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Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via email in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be read into the record, they should be submitted at least three hours in advance of the meeting start time. Please email Lamond Daniels at ldaniels@norwalkct.org to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

**CITY OF NORWALK
COMMUNITY SERVICES
AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 21, 2020
VIA TELECONFERENCE**

ATTENDANCE: Barbara Smyth, Chair; Gregory Burnett; Dominique Johnson; Thomas Keegan; Kadeem Roberts; Diana Revolus; Nicholas Sacchinelli

STAFF: Lamond Daniels, Chief of Community Services; Ray Burney, Personnel Director; Maria Escalara, Human Services Director

OTHERS: David Heuvelman, Common Council member

1. CALL TO ORDER/ ROLL CALL

Ms. Smyth called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and called the Roll as indicated above.

2. PUBLIC COMMENTS

No members of the public wished to comment this evening.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MEETING HELD ON SEPTEMBER 16, 2020

**** MS. JOHNSON MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY BY A SHOW OF HANDS**

4. DISCUSSION COMMUNITY SERVICES

a. Introduction Maria I. Escalera, Human Services Director

Mr. Daniels introduced Ms. Escalera and said she is Norwalk's first Human Services Director.

Ms. Escalera said she hit the ground running. They are very busy amplifying the needs of the community. She added that they are the hands and feet of the community. She reviewed her background and said she was excited to be in this position and serving the community. She said this was the beginning of her sixth week and that she is very excited to being able to meet everyone.

Ms. Escalera explained that Family Navigators have been hired to assist families. She added that they also continue to support and bring together groups providing food access. She said she is staying on top of what is going on with Covid and ensuring there are enough testing sites available. Ms. Escalera said that word has gotten out and people know to come to City Hall for help.

Mr. Daniels described the funding received from foundations for the connectivity initiative for families. He said that now that Ms. Escalera is on board, they will be filling two part time positions to help residents navigate social service programs.

Ms. Smyth asked for an update on the Family Navigator initiative. Mr. Daniels said Family Navigators have been hired and the Norwalk Public Schools has identified families. The Family Navigators have already begun assisting families.

Ms. Escalera said that some families have requested food; one Mother needed help updating a resume. Another Mother needed assistance with mental health. The Family Navigators connect families with services. Mr. Daniels said this department has a bird's eye view to see where there are gaps in services. Ms. Smyth said the need is so great and this establishes equity for all students.

Mr. Heuvelman asked about the number of different languages being serviced. Mr. Daniels explained that 80% of the families are Spanish. He added that they have access

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to the language services line. The other 20% speak Haitian Creole and English. Ms. Escalara said they anticipate adding other languages.

Mr. Burnett welcomed Ms. Escalara and said she did an outstanding job when she joined him on a recent radio program where she shared community services information.

b. Update on the progress of the Equity and Justice for All Commission

Mr. Daniels said they are still moving in the right direction. He explained that the City has a formal bidding process and he had to solicit bids from verifiable companies. He said he only received two applications and the proposals took longer than anticipated. He said he worked with different groups to get feedback on the RFP. A seven-person committee was selected and they met in September. When the bids were reviewed, the Committee decided to go out to re-bid.

Mr. Daniels reviewed the bidding process and noted that organizations doing equity work are in high demand.

Ms. Smyth said she has gotten questions from the public asking why they are choosing to hire a consultant to form this Commission. Mr. Daniels explained that best practice is to use an independent firm who has that expertise. He said the Committee decided to take that route as opposed to doing it in house. Mr. Daniels said this is an investment and the Mayor is committed to creating this Commission.

Mr. Daniels said the Norwalk Public Schools brought in an expert as well as Norwalk Acts. He said it is important to seek outside expertise. Ms. Smyth said it has taken 400 years and it is going to take time to dismantle this. She said she wanted to do it right.

Ms. Revolus asked Mr. Daniels if he talked to a *pro bono* attorney. She said they might be able to offer consultation and help. Mr. Daniels explained that this is a large project but would entertain contacting a *pro bono* attorney. He asked Ms. Revolus if she could forward contact information to him.

Mr. Burnett told Mr. Daniels that he understood what he was saying about trying to make it right, but speed and momentum is what is needed now rather than later. He said it could be another 400 years. He said there is a level of frustration because nothing has been done in terms of action. Mr. Burnett said he feels other things can be done so that when they do identify a company, they can build on that.

Mr. Daniels said he is working very closely with Norwalk Acts. He said it is important to not just start something new, but it had to be a concerted effort. Once the Commission is brought in, it will be a nice fit. He said he would be happy to talk further but would not categorize this as nothing being done. Ms. Smyth said things are being done, for example, Mr. Sacchinelli began a Candance of meetings with the Police Department and

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the Health and Public Safety Committee. Mr. Sacchinelli said his committee is trying to offer a high level of transparency with emergency services departments.

