



RACE RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Minutes

Zoom Meeting

December 4, 2023

6:00 p.m.

Roll Call

P	Danielle Russell, Chair	P	Councillor Juanita Nathan
P	Jas Atwal, Vice-Chair	P	Claudette Rutherford
TD/P	Satya Arora	P	Darius Sookram
P	Edward Choi		
P	Madge Logan		
A	Faiz Mohyuddin	A	Alicia Lauzon, York Regional Police
P	Mohamad Mtairek	P	Jamaal Kossy, Staff Liaison
p	Nayani Nandakumar	P	Hristina Giantsopoulos, Committee Coordinator

P=Present, A=Absent, L=Late, TD: Technical Difficulties

	Action Required
<p>1. Call to Order</p> <p>The Race Relations Committee (RRC) meeting convened at 6:02 PM. Danielle Russell presided as Chair for all items on the agenda and commenced the meeting with a reflection of the Land Acknowledgement.</p>	
<p>2. Adoption of the Agenda</p> <p>Moved by: Mohammed Mtairek Second by: Nayani Nandakumar</p> <p>That the December 4, 2023, Race Relations Committee Meeting Agenda be adopted.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Carried</p>	
<p>3. Approval of the Previous Minutes</p> <p>Moved by: Jas Atwal Second by: Madge Logan</p> <p>That the September 11, 2023, Race Relations Committee Meeting Minutes be adopted.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Carried</p>	

