

**Chairman Cade called the meeting to order at 4:05 PM.**

**Members present:** Vilicia Cade (Chairperson), Valerie Cruse (Vice Chairperson), Anthony Harris, Taylor Sutphen, Daryl Murphy

**Ex-Officio members and staff present:** Blake Harris (City Commission), Eric Wobser (City Manager), John Orzech (Police Chief), Jim Green (Acting Fire Chief), Justin Harris (Acting Law Director), McKenzie Spriggs (Commission Clerk)

**Members absent:** Daniel Williams

## **CURRENT BUSINESS**

### **Approval of Minutes**

**Upon motion of Daryl Murphy and second of Anthony Harris, the members voted to approve the minutes of the March 11, 2020, meeting and suspend the formal reading. The Chairman declared the motion passed.**

### **Introduction of New Executive Board**

Vilicia Cade thanked the committee for her nomination for chair and congratulated Valerie Cruse. She said starting out, she would like to review the mission and goals they have for this commission. She would like to see what the commission would like to do with the national conversation going on, so they can be beneficial to this community.

### **Impact of COVID on Sandusky**

Eric Wobser said the city government is working with the health department and Firelands Health System to have a minim. Sandusky from a financial perspective is one of the hardest hit cities in the state. Ohio cities in general are funded with income tax which means when times are good, they rise quickly. The downside is that they are collected every 30-60 days, so as soon as unemployment hit, Sandusky was hit almost immediately. The income tax is down 14% from where we saw last year. Additionally, admission taxes are down roughly 92% from last year and the lodging tax is down roughly 77% from this time last year. The net effect is our budget is roughly \$7M off. We have gone from 253 employees to 226 FT employees, done through layoffs (apart from police and fire) and attrition from other positions. We have also cut the capital budget and our programs budget. We know next year will be difficult as well. The good news, the city had a record reserve of \$5M going into the year, we have received stimulus dollars, and have had creative uses of other dollars.

In relation to the community, we have dramatically decreased code enforcement efforts. The city postponed water shut offs for a long time, and the city is just starting these up again, but we are doing it sensitively—providing a higher limit and time to get on a payment plan.

Vilicia Cade asked how the city helped provide COVID testing locations (particularly disenfranchised communities) to the health department. Eric Wobser responded saying the planning department gave sites and non-profit partners who might be helpful, while still being sensitive as we know there is distrust in some of these communities.

Vilicia Cade suggested reaching out to the faith based community and using partners such as NAACP. Daryl Murphy said the NAACP helped get the word out when tests were plentiful, but know there was a shortage. Eric Wobser said the city would definitely consider these in the future and keep the committee in the loop.

Valerie Cruse asked for additional details about the water shutoff process as she has gotten questions. Eric Wobser said notice was given, the \$100 cap was raised to \$150 and a 12 month payment plan was established. He asked McKenzie Spriggs to forward the policy to the committee.

Anthony Harris asked if new water meter costs were going to get assessed to the user. Eric Wobser said not specifically, we are not charging for the new meter. But as the new meters will give more accurate readings, people could see a cost savings or an increase, depending how the meter reads.

#### **Update on Police Chief Hiring**

Eric Wobser said interviews with the finalists are scheduled for September 22—with internal candidate Scott Dahlgren and Erie County Sheriff deputy Jared Oliver. We are working with the NAACP to get final questions for these candidates.

Anthony Harris asked who was on the selection committee. John Orzech said the selection committee is outlined in the charter. The city commission member is Naomi Twine, the civil service committee selected Vince Rhodes, and the three residents of the city are Mark Fogg, Ed Windau, and Steve Sturgill. Anthony Harris said there is only one black resident on the committee in Naomi Twine. Eric Wobser and Daryl Murphy said Vince Rhodes is a black resident, making it 40% black. Daryl Murphy said Vince is a great candidate for this committee. Eric Wobser also said Steve Sturgill has a biracial family. Vilicia Cade said there is only one woman on the committee. Eric Wobser said that is true, and people can talk to the city commission who put together this committee to make it more representative of the community. He added it is always best when committees are representative of the community, racially but also economically and variations in age and sex.

#### **Update on City Projects**

Eric Wobser said COVID-19 threw a curve ball in many plans, but there are many exciting things still happening in Sandusky. BGSU opens this fall, Sandusky City School facilities open this fall, the opening of the indoor sports complex, and the opening of the Sandusky Bay Pathway through downtown Sandusky and the new Jackson Street Pier has been very exciting. Priority projects

continue, such as the Sandusky Neighborhood Initiative and the city is acquiring properties for the continuation of the Sandusky Bay Pathway.

Anthony Harris said with all these projects, he hopes we are keeping these dollars local. He sees contractors coming from Cleveland and taking dollars outside the community. Eric Wobser responded saying we bid out projects, and often local contractors do not bid on those projects. That being said, the subcontractors they use tend to be local. For example, the city recently posted on facebook regarding the Feick building and it listed about 11 local companies that were used in that project. We have seen more construction in Sandusky than in a long time—especially with downtown construction, the indoor sports center, the new schools, etc. We hope our local contractors grow large enough to be one of the general contractors on these projects. He said Anthony Harris' point was well taken. Justin Harris added, the requirements are very strict for bids and the legal process is very stringent.