Mr. Burnett said he is hearing fragments, but not a cohesive effort. He said he is concerned that they are months, if not years away from a productive outcome. Mr. Daniels said that the Norwalk Public Schools through their equity firm are looking at how children of Color are faring. Ms. Smyth suggested having someone from the Norwalk Public Schools present to this Committee what they are doing and their outcomes.

Mr. Roberts said he understood what Mr. Burnett was saying. He said they are talking about RFPs and the Commission, but these conversations are taking place and people do not have computers. A lot is happening in the City and he feels like these conversations need to happen. Mr. Roberts said that five – six months ago, people were fired up, but people do not know what is going on now. He said everyone has to play their part; people are struggling, and they do not know what to do as far resources. Mr. Roberts said he was thankful for the first Town Hall meeting.

Mr. Roberts said that the average person does not know the process. He said he wants to be sure there is equal justice for all. Ms. Smyth suggested holding Town Hall meetings regularly.

Ms. Revolus said a lot of engagement will happen when things start happening. She said that once parents and children experience changes, they will be the first to talk and it will be the act of change. She said that Norwalk Acts pinpointed what can work.

Mr. Daniels said his department can do a lot, but it is important to understand their capacity and resources. His recommendation was to hire professionals. He agreed that it was taking longer than they anticipated, but the process is the process. He said there are a lot of moving parts. Mr. Daniels said he felt strongly that the Norwalk Public Schools and Norwalk Acts are doing great work. Anything is possible, but it is a matter of capacity.

Mr. Daniels said they just fed over 5,000 people. He said his department is him and the question is resources. He said he needs funding. Mr. Daniels said to keep in mind that we are in Covid. Mr. Sacchinelli asked Mr. Daniels what resources he needs for the new budget cycle. He asked if there was an opportunity for non-traditional outreach to people without access to computers. Mr. Daniels said he was not prepared to identify what that might look like.

Mr. Heuvelman said he is hearing a level of frustration. He said there is a perception of a lack of action. He said the problem is that people are looking at something to cling to. He said that people see Norwalk Public Schools and Norwalk Acts moving forward and he suggested letting people know what is going on with the City. Mr. Daniels said they are going to have to manage people expectations. He said he will share the RFP. He said

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his department is not designed to run programs. It is to coordinate and bring together groups. Mr. Heuvelman said the public needs to know that. The frustration is that people are not seeing the process.

Mr. Daniels said that those in the field will caution that they need to stay the course. This is a marathon, and it is not a sprint. He said he will think of a strategy to provide information to the public. Ms. Smyth noted that the local news has died and that is a real problem because so much is happening at the local level.

Ms. Revolus suggested placing advertisements in local media or on buses. She said she realized there is a cost, but it would be very effective.

Ms. Johnson said the communication piece will be crucial. She said that she heard from residents that there is a report from 1993 and that there are items in that report that could be used now. She said that part of the frustration knowing some things that need to be done such as affordable childcare and job training. In 1993, they recommended creating a Police Community Commission. She said that these are things the Common Council can do on the policy side. They do not need to wait for the Commission. This Committee is where they can start the conversation.

Mr. Daniels said he read the 1993 report and in the RFP they asked to use it as a blueprint. Norwalk has made great strides in the last 20 years with 75% of all children having an early childhood educational experience before entering Kindergarten. Mr. Daniels said that Stamford and Bridgeport are the hub for job training, and he is in conversations with those organizations. He noted that Norwalk is known as the model for early childhood education in the State.

Mr. Roberts told Mr. Daniels that he and his team do a wonderful job and noted that he and Mr. Daniels talk a lot. He said he feels they need to go “old school” as far as communication. He said they have to get back to basics and knock on doors. He said he appreciated all the work everyone does.

Mr. Sacchinelli suggested there would be an opportunity for some type of digital signage where they put content in strategic areas. They could re-coup the cost by partnering with local businesses and include their advertisements for their businesses. Ms. Smyth said she would reach out to Mr. Lo regarding locations on City owned properties.

Mr. Daniels said this is personal to him and said he was a Carver Kid. He described a conversation with two young men in Roodner Court. The 17 year old told him that when he went to school, he felt that he was just a number and no one ever asked him how he was doing. He said they need mentors. Mr. Daniels said this work is about people and setting an example and letting the community know we care. Mr. Daniels said he is committed to staying the course and will entertain how to do better in communication.

He said he understands there are people who do not use technology. Ms. Revolus said it is important to sit down and converse with the community.

5. EXECUTIVE SESSION

a. Personnel – Collective Bargaining Agreement Settlement

**** MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The public was excused and the Committee members with Mr. Burney went into Executive Session at 8:19 p.m.

The Committee members came out of Executive Session at 8:46 p.m.

During the Executive Session no votes were taken and no motions were made.

**** MR. BURNETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE COLLECTIVE
BARGAINING AGREEMENT SETTLEMENT AND TO MOVE IT TO
THE FULL COMMON COUNCIL
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY BY VOICE VOTE**

6. ADJOURN

**** MR. ROBERTS MOVED TO ADJOURN
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 18, 2020