** agreed, stating that it was in no way a statement about the importance of what was said, but an acknowledgement of an invited speaker on the agenda. Simon Taft acknowledged their comments, stating again the importance of understanding the reach of HB 2 and its impact.

Director Crossling asked for clarity on the method of delivery of the five statements voted on by the HRC. **Chair Engle** advised that a written component was necessary, with public statements optional.

IV. Committee Reports

Chair Report

Chair Engle referred to his written report of activities and updates.

International Advisory Committee (IAC)

IAC Vice Chair Irving Zavaleta spoke briefly about upcoming events:

May 13	TedX Event with speaker Moises Serrano
May 21	FaithAction Unity Walk
June 4	Celebration in honor of World Refugee Day at Hester Park

Human Services Committee

Commissioner King invited all to the second in a four part series on Mental Health Awareness, May 25 at the Greensboro Historical Museum, beginning at 5pm.

Education Committee

Commissioner Wils encouraged interested volunteers to reach out, as the Education Committee is in the process of getting organized and ready to work.

VII. Staff Report

Director Crossling advised that she would follow up with commissioners to provide any pertinent updates.

Chair Engle extended a warm thanks to all for attending, applauding them for a very respectful, passionate, honest discussion with meaningful conclusions. He closed by stating, “Now we have work to do.”

Commissioner Perry-Garnette expressed her thanks again for those who attended and spoke, reaffirming her support and stating that their passion around these issues was the reason she wanted to be appointed to the Human Relations Commission.

VIII. Adjournment

Chair Engle called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Motion: To Adjourn the Meeting

- **Commissioner Wils** motioned to adjourn.
- **Commissioner Perry-Garnette** seconded.
- The Commission unanimously approved the motion at 8:07 pm.
- End of meeting.

S/ _____
Chairperson
Greensboro Human Relations Commission

Approved: _____
Date

DRAFT