



CITY COUNCIL

Nominations & Appointments Committee

Tuesday, September 7, 2021
Meeting Report

Attendance: Marcia Goodman-Hinnershitz, Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz (electronically) S. Marmarou

Others Attending: S. Smith, B. Rivera, I. Litvinov (electronically)

The meeting was called to order at 4:05pm by Mr. Marmarou.

I. Interviews

- **Nehemiah Diaz Lopez – Appointment to the Youth Commission**

Mr. Marmarou questioned why Mr. Lopez is interested in serving on this Commission. Mr. Lopez stated that he moved into Reading a couple of years ago and disliked the thought of moving out of the area he was in. He stated that he has grown to really love the City though he sees many issues with others his age, he would like to be a part of bettering the disposition of others his age. He stated that kids his age from other districts talk so negatively about City kids and the City of Reading in general and now that he is a resident of the City, he feels he can assist in changing that perception. He stated that he seen the Instagram post regarding the Youth Commission and recruitment so he felt compelled to pursue it.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked Mr. Lopez for wanting to combat some of the stigma associated with the City. She also wanted to commend him on how he has dealt with the challenge of moving from the suburbs to a densely populated area such as our City. She questioned if there was one thing he could change about the City, what it would be. Mr. Lopez stated that as he is still quite young, he looks to individuals like the Councilmembers to have the authority to implement change. He stated that if he could change something, it would be relative to the school system. He stated that there are so many kids in the Reading school system and just not enough staff to meet the needs. He stated that he sees so many kids get detention or suspensions and nobody really addressing the root of why these kids act out in the first place. He stated that in his opinion, not addressing the underlying issues causes more problems which cause more problems and on and on. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz applauded Mr. Lopez on a very precise overview of what needs to be looked at more carefully.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that in becoming a member of the Youth Commission he will, in essence, have power to change issues within our community by connecting those issues with Councilmembers who are elected to be the voice of the people. She stated that it is very important that our youth communicate their needs to adults who will listen and implement change.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz commended Mr. Lopez on his frankness and enthusiasm and the level of maturity that he brings to the table. She stated that she was fascinated by his responses to questions on his application. She questioned what he meant by “this generation has been most plagued by mental illness”. Mr. Lopez stated that he has read statistics on increased suicides among teenaged individuals. He questioned how we can have so many advancements in the mental health sector yet our numbers for suicides are increasing. He also mentioned the increase in shootings in our nation’s schools. He stated that if we have more resources available now than ever before, why are these numbers on an incline; perhaps our youth can shed some light on this. He stated he would like to start to help in whatever way he can, even if it is one classroom at a time because he genuinely feels that mental illness is a great contributor to many of our issues related to crime, drugs, suicides, etc. etc.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that she wants to make it clear to Mr. Lopez that he indeed has the power to change things in his environment. She questioned what area of school needs the greatest change. Mr. Lopez stated that the need for qualified guidance counselors is great and unfortunately he doesn’t feel the schools have enough counselors to begin with. He stated that everyone in the schools need to be honest, open and transparent with one another, noting that the Reading School district is still at the bottom of performance lists. He credits Dr. Mumin for being such an exemplary superintendent but even with his knowledge and skillset, the Reading School district has not improved much academically.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz gave Mr. Lopez a “homework” assignment and asked him to think about what he can do tomorrow when he goes into his school that would bring about change. She stated that she is not intending to put him on the spot but that he is part of the greater portion of any school district in that he is a student and students outnumber the adults. She stated that with being the majority, he indeed possesses the power needed to initiate change. Mr. Lopez stated that he would absolutely give that some thought.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if he, as a student, is familiar with student assistance program within the school. Mr. Lopez stated that he is not familiar and has not heard of any such program. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she is glad she asked him as she will follow up on this to make certain this program is emphasized to all students so that they can benefit from it.

Mr. Marmarou questioned how students in the suburbs differ from students in the City. Mr. Lopez stated that they are not much different from one another. The kids in the suburbs make

unfounded assumptions of how the kids in the City really are and yet they are not much different than them in his opinion.

Mr. Marmarou stated that he would be a great asset to this Commission. Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz concurred stating that his energy is infectious. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz also concurred adding that she learned much from the short conversation here in this interview and looks forward to his work on the Youth Commission.

Mr. Marmarou stated that Mr. Lopez will be contacted with the process of being nominated to the Youth Commission. Mr. Lopez thanked all for the opportunity to interview with them.

The Nominations and Appointments Committee recommends the appointment of Nehemiah Diaz Lopez to the Youth Commission.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:40pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Bea Rivera, Legislative Aide