

Human Affairs and Racial Conciliation Commission
May 8, 2025

On this date, the Human Affairs and Racial Conciliation Commission held a meeting via video conference call beginning at 5:00 p.m.

Notice of this meeting was sent to all local news media.

Present: Co-Chair Jerome Harris, Co-Chair Stephen Bowden (Arrived at 5:11), Carol Jackson, Carroll Frye, Tom Orth (virtual), Bonnie Cleaveland (virtual), Brandon Fish, and Bob Simons.

Staff: Adrian Swinton, Melissa Cruthirds, and Jasmine O’Neal recording.

1. Moment of Silence

The meeting was opened with a moment of silence led by Co-Chair Harris.

2. Approval of Minutes of 4/10/2025 Meeting

On a motion of Commissioner Simons, seconded by Commissioner Jackson, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the April 10, 2025 minutes.

3. Presentation

Charleston Housing Authority

Ms. Ferguson said that after the State paused the tax credit program to determine its criteria, many projects were left on hold. Therefore, they mostly looked for developers that didn’t rely on tax credits. A developer came to them with a project that would build 1,100 units, half of which would be affordable attainable units.

Commissioner Jackson asked about the strict procurement regulations they had to follow due to their relationship with HUD. Ms. Ferguson said the process required multiple calls with HUD to identify the financing structure and how they would handle resident relocation.

Commissioner Fish asked about the relocation process. Mr. Milligan said they gave vouchers to the current residents to live somewhere else as they worked on the units. Once the units were built or renovated the residents could move back or choose to stay where they were.

Commissioner Simons asked if the units were all currently occupied. Ms. Ferguson said they were not.

Mr. Jones said Egbert, the CEO of Integral, a national urban development company, had a long history of work with affordable housing. They created the legal, regulatory, and financial structures to do mixed-income housing in the U.S. He said most places called themselves mixed-income when all of their units were at or below 80% AMI. Integral makes sure their communities were genuinely mixed. One of their complexes had 40% of the units for people at or under 60% AMI,

25% for 61%-100% AMI, and 35% unrestricted. He said they met with residents every 90 days to get feedback on their work. They had 6 key goals for development and shared them.

Mr. Jones said the biggest lesson they learned early on was that having the real estate right doesn't mean the residents will be successful when moved back in. After their first project moved residents back into their units more than expected were evicted, they suspected it was because they hadn't prepared them to live in a mixed-income community. They gave a portion of their gross income to their nonprofit organization, the Ascent Project. The organization's goal was to provide service to its residents.

Commissioner Bowden asked if the City could do anything to help. Mr. Jones said that Charleston was a challenge because the housing crisis suggested that at least 50% of any community built should be affordable housing. However, the unrestricted units were necessary to generate the profit needed to continue this work. He said if they ran into any obstacles like with the City's zoning, marketing, or recruitment efforts, they'll let them know. They have met several times with the Mayor and have had great support from the City staff thus far.

Commissioner Simons asked if they planned on preserving some of the old structures on the lot. Ms. Ferguson said they did plan to preserve some of the original units and maintain the green space there.

Co-Chair Harris asked what shared prosperity meant when they used it. Mr. Jones said it was their minority and women's business participation within the program. They typically targeted 30% MWBE participation in the project and wanted to give them ongoing opportunities outside of just the construction phase.

Co-Chair Harris asked if they were consulting with the City's Water Plan whilst planning the construction. Mr. Jones said they were, and they met regularly with the City's planning staff to discuss it.

Co-Chair Harris asked how they were accounting for public safety in the design. Mr. Jones said the company had a lot of experience developing defensible spaces. There was a lot of focus on security cameras, lighting, and how to ensure people feel safe. They also were meeting with council members and CPD to discuss how to make it safer.

Co-Chair Bowden said they should think about recreational facilities for kids because the area lacked good ones and kids needed something to do to stay busy and out of trouble. Mr. Jones said they were and had met with Councilmember Mitchell who had been more outspoken about it to discuss that.

Commissioner Fish said it was also important that the people who worked in the community center were connected to and trusted by the community. That helped more people come and use the facilities. He said that when they discussed sustainability, they should include people in that. That area was one of the last on the peninsula that held intergenerational Charlestonians, and they should preserve that. Ms. Ferguson said they do a lot of work with resident engagement and stakeholder management. They've attended community meetings to get feedback and engagement as well.

Mr. Milligan said discussions around housing authorities and affordable housing were changing. The vouchers residents used were integral and, in the news, some people in the government were discussing things that would greatly harm that. He said if HARCC could speak to anyone in power about preserving this work that could be a great help.

4. HARCC Manager's Report

Ms. Swinton said she would be presenting the HARCC Report and reauthorization at the May 27th City Council meeting. She would also present the proposed ordinance revision at the May 15th Community Development Committee meeting.

