

CITY OF ATLANTA COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION

PUBLIC HEARING

February 16, 1967

Atlanta, Georgia

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The first public hearing of the Community Relations Commission of the City of Atlanta was held February 16, 1967, at 7:30 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chambers of the City Hall.

Mr. Irving Kaler, Chairman of the Commission, presided. Other Commission members present were: Mr. T. M. Alexander, Mrs. Sara Baker, Miss Helen Bullard, Mr. Robert Dobbs, Mr. A. L. Feldman, the Rev. J. L. Griggs, Mr. Joseph Haas, Mr. Al Kuettner, Mrs. F. W. Patterson, Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild, Mr. M. O. Ryan, Mrs. Mary Stephens, the Rev. Samuel Williams.

Mr. Kaler recognized Aldermen George Cotsakis, J. M. Flanigen, Charles Leftwich, G. Everett Millican, Hugh Pierce, Jack Summers, Q. V. Williamson, and Senator Leroy Johnson and Representative John Hood. Mr. Kaler thanked them for their interest and support.

Mr. Bennie T. Smith, of the Grass Roots Council, and Senator Dan McIntyre sent letters expressing their regret at being unable to attend the hearing and assuring the Commission of their interest and support.

Mr. Kaler stated this hearing was the first of a series of hearings planned to afford the citizens of Atlanta a place to seek help with their problems and to voice their complaints or grievances.

The chairman then introduced Mrs. Eliza Paschall, who has been appointed by the Commission to serve as its Executive Director. Mrs. Paschall read the list of persons who had expressed a desire to be heard and asked that all speakers leave their names and telephone numbers for future conferences. Mrs. Paschall stated that her office would begin the following day on checking into all complaints and that all matters brought before the Commission would be thoroughly investigated.

The meeting was then turned over to the Reverend Samuel Williams, who conducted the hearing. Mr. Williams stated that a series of neighborhood hearings would be held and that meetings would be held with all City department heads to discuss problems or complaints presented at these hearings.

Mr. Williams expressed his gratification at the interest shown by the large number of persons, approximately 250, attending the hearing. All persons wishing to address the Commission were asked to limit their remarks to three minutes in order that all might be heard.

MRS. HENRY TOOMBS, 2871 Normandy Drive, N. W.

Mrs. Toombs expressed the feeling that Fulton County and the City of Atlanta are neglecting an opportunity to meet the needs of many of our people by failing to participate in the Food Stamp program of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Mrs. Toombs explained the operation of the program, in which 68 Georgia counties are participating, and reiterated her belief that the City and County should implement all programs designed to meet the needs of segments of our community.

MR. WILLIAM S. JACKSON, Dean of School of Social Work, Atlanta University

Dean Jackson expressed his pleasure in the formation of the Commission and his hope that the Commission could be helpful in seeing that all services of the community are made available to all people. Dean Jackson feels that despite progress in the availability of public services resulting from civil rights legislation, the services of many private agencies are still not available to all citizens. As a case in point, he read a letter from a woman who has experienced difficulty in finding nursing care for her aged mother. She stated Hillhaven had taken her application, promising to notify her when a vacancy occurred, but she has heard nothing further. Upon making application to Highview, she was told that Highview had never admitted a Negro applicant, but might have to accept Negroes at a later date to comply with Federal laws.

MR. ARTHUR BARHAM, West End, (Bush Mountain) Student at Clark College

Mr. Barham stated he was concerned over an incident in which several Negro youths were threatened by white youths with a pistol. Mr. Barham said a case was made against the white youths, but the case has been pending in court since January 25. Although Mr. Barham conceded there were legal reasons for the two postponements of the case, nevertheless he felt it imposed a hardship on students to have to get out of school so many times. Mr. Barham also contended that the police and other persons in the city seemed more anxious to obtain information regarding gangs in the neighborhood than to conclude this specific case. Asked if he would cooperate with the Commission in an investigation of potential gang warfare, Mr. Barham said he would cooperate, but repeated his assertions that he actually knows very little of any gang activity.

THE REVEREND AMOS HOLMES, 1035 Simpson Street, N. W., Vice President of the Atlanta Chapter of NAACP, Chairman, Housing Committee of NAACP

Mr. Holmes stated the City should concern itself with an up to date citywide zoning plan. The City is still using the 1956 zoning format, which is now inadequate for the growth of the City. Mr. Holmes feels zoning policies should be geared to meet the needs of the City and its citizens and should be free from citizen pressure or commercial domination. If the city is to eliminate ghettos and provide housing for all its citizens, planning must be done on a citywide rather than a sectional basis.

