

Racial Equity Commission

Minutes

Attendance

The following members of the Durham Racial Equity Commission met via Zoom on April 20, 2022, from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. Tarik Woods joined the meeting, but had technical difficulties and was unable to remain on the call.

- Del Ruff
- Easmond Codjoe
- Ernest Smith
- Krista Kenney
- Lea Efird
- Nisha Williams
- Ramya Krishna
- Ruth Phillips
- Sheila Mullen
- Taylor Walker
- Theodore ("Ted") Rueter
- Tiffany Foster
- Jillian Johnson (city council liaison)

The following city and county staff were in attendance:

- Anne Phillips
- Sharon Williams
- Yesenia Merino

1. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

2. Roll Call/Introduction

Staff and members of the commission introduced themselves. Members of the commission stated their reasons for wanting to participate on the commission.

Ernest Smith expressed interest in serving as a co-chair of the commission.

3. Your Role as Commissioners: Q&A

Anne Phillips provided an overview of the purpose of the commission, roles of the commissioners, and the bylaws of the commission related to absences, voting, and leadership.

Nisha Williams and Ramya Krishna expressed interest in serving as co-chair of the commission.

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42 There was discussion of the commission's meeting time moving forward, and the
43 commissioners agreed that they would meet on the third Wednesday of each month from 6:30
44 to 8:30 p.m.

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46 There was discussion of the co-chair selection timeline. Del Ruff stated that commissioners
47 should take time to get to know each other, and those interested in serving as co-chair should
48 learn more about the commission before co-chairs are elected. Nisha Williams stated that she
49 also wanted more time for the commissioners to get to know each other.

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51 Anne Phillips asked for clarification about the co-chair selection timeline. Del Ruff suggested
52 that chairs could be elected in July. Ernest Smith stated that he would be traveling in July and
53 proposed electing co-chairs in June.

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55 There was discussion about whether the commission would meet in July, given that the City
56 Council and County Commissioners have a recess in July. The commissioners agreed that they
57 would not meet in July.

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59 Del Ruff stated that electing chairs in June would give the commission a chance to work
60 together before electing co-chairs, while also giving the newly elected co-chairs a month (July)
61 to prepare to assume leadership of the commission in August. The commissioners agreed with
62 the proposal to select co-chairs in June with an August start date.

63
64 Anne Phillips asked city-appointed members of the commission to reach out to her if they were
65 interested in receiving a stipend. Yesenia Merino stated that she was working on finding out
66 about stipends for county-appointed commissioners.

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68 Sheila Mullen requested that all commissioners receive the same training so that they could be
69 exposed to a common message about racial equity. Anne Phillips stated that a training
70 assessment would be used to design a training for the commissioners. She added that she
71 would discuss with Yesenia Merino whether staff would deliver the training or whether it would
72 be delivered by outside facilitators.

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74 **--10 Minute Break --**

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76 **4. Breakout Activities**

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78 The commissioners were put into random breakout rooms for 20 minutes. They discussed:

- 79 - What their superpower would be if they could choose one (icebreaker)
80 - Their visions for a more equitable Durham.

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82 **5. Report Out**

83 Taylor Walker shared that her group (Nisha Williams and Easmond Codjoe) discussed that
84 racial equity work was about two things, the heart condition of people and creating systems and
85 policies that contribute to equitable ecosystems. She added that her group’s vision of an
86 equitable Durham includes a space where people are protected and given equal opportunities
87 and resources. Taylor Walker added that her group also discussed how an equitable Durham is
88 also a place where people are actively working on the condition of their hearts and how they
89 treat other people.

90

91 Ramya Krishna stated that the vision she shared with her group (Sheila Mullen and Ted Rueter)
92 was about going into institutions and prioritizing people's individual stories over broad swaths of
93 data, because data can paint a picture that may not be completely accurate in terms of what is
94 going well and what needs improvement. Ramya Krishna added that giving power back to those
95 who struggle to speak out about their situation would create a more equitable Durham. Sheila
96 Mullen added that Durham is very diverse, but everyone does not have a seat at the table when
97 it comes to opportunities in areas like employment and education. Sheila Mullen discussed how
98 Durham Public School students attend area universities at very low rates, which is an example
99 of Durham not being as inclusive as it could be. Ted Rueter added that a more equitable
100 Durham would involve reducing racial disparities in school suspensions, high school graduation
101 rates, and homeownership rates. He added that an equitable Durham would also include
102 reparations and discussed examples of other cities that are thinking about reparations such as
103 Evanston, Illinois, and Asheville, North Carolina.

104

105 Del Ruff stated that his group’s (Ruth Phillips and Ernest Smith) vision for an equitable Durham
106 was one that provides for all its citizens, not just those who don’t have, but all people.

107

108 Lea Efird stated that her group’s (Krista Kenney and Tiffany Foster) vision of an equitable
109 Durham was focused on the areas of health, education, and housing, as these areas affect
110 other systems the most. She shared that Krista Kenney said that because she is a data person
111 who thinks in predictive modeling, she does not want to be able to predict someone's situation
112 or future based on their skin color. She added that for Krista Kenny, this means addressing all
113 systems, both from a systemic level and a personal level. Lea Efird stated that she spoke about
114 intersectional oppression and moving towards a future where people have not just equal
115 access, but also the supports they need to get to that access.

116

117 **Reports**

118 **6. City Equity Activities**

119 Sharon Williams, City of Durham Equity & Inclusion Director

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121 This item was postponed until May.

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123 **7. County Equity Activities**

124 Dr. Yesenia Merino, Durham County Racial Equity Officer

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126 This item was postponed until May.

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128 **8. Racial Equity Task Force Report Overview**

129 Anne Phillips, FUSE Executive Fellow (City)

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131 Anne Phillips provided an overview of the Racial Equity Task Force report, including
132 background on the task force, a timeline of task force activities, community engagement efforts
133 related to the task force report, and possible next steps for working on the report.

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135 **9. Adjournment**

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137 Ruth Phillips asked whether the commission would be meeting in-person soon, and Anne
138 Phillips shared that the commission would be following guidance from the city and county clerks'
139 offices. Anne Phillips added that current guidance was that boards and commissions would be
140 meeting virtually.

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142 The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

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