Co-Chair Harris recognized the significance of the upcoming 10th anniversary of the Mother Emmanuel Church massacre and the 5th anniversary of the ordinance that created their predecessor, the SCEIRC.

5. Chairperson Comments

Co-Chair Bowden said they should look at the language of their ordinance revision since many things have changed since their inception. Co-Chair Harris said he wanted to go through all sections with the Commission so they could express their thoughts and any changes they wanted to be made.

The first section proposed that HARCC's name would change to the Human Affairs Commission, taking the controversial racial conciliation part out.

Commissioner Fish said he spoke to his councilmember and their perspective was that racial conciliation implied conflict and the focus of the Commission was broader than that. Also, because of developments in recent politics, it could help them get the revisions passed. Commissioner Frye said if that was necessary to continue their work, he was okay with that.

Co-Chair Harris said he felt that changing the name in this political climate would be co-signing the criminalization of organizations that handled race equity, discrimination, and desegregation. There were still issues that were not conciliated and conciliation meant coming to an agreement.

Commissioner Orth said racial conciliation meant to heal and restore relationships between different racial groups by addressing historical injustices and promoting understanding. He didn't think that was controversial and said it shouldn't be regarded as such.

Co-Chair Bowden said changing the name did not change HARCC's purpose or the work they did. He said making a positive impact was more important to him than taking a stand against some political changes.

On a motion of Commissioner Jackson, seconded by Commissioner Orth, the Commission voted on section 2-206, whether racial conciliation should be taken out of their official title. The motion

passed 4-2 with 1 abstention. Commissioners Cleaveland, Orth, Jackson, and Fish voted in favor. Co-Chair Bowden and Commissioner Frye voted against it. Commissioner Simons abstained.

The next section was section 2-207 which described HARCC's purpose. Co-Chair Bowden said the language was confusing and proposed new wording. Co-Chair Harris said he also had a problem with the language, specifically the mention of mandating legal opinions because HARCC couldn't do that. The Commission agreed that the language in this section should be changed to something clearer and more accurate.

Section 2-207 G was a subsection concerning topics and issues HARCC was not allowed to advocate for. Commissioner Cleaveland said she understood why at the time this subsection was necessary, but HARCC should be able to discuss any issue they deemed important enough and the subsection should be removed. Co-Chair Bowden said they could discuss those topics, but they couldn't recommend the City act on any. Commissioner Jackson said she also thought the subsection should be removed and it was added as a compromise because those were weaponized terms with the SCEIRC.

On a motion of Commissioner Cleaveland, seconded by Commissioner Jackson, the Commission voted on the removal of subsection 2-207 G. The motion did not pass. Commissioners Orth, Cleaveland, and Jackson voted in favor. Commissioners Fish, Simons, and Frye abstained.

On a motion of Co-Chair Bowden, seconded by Commissioner Jackson, the Commission voted on the removal of section G. The motion passed 4-3. Co-Chair Bowden and Commissioners Cleaveland, Orth, and Jackson voted in favor. Commissioners Fish, Frye, and Simons abstained.

Section 2-208 was next. Commissioner Jackson said she added a comment that they should reference the City's Comprehensive Plan in that section. Co-Chair Harries read the proposed language for the section.

On a motion of Commissioner Simons, seconded by Commissioner Jackson, the Commission unanimously voted to adopt the proposed language for section 2-208.

The next subsection they discussed was subsection D which concerned community education. It was removed because they lacked resources. Commissioner Fish asked that instead of removing it, they changed it to say that HARCC would actively promote civil discourse and the facilitation of respectful and meaningful conversation. Co-Chair Bowden said subsections C and G allowed them to do that just not with the same language.

The next section was 2-209 which concerned organizational membership. Co-Chair Harris said he met with the Mayor and the Mayor said that their goal of having 13 people on the Commission might be too high. Also, having 3 people from the City Council on the Commission was too high of a goal.

Commissioner Simons said having college students on the Commission would be difficult given the experience and expertise that was required of Commissioners. If they wanted college students to participate in HARCC they should revisit what role they would want them to play. Co-Chair

Bowden said having them participate would still be helpful as one of HARCC's topics of interest was youth and having that perspective would be nice.

The Commission agreed on having 2 students and 2 council members on HARCC. Co-Chair Harris asked how they wanted to decide on new members. Commissioner Jackson said that representation of different areas was important. If they stopped making council members appoint new members, they needed to find a way to have more community involvement. She proposed that 6 members should demonstrate expertise and community involvement in a few areas she listed.

Co-Chair Harris said that appointments from that point on should be staggered.

6. Adjournment

With there being no further business to discuss, the Commission adjourned.

Jasmine O'Neal
Clerk of Council