MR. ROBERT W. HAVER, 430 Lynhurst Drive, S. W., Southwest Atlanta for Progress Association, Cascade Heights Area

Mr. Haver described the work of his organization, which is concerned with preserving their community on a balanced integrated basis. The special concern of this group is that white people do not move out as Negroes move in, thus creating a racial imbalance in the schools and community as a whole. Mr. Haver stated that while the use of percentages in governing human relations is undesirable, the community nevertheless feels it is important for the present to try to maintain a 50-50 balance of white and Negro families to give their children an opportunity to grow up in a truly integrated situation. A series of community forums will be held at Holy Family Hospital, beginning March 9, to discuss ways of stabilizing the community. Mr. Haver asked for the moral support and encouragement of the Commission in their efforts. Mr. Williams expressed the pleasure of the Commission in learning of the work of this group and pledged the full assistance and support of the Commission.

MR. CHARLES CLARK, Southwest Atlanta

Mr. Clark stated a Negro real estate dealer had tried to procure housing for him in a white neighborhood and alleged many prospective sellers had stated they were afraid of the reaction of their neighbors if they sold to a Negro family.

Mr. Kuettner said he would be interested in receiving reports on any real estate agent who will not handle sales because of the race of the client. Mr. Clark was asked to appear before the Commission at a later date to give his story in full detail.

MR. JAMES MARSHALL, JR., 392 Rock Street, S. W. Block 13 near Incinerator (Lightning)

Mr. Marshall stated there are no recreation areas in this section; the houses are unfit for human habitation; there is only one paved street in the area; garbage and litter from demolished houses is not picked up.

Mr. Dobbs asked if there was any plan for including this area in an Urban Renewal project. Mr. Marshall said he knows nothing of such plans. He also stated that the Sanitary Department is very slow in responding to calls to pick up trash.

Rabbi Rothschild stated this area is high on the priority list of communities whose problems will receive special attention.

MRS. ALVENIA DAVIS, 449 Markham Street, S. W., speaking for residents of Markham area

Mrs. Davis stated that several houses unfit for habitation have not been demolished, although some have been unoccupied for more than one year. She feels these houses are dangerous and are a breeding place for crime and delinquency.

MRS. ALVENIA DAVIS (Continued)

Mrs. Davis also alleged that the housing code is not impartially enforced, contending that persons who own many houses receive more lenient treatment than the owner of only one or two houses. Asked who owned the substandard houses still being occupied, Mrs. Davis stated Joe Schaffer was the owner.

MRS. HAMBRICK, Walker Street School Council

Mrs. Hambrick stated the residents of this area protest the continued use of the Walker Street School building, which is old and in substandard condition. The residents want the school building replaced and feel the transfer of children to this school should be discontinued. Mr. Kuettnner asked if the problem had been discussed with the Board of Education. Mrs. Hambrick said members of the community had met with Dr. Letson and had been told that work has been done on the building recently and that plans for replacing this school were not included in the recent school bond issue.

MR. GLENN GLEATON, 1035 Garibaldi Street, S. W.

Mr. Gleaton asked what the responsibility of the City is in regard to the individual homeowner whose property is being damaged by leaking sewers or overflowing drains. Mr. Dobbs stated that new homes were inspected by the City and the Building Inspector should not clear houses which had inadequate sewer or drainage systems. Mr. Gleaton replied that he had complained to the City of the damage to the foundation of his house and had been told the house was too close to the ground. No further help on the matter was offered by the City.

MRS. SALLIE BILLINGSLEY, Pittsburgh Civic League

Mrs. Billingsley complained of poor police protection in this area. Many robberies have occurred, but the police have not appeared very interested in the matter. There are very few street lights. Teenagers are hanging out in vacant houses. Mr. Williams stated that Alderman Charles Leftwich has discussed the problems of this community with the Police Department and every effort will be made to provide better patrol service, especially at night.

MR. HERNANDEZ, Southeast Atlanta, close to Blair Village (Gilbert Heights Area)

Mr. Hernandez asked what can be done about unscrupulous real estate dealers who attempt to buy houses through scare tactics, such as telling homeowners that the section will be turned over to Negroes or that it is going to be torn down for an Urban Renewal project. Mr. Hernandez stated there is no racial trouble in the area, but real estate dealers are constantly starting rumors that the property will be condemned by the City to build apartments. In answer to an inquiry as to the real estate companies involved, Mr. Hernandez stated that Bickers, State Realty, and Collins Realtors were among those engaging in this practice.

MR. HERNANDEZ (Continued)

Asked if he had called any of the Urban Renewal agencies, Mr. Hernandez replied that he had not talked to anyone in those agencies, but he could not wait for this. He feels the City should investigate immediately, as many of the people in the community may be panicked into selling their homes.

