

Mayor's Commission on Reentry Minutes
November 18, 2019

In attendance: Keith Mitchell, Andrea Reese, Kristin Barker, Cathy Robinson, Jenette James, Dr. Michael Forte, John House, and Kawain Reese

The meeting was held in the Elections and Registration office, Citizens Services Center, 2nd Floor at 1:30 pm.

Jeanette James opened the meeting in prayer. At this time, Keith Mitchell asked the commission if anyone had corrections for the minutes. No corrections were received. Keith also asked if anyone had correspondence that needed to be discussed. Cathy received information from a gentleman who works with veterans and felt this person would make a valuable addition to the commission. She shared his bio with the group and stated that he is also well connected in our community. John House agreed with Cathy.

Kristin shared that our sponsored On the Table discussion had a good turnout of 12 people. Much of the discussion was focused on building a resource base by working with the private entities to support needed housing because the public resources have been maxed out. We discussed how this might work and training that would be needed. There was also discussion of support needed to give some financial stability to returning citizens and how this may be addressed. We walked away talking about mapping out areas in our community where housing could be made available for returning citizens and even specifying where options for specific categories of housing could be considered.

Andrea mentioned that some of these concepts will be addressed by the Housing Subcommittee to include RPH as well as a barriers to working with RPH and working with private property owners. They may also look at what training may be needed in this area.

The discussion paused here to allow for introductions. A guest attendee was Kawain Reese who works with the Department of Community Supervision. His current role is to make sure that communication remains open with then Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) so that individuals with high risk needs continue to be identified and helped. He shared that we have something unique here with the commission. We should know who is coming back to Muscogee County post incarceration and what their needs are. There is a list that exists. Kawain can help with this. There will be a focus on housing, employment, mental health, and physical health.

Keith shifted the discussion to explain that Rev. Juan Carlos Diaz would like to stay connected but has limited availability to join the commission. He has submitted an alternate name of Minister Torres who may be able to represent the Hispanic community on the commission. He may prefer to serve in an advisory capacity. Keith will reach out to him and let us know.

At this time, Keith introduced the concept of breaking our work down into subcommittee work. He felt this would be the be way to make progress structurally. He recommended we consider including employment as an additional subcommittee. Kristin volunteered to take the lead on forming this subcommittee. Jeanette suggested that Lafini Mosby would be a great addition to this subcommittee.

It was also recommended that we create a Faith Community subcommittee as they connect to Stations of Hope. Michael Forte agreed to take the lead on this subcommittee. Keith also suggested that much of the subcommittee work could be achieved via conference calling to cut down on meeting time. Issues connected to mental health, physical health, and substance abuse would be spearheaded by the Faith Community subcommittee. Needs will be identified through these subcommittees.

Keith also asked how we can and should clarify issues related to monetary spending or contributions for commission related events. We need to address this from a structural perspective, then a written policy can be created that and communicated. The commission will absorb no liability related to events. Jeanette also shared some information about First Step Staffing in Atlanta, GA. This is a program the Employment Subcommittee can look into.

Now, Keith asked the group to consider activities the commission may want to support in 2020 and to think about which activities can move the needle most effectively. We should give these priority. Andrea shared that Denise Eckley at Goodwill would like to use some funding to host a job fair focused with a reentry focus the first part of 2020. Andrea will get more information on this from Denise. Kristin told the group about a meeting she had with Ann Colloton at the Georgia Justice Project and Waleisah Wilson. Recommendations based on this meeting include an event to train non-profits who work with ex-offenders, NewLife-Second Chance Outreach is already planning a job fair which can include education for those desiring to have their records restricted, and an Expungement Summit next fall to actually expunge the records of many in our community in mass.

The commission could help the most by leveraging our connections to get the DA, county or state superior court judges, and a county clerk to meet with the Georgia Justice Project and agreeing to the process needed to make this happen. The education process needed to clarify how this works will be extremely important for all to understand. Ultimately, individuals would complete a registration process online following NewLife's event and would learn the status of this request during the Expungement Summit. The commission could endorse events related to this.

Kawain suggested that the commission sponsor one event annually that gives back to the organizations who are supporting the shared mission. The commission could also spotlight a service organization during the promotion of this event. One caveat is the restriction created by the commission's inability to channel funding. We need to identify a way to achieve this spotlight concept effectively at no cost. We may be able to achieve this with a presentation during a city council meeting. We may be able to find someone to sponsor the award.

We will discuss further and define the priority of activities, what the commission should support, and what the commission will sponsor in 2020 during our December meeting. For sponsored events, the commission will be 100% committed to doing the work to see these happen. We may look at an education event, a connection event, and a recognition event.

We need a way to measure the quality of events we are already sponsoring as well as some criteria for evaluating and supporting only quality events.

Justice Day at the Capital will be February 27, 2020. The bus will depart Columbus at 6:30am and will return at 5pm.

The meeting was dismissed at 2:40 pm. Our next meeting will be held December 16, 2020.