

Comments On Redrafted Human Rights Commission

Good evening. I 'm Paula Reeder. I'm here tonight to urge you to withdraw the redrafted Human Rights Commission proposal from further consideration because it ignores the originally envisioned purpose of a local Human Rights Commission, it won't help unite Chestertown against racism and, if adopted in its present form, will prove counterproductive.

Originally, the proposed Commission was designed to combat racism. The redrafted ordinance substitutes a Commission tasked with addressing all forms of discrimination that might be experienced by anyone who sets foot in Chestertown.

Racism and discrimination are not synonymous. Discrimination is the unfair, inequitable treatment of a person. Racism is the many faceted manifestation of a belief that one's race is superior to another. A key distinction between the two is that while people of all races may experience discrimination, victims of racism are strictly people of color. For them, discrimination is just one of the many ill effects of racism.

Roughly 25% of Town residents are people of color. Historically, they've been denigrated, discriminated against solely based on race, and largely gentrified out of town. Still, they remain a vital, contributing segment of our populace . It's way past time for their interests and concerns to be vetted and addressed without prejudice. The original construct of the Human Rights Commission did just that. The new proposal doesn't come close.

To work, strategies to combat and redress racism must recognize the full range and depth of its impacts on its victims. They, not outside consultants nor white residents, are best qualified to lead the definition of policies and initiatives that will work to mitigate the occurrence and effects of racism. The Town's pledge to unite against racism can't be realized without close collaboration between Town government and our resident population of color. A truly joint effort to define remedial actions that also empowers residents of color to lead their implementation is essential. Initiation of constructive collaborative action doesn't require formation of a local Human Rights Commission.

Suggestions for such action might include:

1. Commit to increase representation of residents of color on all Town commissions and the Board of Directors of Main Street Chestertown.
2. Commission production, publication and wide dissemination of a history of Chestertown's African American community before their stories are lost.
3. Dedicate town-owned property for construction of additional in town affordable housing units.
4. Tangibly recruit and support establishment of minority owned businesses.
5. Solicit town residents to identify townspeople of color who warrant special recognition and identify tangible lasting way to honor them.

6. Enlist Sumner Hall to spearhead local delivery of Town funded educational programs that explain and discourage racism.

7. Enroll key Town government officials in a racism awareness training program to heighten their ability to recognize and respond appropriately to racism-related issues and concerns.

Thank you for your consideration. I 'd be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding my recommendations.

Paula Reeder
December 7, 2020