Mr. Hernandez was asked to meet with the Commission at a later date to provide specific names and additional facts.

MR. OTIS COCHRAN, 230 Walnut Street, N. W., Vice-Chairman, Advisory Board, Nash-Washington EOA, Member of the Board of Directors of the Atlanta Council on Human Relations. (Vine City)

Mr. Cochran stated the City should investigate cases of discrimination in employment practiced by many of the firms and contractors with whom the City is doing business. He stated that a group of consultants engaged by the City to make a study of equal employment opportunities actually practices complete discrimination against Negroes in their own hiring policies.

Mr. Cochran also addressed the Commission on the problem of recreational facilities in the Vine City area. Mr. Cochran stated that a full time, long-range program should be established rather than relying on emergency measures to solve crises.

MR. JOE LEWIS HEADSPETH, 575 Magnolia Street, N. W. (Vine City)

Mr. Headspeth, with two other teenage residents of this area, appeared with Mr. Cochran to protest the closing of their recreation center at 141 Walnut Street. Mr. Dobbs stated that because of a reduction in EOA funds, the center had to be closed because funds for recreation technicians were cut off. Mr. Headspeth turned over to the Commission a petition from residents of the area requesting that the center be reopened.

Alderman Millican stated that there has been a 30% cut in Federal funds available for EOA, but the City is working to provide the same service to this area as was available last year.

Mr. Headspeth stated that he and his friends felt very strongly about this matter and that if it were necessary demonstrate in the streets to spotlight their problem, they would do so.

MRS. LOUISE WHATLEY, Pryor Road (Carver Homes)

Mrs. Whatley protested the lack of recreational facilities in this housing project in which approximately 4,000 children have no place to play. Open space which could be used for football and baseball fields is available, but the Housing Authority will not permit them to use it.

MRS. LOUISE WHATLEY (Continued)

Mrs. Whatley also protested the management's practice of doubling and tripling charges for repairs according to the number of repairs requested in one year. She stated repairs were often made without the occupant's knowledge or request. Tenants have been charged as much as \$36 for repairing a screen door and have been charged \$5 because their children played on the grass. Mrs. Whatley said a receipt was given for the charge, which is paid at the same time as the rent, but the receipt does not specify what the charge covered and the tenants do not know where the money goes. She said complaints had been made to Mr. Howard Ball at the Housing Authority, but his attitude was that the complainants represented only a minority of the tenants.

In reply to a question about a tenant's organization, Mrs. Whatley said they did have a Tenant's Association, but it is more or less run by the management. Mrs. Whatley also complained that the tenants are treated with discourtesy or disdain by the management.

MRS. CHARITY MURRAY, 76 Hilliard Street, Apt. 612, Grady Homes Apartments

Mrs. Murray stated that a woman living in an apartment across the hall from her had fired a pistol, narrowly missing her granddaughter. A case was made against the woman and she was bound over to Fulton County Court, but both the defendant and Mrs. Murray had been told to vacate their apartments by letter from Mr. Carl Brown, manager of Grady Homes. Mrs. Murray stated she went to Legal Aid Society, but they could not help her. Mrs. Baker asked if any charge had been made against Mrs. Murray. She said no charge was made against her. Mr. Williams stated that an investigation would be made.

MR. DON CROWLEY, Edgewood Area, East Atlanta

Mr. Crowley stated that large numbers of people have migrated into this area and there is an acute need of recreational facilities. The citizens of this area want supervised recreational facilities for their children.

MR. LORENZO JOHNSON, 1583 First Street, President of the Wesley Homes Tenants Association

Mr. Johnson stated the apartments are unsanitary, unfit for human habitation, infested with rats and snakes. He said that persons who attend meetings of the Tenants Association had been threatened with eviction. In answer to an inquiry as to the owner, Mr. Johnson stated he believed the apartments were owned by a Mr. Sam Maddox.

Mr. Dobbs asked him to call the Commission if he is threatened or harassed in any way because of his testimony before this commission.

MR. JOHN DAVIS GAITHER, 1560 Foote Street, N. E., Edgewood Civic Club  
(Blue Heaven)

Mr. Gaither is concerned that this section is a political football between DeKalb County and Atlanta. He said if complaints or requests are voiced to DeKalb County, he is told to call Atlanta; if he calls Atlanta authorities, he is told the matter is under the jurisdiction of DeKalb County.

Mr. Gaither also expressed a strong sentiment that the term "Blue Heaven" used to describe this area is derogatory and inappropriate. He stated that the residents of the community are proud of their community and want to improve it and they want the use of the term "Blue Heaven" discontinued.