<p>4. Business Related to the Previous Minutes</p> <p>There was no business related to the previous minutes.</p>	
<p>4.1 Meeting Frequency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of the Staff Report to General Committee 11/21/23 • 1-year Review and Next Steps • Terms of Reference Update • RRC Member Attendance Records <p>Jamaal Kossy, provided a brief overview of the report that went to General Committee on November 21, 2023 regarding meeting frequency and noted that while the meeting frequency will remain at quarterly, it may be reviewed again in the future. He noted the commitment that was made by the City to review the Terms of Reference by the end of March 2024.</p> <p>There was discussion regarding the Terms of Reference, the role of the committee, and the importance of receiving the appropriate direction to establish goals and achieve objectives.</p> <p>The Chair also addressed the importance of meeting attendance and engagement to advance the RRC mandate especially once it is defined within the Terms of Reference.</p>	<p>Committee members were encouraged to attend all meetings.</p>
<p>4.2 Succession Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on Current Member Recruitment (3 members) • Plans for Committee Orientation and Training <p>Jamaal Kossy advised that recruitment to fill the current vacancies is underway and that interviews will begin next week. He further advised that the new member appointments require Council approval and will be on a January 2024 Council meeting agenda. It is anticipated that new members will be on-boarded before the March 2024 RRC meeting.</p> <p>The Chair suggested that the whole committee may participate in onboarding activities during a committee meeting in the new year.</p>	<p>Jamaal to provide an update on the recruitment progress and the date in which the appointments will proceed to Council for approval.</p> <p>Hristina to check the term ending dates for Mohammad and Edward.</p>
<p>4.3 RRC Minutes June 5, 2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referred to General Committee 11/21/23 • Update on RRC Motion on Anti-Black Racism issue <p>The June 5, 2023, RRC Minutes which included the recommendation were received by Council at the Nov 21, 2023 General Committee Meeting without comment.</p>	
<p>4.4 RRC Minutes of September 11, 2023</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little Native Hockey League <p>Jamaal Kossy provided a brief update and that indicated that there is extensive planning in progress for this event and will follow up with the committee on volunteer opportunities.</p>	
<p>5. Chair’s Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written Report Below <p>The committee thanked Danielle Russell for the comprehensive report and updates that were sent to RRC Members between official meetings.</p>	
<p>6. Diversity Action Plan and Anti-Black Racism Action Plan Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update from the City Diversity Specialist • Blue Sky Brainstorming on how the RRC can support the DAP <p>Jamaal Kossy provided an update on the Terms of Reference, the Anti-Black Racism Plan and the Diversity Action Plan. He noted that he is working with the Executive Leadership Team on the workplan for the strategic implementation of their recommendations across City departments for lasting sustainability and impact using a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion lens. He further noted that additional information will be provided to the RRC once the implementation plan and initiatives are approved and how they correlate to the RRC Terms of Reference. There are many things planned between now and March.</p> <p>Jamaal also commented that new training will go to all staff and that this will be part of everyone’s daily work to ensure accountability and measurable success of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan, Diversity Action Plan, and Anti-Black Racism Plan.</p> <p>The Chair indicated that she would provide feedback to Jamaal on what the role of the RRC may be and opened the floor for additional feedback from members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The feasibility of having every department decide what part of the action plan is meaningful to them. • That there needs to be accountability to ensure the plan initiatives are fulfilled. • That there should be consideration to tie in accountability to job performance. • That plan initiatives be actionable via key performance indicators (KPIs) otherwise they may not be effective. • That there be consideration to assist staff with attrition if under stress to employ accountability. • That participation and accountability by everyone across the corporation are key components of success. • That everyone’s performance should reflect action plan items and that this responsibility be shared and not only be on one person such as the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Specialist. 	<p>Jamal to provide information in relation to progress and outcomes of the organizational training implemented two years ago and if it was integrated into daily work.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That there needs to be collaboration within the entire organization to share this responsibility and be equitable across the board. • That these initiatives be actioned by all. • That there be continuous reporting and follow up on the progress. <p>Staff indicated the plans have KPIs incorporated in them and that they don't speak to accountability measures however, these recommendations are included in the departmental business plans.</p>	
<p>7. 2024 Priority Planning/Work Plan Discussion</p> <p>Danielle opened the floor for discussion on identifying achievable goals for committee to work on in the next 12 months and a potential work plan.</p> <p>Achievable Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing the issue of islamophobia; to take a more active role in this regard as a committee and include this in a committee work plan alongside the anti-black racism plan. • Help provide an understanding of what anti-Islam and islamophobia are, who it involves, and the impacts in the community. • Promote and develop wholistic training on racism; to create an understanding of what racism and anti-racism are and initiate components to address them. • Identify the intersectionality of racism i.e. Somalian, Palestinian, Black, Muslim, etc. • To break stereotypical thinking – terrorism is not Islamic action. • Create definitions about racism and stereotypical terms. • To identify community issues in neighbourhoods, workplaces, community centres and schools and assist in the delivery of workshops. (Initiatives such as Many Faces of Markham may assist in public education in this regard.) • To be a presence at City events and promote public engagement. • To initiate a neighbourhood welcome wagon to promote inclusivity into the community. <p>Actionable work plan items for 2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular review of policies, objectives, and the Terms of Reference to maintain relevance with the current environment. • Identify what is the capacity of the committee. • Create communications in multiple languages. • To study diversity metrics across the organization to establish KPIs in the future. 	<p>Danielle/Hristina</p> <p>Summarize the 2024 work plan and prioritize the goals.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for community members using a diversity lens where opportunities have been identified, i.e. Firefighter program. • Communicate in multiple languages. • Establish a cycle for policy review audits. • Create conditions for a safe work environment and to promote inclusivity in all work environments. • Increasing comfort level in community spaces and establish KPIs to improve feelings in them. <p>Jamaal Kossy agreed with having a goal for the City to be representative of the community it serves and to ensure that there are tools in place such as undertaking an equity audit for which he has created a request for proposal. He indicated that the KPIs identified by the plan, have qualitative measures and that their progress may be difficult to present. There are initiatives underway such as the Markham Fire Scholarship, and Mentoring Initiative for Indigenous and Planners of Colour (MIPOC).</p>	
<p>8. New/Other Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unofficial Meetings and Winter Social <p>There was no new or other business.</p>	<p>Danielle to provide information on unofficial meetings between the regularly scheduled ones and a winter social event.</p>
<p>9. Next Steps – Advice Provided to the City of Markham Council/Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MOTION: (to be written as needed) <p>There was no motion or recommendation drafted at this meeting.</p>	<p>Hristina to include the Sept RRC minutes on a January GC meeting for receipt by Council.</p> <p>Minutes with the work plan i.e. December minutes will be on a March GC agenda.</p>
<p>10. Farewell and Appreciation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remarks from the Past Chair Darius Sookram expressed his appreciation to have served on the RRC. 	

<p>The Committee thanked Darius and Nayani for their contributions as Chair and Vice-Chair. They wished Darius well in his future endeavours.</p>	
<p>11. Next Official Meeting Dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monday, March 4, 2024 • Monday, June 3, 2024 • Monday September 9, 2024 • (Additional Dates Pending 1 year Review) 	
<p>12. Adjournment</p> <p>Moved by: Darius Sookram Seconded by: Edward Choi</p> <p>That the Race Relations Committee meeting adjourn at 8:02 PM.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Carried</p>	

Chair’s Report
City of Markham, Race Relations Committee, December 4, 2023
 Prepared by: Danielle S. Russell, CAE, C.Dir

Please note I will not be speaking to this report at any length, you are asked to review this report and bring pertinent questions to the meeting.

Summary:

With my continued thanks to all members of the Committee for selecting me to chair the RRC starting at this, our December 4, 2023, meeting; I have set about establishing relationships, representing the committee at key meetings and consultations, and otherwise gathering feedback on the ongoing role and purpose of our work.

Special thanks to Edward Choi, who has written a letter in support of our motion which went to General Committee (as part of our March minute package) on October 10, 2023; to Satya Arora who attended the General Committee meeting of November 21, 2023 when the staff report (on the March motion) was received, along with the RRC minutes of June 6, 2023 which contained a motion regarding the use of the N-Word by a City Employee; and to both Edward and Satya who attended the City’s public update on the Strategic Plan on November 22, 2023.

