



**Fairfax County NAACP
General Membership Meeting Minutes
September 9, 2017**

Location: Kings Park Library, Burke, VA
Meeting Facilitator: Kofi Annan, President
Attendees: 40

President Annan called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m. He announced that the meeting would primarily focus on the Criminal Justice Forum that had been in the planning stages for months. A brief membership meeting would be held to comply with bylaws regulations.

Minutes from the August meeting, which had been distributed online through Constant Contact were moved and approved by the membership.

Committee Reports

Political Action Committee: Chair Karen Campblin discussed the branch's partnership with the League of Women Voters, who will be sponsoring a Get Out The Vote event on September 11. She also announced the creation of an LGBT Subcommittee that would be forming soon.

Veterans Affairs Committee: Chair Nikki Zimmerman announced the branch's upcoming Veterans Forum, scheduled for Saturday, September 30 at 10 a.m. The Forum will focus on meeting the needs of our local veterans.

Freedom Fund Committee: Chair Evelyn Spain announced that the branch will be holding an old fashioned Fish Fry Fundraiser on Saturday, October 14, from Noon – 4 p.m. at Burke Lake Park in Fairfax Station. Donations of food and picnic supplies are welcomed and encouraged. Proceeds from the event will help meet the financial obligations of the branch and continue the valuable work of the NAACP locally.

Recognition of George Alber

President Annan took a moment to recognize the incomparable contributions of branch member George Alber, who had just resigned from the Executive Committee. Alber successfully led the branch's involvement with the Change the Name initiative, started by students of the J.E.B. Stuart High School, to encourage the Fairfax County School Board to change the name of their school. After a two-year campaign, with Alber participating every step of the way, the School Board voted in late July to Change the Name. Alber was appreciated for his dogged determination and dedication to removing this Confederate and Segregationist symbol from our school system.

Criminal Justice Panel

President Annan introduced the distinguished panel and provided each of them an opportunity to discuss their respective roles within the Fairfax County Criminal Justice System. Panelists included the following:

John Cook, Fairfax County Supervisor (Braddock) and Chair of the County's Public Safety Committee

Alan Davis, Interfaith Partners for Justice and OAR supporter

Richard Schott, Fairfax County Independent Police Auditor

Adrian Steele, Chairman, Independent Civilian Review Panel

Ed Roessler, Fairfax County Police Chief

Redic Morris, Fairfax County Sheriff's Department

Shirley Ginwright, Chair, Fairfax County Communities of Trust

Supervisor Cook initiated the discussion by citing the 205 recommendations that had been developed by the Police Oversight Ad Hoc Review Panel in 2016. He noted that many of the recommendations have already been put in place and others are being worked on. "We ask a lot of our police force," he said, noting that training of police is critical and that a renewed focus on community policing is in the works.

Police Chief Roessler followed by noting that the police force has reviewed its "Use of Force" policies with all personnel. In addition, the force is undergoing "Critical Decision Making Training" and "Sanctity of Life Training." He said the Fairfax County Police Department emphasizes "human skills first and focuses on community engagement."

Deputy Sheriff Morris focused his remarks on the Sheriff's Department operations (overseeing the Adult and Juvenile Detention Centers) and noted that they have recently focused on De-escalation Training for all members of the Sheriff's Department. He also discussed the new "Diversion First" program, indicating that any person picked up by police who exhibits mental health-related symptoms would be "diverted" to the new Merrifield Crisis Response Facility.

Police Auditor Schott discussed his office's role in reviewing "office-involved shootings." He also conducts "Use of Force" reviews. In addition, he is charged with reviewing all police training.

Chairman Steele discussed the role of the newly created Independent Civilian Review Panel, which will review public complaints about police misconduct, hold public meetings on law enforcement policies and procedures, and issue an annual report about police its activities, including policy reviews and training recommendations. (Chairman Steele recognized NAACP member and attorney Steve Descano as one of the members of the Panel.)

Mr. Davis discussed his organization's interest in "data-driven solutions" to the problems of crime and justice. He noted that his efforts focus on "restorative justice approaches" and suggested that "Punishment is not the answer" for handling criminal behavior. Davis praised the County's new focus on community engagement and said the County is "taking steps in the right direction."

Ms. Ginwright discussed her "Communities of Trust" initiative, started by Board of Supervisors Chair Sharon Bulova in the wake of racial unrest in other communities throughout the country in order to build trust among law enforcement officials and the communities they serve. Ginwright also addressed the creation of Public Safety Academies in the public school system.

The panel's remarks lasted approximately an hour. Then President Annan opened the floor to questions from the gathered members and community participants. Some very pointed questions were raised, including the following:

- The issue of "cops in schools", i.e. School Resource Officers (SROs) placed in public school to protect students in the wake of mass shootings on school campuses nationwide. SROs have repeatedly been drawn into disciplinary actions with students, thus criminalizing student behavior rather than dealing with it in the traditional channels of detention and suspension.
- The issue of Fairfax County Police and Sheriff's Department collaborating with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids throughout the County.
- The use of body cameras by police and the availability of the video footage gathered from such technology.
- Police interaction with people with special needs, who tend to have slower response times and the misunderstandings that can occur when police officers do not understand the communications and cognitive issues involved.
- A discussion of the police and sheriff departments' mishandling of the John Geir and the Natasha McKenna cases, which led to the need for the Independent Police Auditor and the Civilian Review Panel. Supervisor Cook made it clear that the Sheriff's Department is an independently run agency, not overseen by the Board of Supervisors (unlike the Police Department). The Sheriff is an independently elected official and answers directly to the public.
- The role of God in criminal justice and the need to realize that humans need the opportunity for "second chances," i.e., the Restorative Justice model of handling crime and crime prevention.

On that positive note, President Annan provided some closing remarks, thanking the panelists and urging them to continue their work of community engagement.

The meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Following the meeting, a brief socializing event with a cake provided to honor the many contributions of NAACP Executive Committee Member George Alber.