MRS. JOHN W. STANLEY, Chairman of the Council on Human Relations of Greater Atlanta

Mrs. Stanley congratulated the City on the formation of the Community Relations Commission and expressed great faith in the potential effectiveness of the Commission.

MRS. THELMA McCLENTON, Bankhead Estates Apartments

Mrs. McClenton feels the occupants of these apartments, which are privately owned, should receive better maintenance service. She also stated the apartments are rat-infested and no pest control is provided. The children have no play areas.

MRS. NANNIE McCORMICK, Oakmont Drive, S. W.

Mrs. McCormick cited health hazards caused by Proctor Creek. She said the creek causes basements to flood in rainy weather, sewerage backs up to the doors of homes; the odor is highly offensive; and, most serious of all, it is a great hazard to children.

Mr. Dobbs stated that seven children have died in this creek. The creek presents an especial danger because most of the parents in the neighborhood are at work all day and the children are not supervised.

MRS. JANIE MAE SIMS, 774 Norwood Road (Thomasville)

Mrs. Sims said this area is threatened by poor drainage and by overflow of water in rainy weather. Mosquitoes are a problem and backed up sewerage causes offensive odors.

THE REV. J. ALLEN JAMES, 1152 Welch Street, S. W. , Pittsburgh Civic League,  
Pastor, St. James Baptist Church

Mr. James asked that the Commission make inquiry into discriminatory practices by the Municipal Court and the Housing Authority in the enforcement of the Housing Code.

MR. DAVID MCGOUGH, 50 McDonough Blvd, S. E. (South Atlanta)

Mr. McGough cited water overflow and sewerage problems in his community. He feels there is too much "buck passing" when he tries to reach City officials.

MRS. IULA O'NEAL, 1612 Foote Street, N. E., Apt. 5, President, Edgewood Improvement Association

Mrs. O'Neal cited the danger to children in this community from open streams running from above the park.

She also complained that truancy laws are not enforced in this area.

MRS. ROBERTA GRESHAM, Boulevard Area

Problems cited by Mrs. Gresham were: No recreational facilities. Many elderly people cannot get welfare assistance. Poor sanitary service. Garbage collects on warehouse property and causes rats.

MR. LEWIS HOLMES, SR. Reynoldstown Area, representing Reynoldstown Citizens Improvement Committee

Mr. Holmes stated that he makes building repairs and alterations and in the course of his work has seen many violations of the City health laws and the U. S. Government pure food laws. He asked for a private meeting with the Commission and was told such a meeting would be arranged.

MRS. ANNETTE WATKINS, 773 Hill Street (Old Summerhill Area)

Mrs. Watkins feels the practice of permitting colored people to move into old deteriorated houses vacated by white families perpetuates the problem of substandard housing for Negro families. She feels these houses should be demolished if they are not fit for occupancy.

THE REV. L. WILLIAM HOPE, Peoplestown Civic League

Mr. Pope stated the problems with which he is concerned cannot be covered in the time allotted for each speaker. He asked for an opportunity to meet with the Commission at a later date. The Commission will arrange a meeting with him.

MR. STERRS A. JOHNSON, 260 Linkwood Road, N. W.

Mr. Johnson feels the Civil Defense program is of vital importance and participation should be open to all citizens. He stated that there are no Negroes on the staff of the Atlanta Civil Defense Agency.

THE REV. PERCY L. HEATH, cab driver

Mr. Heath protested brutality of the police. He feels he was unjustly accused of running a red light because he pulled into the intersection to make a turn. He said he has heard rumors that police have to write ten tickets each day. Mr. Williams assured him that this is not true.



MRS. BEATRICE CAMPBELL, 1331 English Avenue, N. W. (Blandtown)

Mrs. Campbell stated this community needs bus service and better street lighting. She also cited the need for recreational areas for children and asked for the elimination of a portable bridge which the children have to cross to get to and from school.

MR. JOHN MATTOX, 2541 Tilson Drive, S. E., East Lake Heights

Mr. Mattox complained of poor sanitary service in this area.

He is also concerned about this area being rezoned as commercial. He feels the people who have invested in property in this area have a right to have their investment protected. He stated that signs saying the property was zoned for business extend on Memorial Drive from the Expressway ramp to East Lake Avenue.

Mr. Dobbs stated that no property can be rezoned without a public hearing and the occupants of this area must be alert to attend such hearings. They should also take care when buying property to see that the area has not already been rezoned for business.

Mr. Williams asked that any persons desiring to be heard at a later date notify the Commission.

Chairman Kaler expressed the Commission's pleasure in having had the opportunity to hear from representatives of so many sections of the city. He stated that additional meetings will be scheduled on a neighborhood basis and the dates for these meetings will be well publicized.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 p.m.