#### **Update on City Manager position**

Vilicia Cade asked if Eric Wobser could update the commission on his interview process in Ann Arbor. Eric said it is unlikely to work out with Ann Arbor, on his part or on their part. Ann Arbor is a special place to him where he went to law school and had many great years, but it would take a nearly perfect situation to pull him out of Sandusky and he looks forward to continuing to serve Sandusky during his time here.

#### **Black Lives Matter in Sandusky**

Eric Wobser said many efforts have been taken in Sandusky to diversify Sandusky's workforce, including the highest level of the city and entry level positions. He cited hiring a diverse Fire Chief, a diverse Law Director, diversifying code enforcement, recreation, the police department, etc. Sandusky is far from perfect, but we are making strides. Eric talked about the diversity of boards throughout the city, and that needs to be addressed. The Erie County Community Foundation is taking that effort very seriously and he hopes to see that spread along to other non-profits throughout the city. He added that Commissioner Blake Harris has brought up street names and getting a name changed to symbolize a civil rights leader, and hopes to take that to the city commission.

Anthony Harris added that Ashburn Drive represents a black minister in Sandusky. He also wanted to ensure Gray lives matter, meaning the elderly have a say on the board volunteers.

Blake Harris cited the rally in Sandusky, that it was peaceful and brought people together to have a conversation. He added that he hopes to get a name changed to signify Sandusky's progress. He noted that city staff have actually asked him for names of individuals that might be interested in the city's boards, to ensure they become more representative of Sandusky's population. Blake Harris has been working with black entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs to address the information gap that exists.

Daryl Murphy said it's important to say Black Lives Matter. Too many times we push the issue of blackness to the back, either because it's confrontational or insults people. He said we don't need to go all lives matter, or blue lives matter, of course all those lives matter. He said the national policies show that black lives historically do not matter. We need to be able to say "Black Lives Matter" in Sandusky.

Anthony Harris said it is important to speak about topics like this that are uncomfortable. If it is uncomfortable to say "Black Lives Matter," that is okay, that is growth.

Vilicia Cade added that structural and institutional racism has impacted black lives, disproportionately in our country. We can see this all over the country, whether looking at medical coverage and the COVID-19 pandemic. The implications can be seen all over.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

Vilicia Cade said the purpose of the CRC was to recommend ways to eliminate discrimination or to remove the effects of past discrimination. What training, information, etc does this board need to advance the mission of this group. She cited the existing group is diverse with respect to age and diversity. She wants this group to be outcome focused and doesn't want the effects of the rallies and walks to disappear. She said history often repeats itself, and she wants the group to dive into some of the aspects of Sandusky's past that we want to ensure do not repeat themselves.

At the next meeting she would like to hear from this commission on how they'd like to advance the mission and consider what tools the group needs.

Taylor Sutphen said there are many minority law enforcement candidates here in Sandusky. How can we get those people interested and involved in the field? Having more diversity will help these situations. He wants to consider how we get more people interested, whether it's through the schools or religious affiliation.

Anthony Harris said this commission needs to become more visible in the community.

Vilicia Cade said she would like the city to be more proactive approach, rather than just an update. She used the new police chief search as an example and said she would have liked to help or give questions before, rather than an update later. She said the Community Relations Commission is to be used as a partner.

Eric Wobser said the search process has been complicated by COVID-19, and it was not intentional, but her point is well taken. The NAACP will be used in the interview process, but the city will make a better effort. He would like to build trust through participation. He said the Fire Chief selection process will come next year, and that will be a good way to begin this partnership.

Vilicia Cade said she would like to lead this commission and serve the community so they are fulfilling a role and assisting the city. This commission's role is to be considerate of the residents and ensure discrimination does not happen. She noted both Anthony Harris' and Taylor Sutphen's comments and would like to continue the conversation at the next meeting.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Upon motion of Valerie Cruse and a second of Taylor Sutphen, the members voted to adjourn at 5:02 PM. The Chairperson declared the motion passed.**



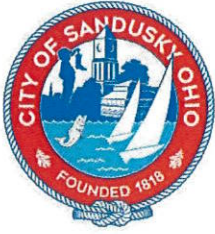
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**Attest: McKenzie Spriggs, Clerk**  
**Date: 12 / 9 / 20**



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**Vilicia Cade, Chairperson**  
**12 / 9 / 20**



**COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION AGENDA**  
December 9, 2020 at 4 p.m.  
City Hall, 240 Columbus Avenue

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**CALL TO ORDER**

**ROLL CALL**

Vilicia Cade (Chairperson), Valerie Cruse (Vice Chairperson), Anthony Harris, Blake Harris, Daryl Murphy, Taylor Sutphen & Daniel Williams

**CURRENT BUSINESS**

Approval of Minutes – September 9, 2020

Introduction of Interim Fire Chief: Jim Green

Introduction of new Police Chief: Jared Oliver

Presentation on the New Police Chief's Vision or Priorities for the First 100 Days

**OLD BUSINESS**

Review the Mission of the Community Relations Commission & CRC members share what they want to focus on this year?

Update from the City Manager regarding community concerns

- Factory speakers feedback
- Safety Issues in TIMS ( East Oldgate Forest Drive)
- Demolitions in MacArthur Park

**NEW BUSINESS**

CRC Members and City Boards and Commissions

What is a joint project that City Manager and CRC can work on during this time of racial strife in our nation?

Set meeting dates for 2021

**ADJOURNMENT**