

Champaign County Racial Justice Task Force (RJTF)
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, August 17, 2017
6:30 pm

I. Call to Order

Sara Balgoyen called the meeting to order at 6:40pm.

II. Roll Call

Members Present: S. Balgoyen, L. Branham, E. Dee, A. Felty, R. Hughes, S. Lerner, E. Patt, C. Randolph, H. Ross, S. Silver, D. Turner, G. Walter.

Scott Lerner arrived at 6:56pm.

Members Absent: M. Ar-Raheem, S. Byndom, A. James.

III. Approval of Agenda

Gerry Walter moved to approve agenda. Esther Patt seconded. The motion carried.

IV. Approval of Minutes

Esther Patt moved to approve the minutes. Gerry Walter seconded the motion. The motion carried.

V. Public Participation

James Kilgore

James wanted to talk about the process that is moving forward at the County Board facilities meeting. The Sheriff has come forward with a proposal to build a new jail and mental health facility. He spoke about finances and how the jail could be funded. He discussed the budget process. At the end of August, public comments are open for the budget, and it is approved by November. He said that someone from the Racial Justice Task Force needs to go before the County Board to express its concern about funding for racial justice. He also noted the Charlottesville City Council's recent action to create an equity fund. He suggested considering an equity fund as a recommendation for the County Board to provide resources for some of the other RJTF proposals.

Esther asked about the specifics of the public safety tax.

Lynn asked for suggestions for how to allocate money towards RJTF proposals and for how to complete the RJTF report. James agreed that it is helpful to have some illustrative examples that can be put on the table. James also suggested talking to County Board members.

Albert Stabler

Albert spoke about Build Programs Not Jails' position on how to spend the money that is becoming available. He also said that he is very excited about the RJTF draft reports and hopes they come before the County Board sooner rather than later. He is also writing a piece about the RJTF for the Public I. He also suggested reconsidering how meetings are facilitated and also the way in which white voices often dominate the conversation. He suggested bringing in more voices of people of color who are community members.

Esther asked Albert about the number of jail beds.

Carolyn asked Albert to send BPNJ's statement on how to use the funds so the RJTF can create similar language. She also appreciated his note about including more voices of color to the RJTF conversations.

Henry said he liked what Albert and James had to say about the funding. Henry wanted to address a few items about how the RJTF has operated. He wants to hear more about what happens before going to court. He spoke about the lack of help that is available in the County for community members, and he wants the RJTF to focus more on how to provide employment opportunities and community support services. Demario asked if Henry was talking about re-entry programs and/or legal resources for community members. Henry wants to see recommendations that support empowerment.

VI. Presentations

There were no presentations.

VII. New Business

Plan for the Final Report

Sara asked for each person to give their thoughts on what needs to be done in the final few meetings to complete the work of the task force and also for making budget recommendations to the County Board.

Sara thinks it is appropriate for each subcommittee to develop a budget number and description for whatever they need. She also believes there should be someone from each subcommittee as a representative on a working group to help write the final report. The whole task force would then need to approve different sections.

Scott would like to see a better way to identify recommendations that the County Board can actually do.

Esther believes we need to identify budget items tonight. Gerry spoke about budget items that the Community Engagement Subcommittee would recommend. Carolyn highlighted two personnel hire recommendations for those items. Esther believes we need to go through each section and approve each one. The introduction should discuss disparity in income and the connection to race.

Gerry believes that a committee to put the final report together is a good idea. The report could be seamlessly tied together or be a collection of sections/chapters from the subcommittees which are then tied together by the introduction. He likes the suggestion of separating actions that the County Board can take from recommendations. Ellen asked if we will be going to a County Board meeting to present the report. Ellen asked if we could approach the News-Gazette and ask for coverage on our sections.

Carolyn spoke about the creation of the introduction and the challenge of using a committee to write the introduction.

Ryan spoke about community support.

Susan spoke about the dependence on fees for Katie Blakeman's office and considering commenting on the County Board working toward reducing such dependence through line items of budget support. Susan thinks there are pros and cons to both approaches for the final report. She believes a working group is the way to go but we need to make sure voices are not lost.

Lynn believes we need to recommend a Coordinating Council. Other priorities are the staffing for pretrial services, staffing for RJ programs, staffing for community engagement, and staffing for data collection and evaluation. She suggested giving the finances section as an example to the County Board. She believes we need to finally approve sections and to do it with timelines. She also thinks we need a working group to write an introduction, a summary of recommendations, and an appendix and then to have that come back to the task force for a final vote.

Demario believes we should focus on formatting, style, transitions and then write an introduction. He also thinks a working group is more productive and that a good idea is to research other groups (Community Justice Task Force) to see how they wrote an introduction.

Amy believes it is futile to put forth recommendations that only focus on the criminal justice system. She read about poverty and discrimination. She believes the recommendations are ok but that it is essential that we make it known that making numbers equal in the CJ system is only a solution to the endpoint of a bigger problem.

Henry agrees with Amy that the criminal justice system is the endpoint and that poverty and unemployment leads to the issues in the criminal justice system. The group discussed fines and fees related to insurance and driving.

Sara summarized thoughts: the group would like to approve the sections from the subcommittees and then have a working group to put the pieces together.

Sara moved to vote on all final drafts as a task force from each subcommittee at our next meeting and develop a voluntary working group to pull it together (established at next meeting). Esther seconded the motion. Thursday, August 24th as a date for final drafts to be shared.

The group worked on budget highlights.

VIII. Adjournment

Henry moved to adjourn.