



## Minutes - Final

### Human Resources, Administration and Appointments Committee

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Wednesday, February 19, 2020

5:45 PM

Council Chambers

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#### Roll Call: Chairperson Gerlach, Mota, Zucal

[15-3392](#)

Bill 8 HR, Admin and Appts - this evening  
Establishing a Homeless Commission

**Sponsors:** Gerlach, Guridy, Mota, Mr. Siegel and Administration

**Attachments:** [Bill 8 Homeless Commission](#)

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach stated that seeing in the Ordinance the way it was written. They are not legally bound to accept the recommendations from the Commission. It is an advisory commission. She asked Ms. Mota if she had any questions or comments.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated, no. At this time, she doesn't have any comments.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach asked if the administration had any questions or comments.

Mayor Ray O'Connell stated no. The administration supports her initiative.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach asked if any members of the public had any questions or comments about forming a commission on Homelessness.

Ms. Ashley Strange, 815 S. Front Street, asked if they will make sure there is someone on the Commission that had experienced homelessness.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach stated yes, they have a gentleman that is very interested in serving. He is currently experiencing homelessness.

Mr. Tom Harrington, Valley Youth House 6460 Red Sunset - Coopersburg, stated that he is in support of this commission. Valley Youth House has been in existence in the Lehigh Valley for 47 years. They started with an emergency shelter for run-away and youth in Bethlehem. They have a street outreach program. They identified over 200 homeless youth. They provide housing for young adults experiencing homelessness, they have a maternity group home near Deiruff High School. They have apartments for 17 young ladies who are parenting or pregnant who are also experiencing

homelessness. They have a summer enrichment program for young people in foster care. All these programs need support and coordination.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach thanked Mr. Harrington for the work that Valley Youth House does.

Ms. Kris Cassidy, Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley and the Steering Committee for the Lehigh Valley Homeless Advisory Board, expressed her support for this effort. Thanked Council for putting it together. They look forward to working with them.

Mr. Daniel Jackson, Islamic Association of Reading PA - Masjid Al-Sabireen, stated that not only of color, but of spiritual background. We need to open the door for those who may not be equipped to be able to be able to be in a christian-based or other based recovery houses or halfway houses. A lot of times we put some dots on some eyes and not other eyes. In Reading, homelessness doesn't have color or religion. Put in a training system so that they can train and get a trade. If a person doesn't feel like they are a part of or they don't participate. The old saying is that if a man doesn't work, he shouldn't eat. It should not be direct and/or fine line like that.

Ms. Milagros Canales, Old Fairground President, stated that she appreciates the time and dedication Council has put on the Homeless issue. She looks forward to serving in some capacity. She wants Allentown to become a greater city.

Mr. Hamp Smith stated that he comes because he knows the homeless is a problem. There are many organization that help. Sometimes we have to find the leader to bring them all together. Let's not try to start something that is already started. It is great, but how can the Mayor picks somebody unless he sees all these organizations. Maybe we can find a way to invite them to a meeting or get them together to nominate someone to help out. The homeless is sort of like crime. How can you stop it. You almost can't. We try to help them.

Mr. Thomas Martino, Laundry Minister - 728 S. Cumberland Street, stated that they do laundry every Tuesday, every week. It was founded by Rick and Jacqui Howells. They have a medical van from St. Luke's that show up twice a month. They help about 120 people, on average about 60 people per week. There are people that are homeless, but you don't see them because they are hidden. They are couch surfing with various families and friends. They are supportive of this group and hope the efforts go well.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach asked if there were any other questions or comments from the public. She thanked all that came and supported. Thank you to all that asked questions because like you she shares that same worry. She does not want this to be another commission that everyone sits around the table and nothing gets done and a year from now they still have the same issues, if not worse. She asked them to hold the commission and her accountable to make sure that this commission is not like that. If they see it turning into that, then say something and they will make those changes accordingly.

Ms. Cynthia Mota asked for patience. Things don't happen overnight. She stated that she knows what homelessness is. She experienced it as a young girl. Thanks to Valley Youth House, they help her get on her feet. She could attest to the great job that Valley Youth House has done. She stated that let's give everybody some grace. It cannot be fixed over night. It takes time, but they are willing to work.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach thanked everyone for coming and asked them to be reassured that for her, this is more than a legislation. It is a heart thing for various reasons that she won't get into.

**A motion was made by Ed Zucal, seconded by Cynthia Mota, that this Bill be forwarded to full Council. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Yes:** 3 - Ce-Ce Gerlach, Cynthia Mota and Ed Zucal

Enactment No: 15596

**Adjourned: 5:58 PM**