Of note: Destination Markham Corporation received an Award from the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, bringing home the Canadian Business Event of the Year Award, in partnership with the Hakka Conference held in Markham in 2022.

Updates on Issues of Interest to the Committee:

Motion to return to monthly meetings: as you will hear during the meeting on December 4, the General Committee accepted a report and recommendation that RRC meetings remain quarterly, but that time and resources be devoted to the development of new Terms of Reference.

At every opportunity I have been clear that the RRC has been calling for new TORs for several years and will be (understandably) anxious to see real progress. Thanks to a motion from councillor Nathan, an end-of-March-2024 deadline has been set for new Terms of Reference.

Claudette Rutherford has already responded to a request to provide any references from nearby jurisdictions, and I have been advised that the committee will have ample opportunities to consult and comment on all forthcoming drafts.

The issue of the name of the committee 'Race Relations' continues to be raised, and any ideas on alternatives should be raised during our discussion on our 2024 workplan.

Motion re: the use of the N-Word by a City Staff Member at George Brown College: the motion was received by General Committee as part of the consent agenda at the meeting of November 21, 2023.

Many of the substantive issues raised by the committee in the motion including an Equity Audit, and the establishment of ongoing reporting on the DAP and Anti-Black Racism Strategy, are now in progress of on near-term workplans.

I have been advised that members of senior staff read all of the minutes of the RRC and no doubt, issues such as LinkedIn updating will make their way into ongoing updates to policies and procedures.

On more than one occasion I raised my concern about the delay in advising the committee following the incident, and it is generally agreed that RRC members should not be learning of incidents such as this through the media, however, we all recognise that an incident involving a senior HR staff member created a perfect storm of challenging conditions.

Markham Public Library Response to Islamic Heritage Month (removal of displays): we recognize that the Markham Public Library is separate to the City, and thank Edward Choi, who also sits on the board of the public library for expressing the RRC's concerns to that board.

On numerous occasions I shared with city officials the general sense of concern on the part of the committee about the alarming and swift rise in Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia following the October 7, 2023, Hamas Attack and subsequent Israeli Military response in Gaza.

And, noted that statements that even appeared to 'take sides' could intensify the feelings of isolation felt by Markham Citizens concerned for their own safety and that of loved ones in the Middle East; and repeated the conversation we had over the summer at the RRC table about the lasting impacts of the London van attacks on safety concerns in the Muslim community here in our City.

Key Meetings and Events:

September 11, 2023 – Appointed along with Jas Atwal to serve as Chair and Vice-Chair Respectively

October 5, 2023 – Jas and I met with Councillor Nathan to discuss her role and priorities as Committee Liaison.

October 5, 2023 – Jas and I met with Jamaal Kossy (the City's Diversity Specialist) and his new colleague Asha Edwin to discuss the status of the DAP, Anti-Black Racism Action Plan, and additional work being done by his office, and to explore opportunities for RRC to support that work.

October 10, 2023 – I appeared before General Committee to give a 5-minute deputation re: the RRC's March motion on a return to monthly meetings. I sent follow up correspondence to all Councillors and Staff who spoke to the motion, inviting them to a future meeting to help in the cocreation of priorities and a workplan for the committee.

October 12, 2023 – Jas and I held a debrief meeting and discussed next steps.

October 17, 2023 – I met with the City Solicitor Claudia Storto to discuss a path forward for the updated Terms of Reference, and to better understand how the RRC can provide meaningful, timely, and focused advice to various parts of the city.

October 31, 2023 – Jas and I met with the immediate past Chair and Vice Chair (Darius Sookram and Nayani Nandakumar) to discuss the transition of leadership for the committee.

November 13, 2023 – I met with Hristina to discuss how she works with the Chair in support of the committee, and to better understand workflow for meeting prep, etc.

November 13, 2023 – I met with City CAO Andy Taylor to discuss the role of the RRC within the City, and how the committee can work within existing plans, priorities and structures to make maximum impact with our advice. I was advised at that meeting of the likely contents of the staff report presented 21 November.

November 20, 2023 – I had a phone call with Jamaal to discuss the likely contents of the staff report presented November 21, 2023; and to plan for this meeting, and how his office can best support, and be supported by the RRC.

November 21, 2023 – I attended General Committee virtually and want to acknowledge and thank Councillor Nathan for her recommended amendment that put an explicit deadline on the new RRC Terms of Reference (March 31, 2024).

November 22 – I attended the City of Markham public update on the Strategic Plan, along with committee members – Satya Arora and Edward Choi. I was able to briefly speak with Mayor Scarpitti following the meeting when he generously shared the history of the RRC and its founding.