

COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION
Minutes from the Meeting held on Thursday, September 23, 2021

Members Present:

Carolyn Drblik - Commissioner
Vicky Duka - Commissioner
Jovan Marinac - Commissioner
Jeff Kash - Commissioner
Katie Schneider - Village of Niles, CRC Secretary
John Jekot - Village Trustee
Nick Zakula - Niles Police Dept, Deputy Chief
Joe La Margo - Village Manager

Members Absent:

Kathy O'Grady - Niles Family Services, Assist. Director
Joe Kuffel - Chair

I. Call to Order:

Vicky Duka called the meeting to order electronically via Zoom audio/visual conferencing at 6:11 p.m. on Thursday, September 23, 2021. Katie Schneider called the roll for attendance.

II. Approval of Meeting Summary

Jovan Marinac made a motion to accept the minutes of the April 8, 2021 meeting as presented. Carolyn Drblik second the motion, all were in favor, none opposed. Minutes approved.

III. Reported Citizen Comments/Complaints

a. Police and other Village Departments

Deputy Chief Zakula reported that Niles Police will be participating in upcoming events including traffic assistance at the Park District 5K Harvest Hustle and Park District Halloween Parade. The Police Department will also be having their Turkey drop, where police officers deliver Thanksgiving meals to families in need. Plus, police officers will be onsite for the Public Works tree planting in recognition of First Responders.

b. Niles Family Services

No representatives from Family Services were in attendance, no report was given.

c. Telephone / Email Hotlines-

Katie Schneider reported that no complaints or inquiries were submitted or reported.

c. Commissioners

There were no reports from Commissioners.

IV. Old Business

- a. **Marketing CRC Services:** Katie Schneider suggested that we update the village website with resources from Open Communities, a local non-profit that offers workshops, classes and online programs for landlords and tenants that support fair housing initiatives. Commissioners agreed to post Open Communities information on website and social media. Commissioners have also discussed updating the brochure, but will wait until the group has a better understanding of how a printed brochure will be distributed.

V. New Business

There was no new business.

VI. Open Discussion and Public Comment

Members of the public can participate remotely in the meeting and provide live comment during public comment sections of the meeting via Zoom. Public comments are limited to three minutes per person. Comments should be related to the Community Relations Commission mission:

The mission of the Community Relations Commission shall be to foster, encourage and stimulate the improvement of relations among and between citizens of all races, creeds, national origins and economic and educational levels; and to provide all individuals with an equal opportunity to grow and participate to the best of their ability in the economic, educational, social and cultural activities available that are available in the community.

Renee Sutherland (she/her):

Ms. Sutherland thanked the Commissioners for hosting the meeting via zoom as it easier to attend especially for people with young kids and those with health problems. She thanked the Village Board and library for also holding live meetings with virtual participation. She asked that school boards do the same. There is a lot of valuable information at these meetings and she would like to see an increase in access to all meetings. Ms. Sutherland asked the Community Relations Commission for assistance with the Niles-Maine District Library Board anti-community behavior, particularly library president Carolyn Drblik. Ms. Sutherland has reached out to Ms. Drblik with questions but received no response despite her follow up inquiries. Ms. Sutherland is upset and concerned with the Library President's public comments about feeling unsafe in the community and asking for a police presence at library board meetings. Ms. Sutherland does not understand how Ms. Drblik can improve the relations among community members and meet the mission of the CRC. Ms. Sutherland would like to hear more about what the Community Relations Commission can do about this behavior.

Elizabeth "Liz" Lynch (she/her):

Ms. Lynch stated that one of the central parts of meeting the CRC mission is the Niles-Maine District Library and it has been upsetting and distressing to many people to see trustees, leaders in our community, make comments that advocate for less services for the people who need them the most and advocate for discriminatory services. Liz gave examples of Library Trustees making discriminatory comments including Library Trustee Joe Makula stating that library resources and funds should not go to people who want to speak and read languages other than English. Trustee Schoenfeldt stated that everyone has the internet and computers, which is not true according to Liz. Liz asked the Community Relations Commission to look at the Niles Coalition petition calling for greater equity at the library and for trustees to apologize for their former actions. Liz is advocating for the library to be a welcoming place to serve everyone.

Alisa Ramirez:

Ms. Ramirez stated that she is a longtime resident and is a representative of a minority group and is concerned about a member of the Community Relations Commission. Ms. Ramirez stated that she is afraid as a woman of color to speak up at library meetings and that she may be stopped or apprehended since she not white. She would like to live in a peaceful community for her and her kids. She would like people to respect her as a human being.

David Sutherland (He/His/Him):

Mr. Sutherland stated that he was present at the December 10, 2020 meeting. Mr. Sutherland explained that the minutes of the meeting incorrectly stated that the Illinois Law Accreditation that the Niles Police Department received was a federal accreditation. The accreditation is from the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police which is a not-profit organization and not a federal accreditation. Mr. Sutherland reiterated the public comments of the other residents and questioned

how Library President and Community Relations Commissioner Carolyn Drblik can continue to operate in good faith to the CRC Mission. Mr. Sutherland stated that Ms. Drblik is hostile to the mission of the library and the effects are rippling through the community. Mr. Sutherland hopes that the CRC can foster efforts of anti-racism in our community.

VII. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held in December; Katie Schneider will reach out to commissioners to schedule and post to the website.

VIII. Adjournment

Jovan Marinac motioned to adjourn the meeting at 6:38 p.m. Carolyn Drblik second the motion. All were in favor, none opposed. Meeting adjourned.

Minutes Submitted by: Katie Schneider, Secretary CRC