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MINUTES OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

5/21/26

ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 1909

Roll Call:

Commissioners Present	Ravi Srinivasan (Chair) Leslie Brown (Treasurer) Leonore Dickinson Madeline Gale Reubena Spence Joni Cohen Matilda Carvajal (Vice Chair) Sol Demefack Marcia Almeida Kevin Pierre Matthew Frankel
Liaisons	Renee Baskerville (Town Council) Yvonne Bouknight (Board of Ed)
Guests	Kim McLaren

Commissioners Absent	Kevin Allen
Liaisons Absent	Alisha Dawkins (HR)

Per Township website: There currently continue to be 4 generic open vacancies / appointments for the CRC, and the MSU appointee and Town Council alternate position is also open.

Meeting notice was provided on [Meeting Dates Township of Montclair, NJ \(montclairnjusa.org\)](https://montclairnjusa.org) as well as filed with the Township Clerk. Civil Rights Commission activities also listed in Montclair Local (Internet only news site) with link to Township site for meeting dates: [Montclair Civil Rights Commission: Come Be Part of Change - Montclair Local](#).

Meeting Opening and Minutes Adoption

The meeting was called to order at 19:09 by Chair Ravi Srinivasan
. The minutes from the April 16th meeting were approved

Administrative Follow-ups and Appointments The Chair provided updates on pending administrative items:

- **Secretarial Tasks & Statewide Inquiry:** Follow-ups are ongoing with Alicia Dawkins regarding her potentially assisting with secretarial tasks. Alisha indicated there were no responses from the statewide municipal CRC inquiry (via email).
- **High School Liaison:** Sol Demefack's term ends in June. Montclair High School (Principal Freeman and Superintendent Turner) recommended Hammad Rahman as the successor. Yvonne Bouknight will formally send a note to the Mayor with this recommendation. It seems there's a new process from the Clerk's office that the CRC was unaware of for applicants. They are to fill out an online form at <https://montclairnj.onboardgov.com/application/>. Hammad did this after the meeting and the old VIF was shared with Mayor Baskerville in any case to expedite this.
- **MSU Appointee:** The Chair will restart the recruitment process with Montclair State University in the fall once the Town Council establishes a reliable appointment process. Ravi to enquire with the Town Council on the stability of that process after the July 1 Town Council meeting.
- **Town Council Appointments:** Mayor Baskerville indicated that the Town Council will review all committees and commissions at the July 1st reorganization meeting, which will likely be the catalyst for filling the remaining open seats (including the Council Alternate Liaison). The commission also discussed reaching out to Muslim community groups to increase diversity

Upcoming Sponsored Event: "Rebuilding the Covenant" The CRC is co-sponsoring an event titled "Rebuilding the Covenant: New Jersey's Black and Jewish Relations in Today's America" with the NAACP and the Montclair Jewish Community Relations Council (MJCRC). The event is scheduled for Wednesday, May 27th, at 7:00 PM at the Cooperative School Annex. Commissioners were encouraged to attend and help publicize the event through their personal networks.

Immigrant Rights Panel Debrief The commission debriefed the April 20th Immigrant Rights panel. Kevin Pierre was commended for taking on the bulk of the event's logistics and organization.

- **Lessons Learned:** Commissioners noted opportunities for improvement, such as allowing Ravi Ragbir to share his personal experience in an immigration detention center, securing earlier and broader advertising (which was delayed

when the ACLU pulled out last minute), and distributing the workload through a subcommittee. They also discussed compensating speakers for travel and tolls.

- **Future Planning:** To improve efficiency, the CRC agreed to form a subcommittee to strategically plan an editorial calendar for future events (potentially focusing on educational equity or voting rights in the fall) and to discuss these topics at the June meeting.

Latino Community and Police Relations Marcia Almeida proposed creating a "Cafe" or meet-and-greet event to build trust between the undocumented/Latino community and the four Spanish-speaking police officers in Montclair. She highlighted recent robberies on Church Street where victims were afraid to report crimes due to fear of the police. The commission supported the idea and suggested participating in the existing police backpack giveaway event in August/September to set up a table. Chair Srinivasan will coordinate with Lt. Tyrone Williams to explore this initiative.

Code Enforcement and Parking Fines (Tichenor Place) Leonore Dickinson raised concerns about residents on Tichenor Place facing severe code enforcement fines (and threats of incarceration) for parking in their own substandard driveways. Mayor Baskerville clarified that the Town Council unanimously passed the first reading of an ordinance to allow overnight street parking with a permit on that block. The CRC agreed to formally recommend that the Township Manager and Finance Committee consider retroactive leniency or refunds for the residents who have already paid significant fines.

Citizens Bank Divestment Concerns Guest Kim McLaren and Commissioner Leslie Brown shared information indicating that Citizens Bank (where Montclair holds \$91 million in municipal funds) is a primary funder of private ICE detention centers like CoreCivic and GEO Group. Protests are planned in Montclair and surrounding towns for June 6th. The commission recognized the complexity of recommending divestment, noting that many large financial and tech institutions engage in problematic funding, but agreed to review the information if Kim sends it to the CRC email.

CRC Charter Review and Operations

The commission discussed proposed modernizations to the CRC Charter via the open Google Doc. Proposed updates include formalizing the complaint intake process, explicitly adding a community engagement/public education mandate, including voluntary mediation processes, and adding an alternate student liaison position. Chair Srinivasan will ensure all commissioners have "editor" access to add track changes before the June meeting. To follow-up from last meeting: The group also discussed how

to maintain confidentiality for sensitive complaints under the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act, suggesting the intake form be modified to allow complainants to opt for a pseudonym during public deliberations and for confidentiality to be addressed in the intake form

Action Items and Responsible Parties

Item	Responsible Party
High School Liaison Appointment	Yvonne Bouknight: Formally submit the school's recommendation of Hammad Raman to Mayor Baskerville. Follow-up with Hammad and the Mayor on review of the new online form that the Clerk now apparently requires.
Latino Police Meet-and-Greet	Ravi Srinivasan: Contact Lt. Tyrone Williams to discuss a "Cafe" event with Spanish-speaking officers and setting up a table at the backpack giveaway.
Retroactive Parking Fines	Ravi Srinivasan: Send a formal recommendation to the Township Manager regarding retroactive leniency/refunds for Tichenor Place parking fines.

Item	Responsible Party
Future Event Planning	All Commissioners: Brainstorm potential fall event topics (e.g., educational equity, voting rights) to discuss and prioritize at the June meeting.
CRC Charter Edits	All Commissioners: Review and add track-change edits to the CRC Charter Modernization Google Doc before the June meeting.
Citizens Bank Information	Kim McLaren: Emailed the detailed information regarding Citizens Bank's funding of ICE detention centers to the CRC email address. Email has been forwarded to all CRC commissioners
MSU Appointee	Ravi to follow up with Town Council post July 1 meeting on stability of Town Council's appointment processes before reaching out to MSU to enquire on new candidate