



City of Milwaukee

200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
53202

Meeting Minutes AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE UNEMPLOYMENT TASK FORCE

**ALD. ASHANTI HAMILTON, CO-CHAIR AND ALD. TONY
ZIELINSKI, CO-CHAIR**

**Deborah Blanks, Sedgwick Daniels, Ald. Joe Davis, Joe
Fahey, Pam Fendt, Curt Harris, Wendell Harris, Ralph
Hollmon, Carl Jaskolski, Ossie Kendrix, Marc Levine, Arturo
Martinez, Gerard Randall, Michael Rosen, Tim Sheehy, Julia
Taylor, McArthur Weddle, Lenard Wells and Ken Wheeler**

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Tuesday, September 14, 2010

12:00 PM

Room 303, City Hall

Meeting convened: 12:08 P.M.

1. Introduction of Members.

Members introduced themselves and the organizations they represent.

Eric Paulson present for Julia Taylor.

Members excused:

Joe Fahey, Sedgwick Daniels and Gerard Randall

2. Appearance by Jim Owczarski, Deputy City Clerk, relating to open meetings and open records law.

Mr. Owczarski spoke briefly on open meetings and open records laws as they relate to this body.

3. Defining the problem - roadblocks and pitfalls that affect African American male unemployment.

Wendell Harris noted he started the Coalition of African American Men in the 1990s to increase employment among young men. The problems are the same now as they were faced in 1989 and 1990. These problems are that job applications weren't even accepted for black males at companies and drug use, particularly marijuana, also reduces the number of persons employed due to drug tests. Drug tests might also be required for some employees and not others. He used to operate six vans to take employees out to suburban communities to work. People who have not worked for years need support to work eight hours a day as it's a mindset of discipline.

Curt Harris said that the city has a history of black male discrimination, including the fact that A.O. Smith had to be sued by the federal government in order to force them

to hire black males.

Deborah Blanks said that the community has not been as proactive, such as with the loss of the manufacturing base moving people into other viable, family-supporting jobs. The construction of the interstate, resulting in the loss of Bronzeville, was also a blow to the black community. Bronzeville offered local jobs which didn't rely on transportation. She sees the lack of jobs in the central city, lack of a transportation system to get individuals to jobs and an educational system poorly preparing individuals for jobs as causes of black unemployment. She also feels that society sends a message that black men don't want to work and just want to do the minimal amount of work to get by. We need to turn that community rhetoric around to speak more positively.

Marc Levine said that the economy in Milwaukee is no-growth or slow-growth. Nationally black unemployment is a problem; Milwaukee, however, has been persistently worse than other areas over the past 20 years, while 30-40 years ago, compared to nationally, Milwaukee was better. Since the late 1980s Milwaukee has had no net employment growth. All of the net job growth has occurred in the suburbs and the city/suburbs are almost the most segregated area nationwide. He sees the core issue as the absence of jobs in the city. There is also a huge increase in black males who are not working and have not worked for years - this may be due to incarceration and other issues. Milwaukee has a much higher rate of this drop-out of the labor force than other cities. Approximately 25% of black males in the prime employment ages are chronically unemployed, compared to 8% in 1970. In 1970, the rate for black and white males out of the labor force was exactly the same, while, today, it's 34% for black males, ages 20-24, while the rate for white males has decreased since 1970. Those areas with the highest rate of African American suburbanization also have the highest rate of black employment.

Lenard Wells noted that assumptions relating to black males, by employers, are that black males are either uneducated or have a criminal background and hence, the applications don't get past the gatekeeper. He also believes that the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) are unfairly maligned as producing uneducated students. He believes that MPS produces no worse students than other schools.

Ken Wheeler noted that his church began a jobs program 5 years ago, resulting in employment for 50 people. Mr. Wheeler noted that this is not a huge number. He believes that a number of black males have dropped out of the job force in frustration and then revert to illegal activities to support their families.

Michael Rosen said unemployment is both cyclical and structural; structural in terms of long-term unemployment. There is a shortage of jobs in the city, as well as a continuing inability to access those jobs due to transportation issues and a lack of affordable housing. There are also shortage of skilled workers in specific industries. He thinks we overly rely on training in this community; we focus on the supply side, rather than on the demand side. He also sees the lack of networks and connections as to how someone gets a job. Once an individual is trained, it's still hard to get them in the door to become employed.

Ald. Davis, as his personal assessment, thinks that the MPS curriculum does not allow its kids to be successful as the curriculum is not as difficult or offer the same opportunities, such as shop class, as suburban schools. If there is a lack of sustainable businesses to create jobs and hire employees, then that is also an issue. Short term, if a father works, then a child is inspired; if a father does not work, then that sets the pattern for a child.

Ralph Hollmon wants to caution the body not to fall into the trap of getting stuck on defining the problem and not moving on to the solution. This body also needs to be clear as to which population it is discussing - the chronically long-term unemployed who have issues and lack skills vs. the short-term unemployed due to the poor economy. He would like to review city-funded construction projects to see how many black males are employed at these sites.

Eric Paulson noted that the large employers from the past are gone and that the average number of employees at a company is decreasing. He thinks that the entrepreneurs should be showcased as that will be where job growth is in the future.

Pam Fendt said that in the future the Task Force should note the statistical difference between discouraged workers, joblessness, unemployment and clearly define each term.

Jeff Lemon, a member of the audience, noted that he is unemployed and can't pay his bills, which also affects the city. He believes that if citizens are working then the whole city benefits; if a segment is not healthy, then that affects the entire city. He thinks the city needs to implement policies to hire residents, rather than hiring from outside the city.

Michael Rosen excused from the meeting at 12:50 P.M.

4. Previous solutions/studies that have addressed African American male unemployment.

Ms. Fendt said that the power of the public sector can't be underestimated to fix this problem. An update on MORE ordinance enforcement would be helpful. She noted that they have 300 apprentices, 74% of whom are minorities, that have passed the test to work, but can't get employed.

Wendell Harris excused from the rest of the meeting at 1:10 P.M.

Mr. Curt Harris moved to to not use the terms "people of color", "disadvantaged" or "minority" during discussion or in a written report so that the focus can be on black males, which is the focus of this body. Kendall Harris seconded. There were no objections.

Mr. Hollmon said that this body must look at transitional jobs due to the poor economy in the short-term as the private economy cannot provide the jobs. A transitional job helps people develop the skills and a work ethic so when the economy recovers, these individuals are better prepared to compete for jobs.

Lenard Wells would like to have technical colleges, such as MATC, accelerate its programs. Does it take 2 years to produce good employees for specific jobs? Some agencies in the community can produce employees faster than MATC.

Curtis Harris excused from the rest of the meeting at 1:20 P.M.

Marc Levine said that the majority of jobs likely to be created require short-term training, but training will not solve this problem. Although it's believed there's a shortage of welders, the wages of those jobs do not reflect a shortage. The private sector is not producing a sufficient number of jobs. There have been a lot of initiatives in the past 20 years, but there has been little change in the numbers. He believes the solution is massive public funds - for transitional jobs, transportation and

rail support. There must be a link between jobs and regional issues.

Arturo Martinez wanted to look at the educational system to see if there are different ways to prepare people for employment.

Ald. Zielinski suggested having members e-mail each other their potential solutions, but not respond to other members' suggestions. The suggestions should include private sector, educational, faith-based, municipal, state and federal suggestions. Suggestions may be forwarded to Ms. Elmer and she will collate these suggestions so as to avoid members getting a deluge of e-mails.

5. Goals of the Task Force.

The recommendations will become part of the goals of this task force.

Carl Jaskolski said that segregation and race is a continuing problem for this city. He thinks that future job growth is in the service and health industries, not manufacturing. Ralph Hollmon said that disagreement is fine among members as long as the dialogue continues. He commends both co-chairs to taking the initiative on this issue.

Ald. Davis suggests that we think globally as it's now a global competition for jobs, rather than a local competition.

6. Timelines of the Task Force.

The Task Force is constrained by its 6-month time frame, as well as a desire to get any monetary requests in for the upcoming 2011 budget.

7. Set next meeting date and agenda.

September 28th at noon with meetings lasting 1.5 hours.

*Meeting adjourned: 1:38 P.M.
Linda M. Elmer
Staff Assistant*