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Huber Heights declares racism a public health crisis



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LOCAL NEWS

By Eileen McClory

April 5, 2021

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Huber Heights City Council passed a resolution Thursday declaring racism a public health crisis.

Two members, Glenn Otto and Richard Shaw, abstained from the vote.

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“I think the resolution is a good start,” said Rhonda Sumlin, a member of the Huber Heights Culture and Diversity Citizens Action Committee. “It’s a start. It’s not the be-all, end all. The work has to happen after the resolution is passed.”

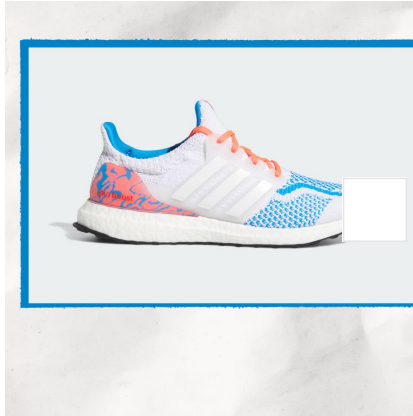
She said the city had been working on the resolution “for a long time.” The commission submitted several recommendations to council, including naming racism a public health crisis, after its Feb. 4 meeting.

Many other areas have already passed similar resolutions, as some members of the committee noted during the meeting.

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“Practically every city around us has passed something similar to this, not this month, not last month, I’m talking they did this last year,” said Mia Honaker, another member of the Huber Heights Culture and Diversity Citizens Action Committee who spoke at the meeting.

But the vote did not come without comments from two members of council who abstained.

“I think I’ve shown in my actions and my words that I am supportive of the commission. But this is not what was asked for,” said Otto.

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Shaw agreed, saying he'd heard from citizens who wanted to come speak on the topic and done research that was not included in the resolution. He and Otto said they thought they were discussing this at the April 6 work session, and some people couldn't make the updated special meeting on Thursday when the council approved the resolution.

Council member Nancy Byrge challenged Shaw.

"Ok, Mr. Shaw, if you read 1,500 pages of research, what do you feel is missing from this resolution?" she said. "I believe it's great, I believe it should pass and I commend you all for putting this together, and I'm really sorry that this conversation is going on because it's ridiculous. It's long overdue and we need to get it done."

Yolanda Stephens, chair of the Huber Heights Culture and Diversity Citizens Action Committee, said if the resolution is representative of city council, it should represent everyone's voice.

"To have a resolution, and half of the council is saying, well, I didn't have any input into this, makes me question if you really buy into it," she said.

Mayor Jeff Gore also said he hadn't heard from Otto or from Shaw before the meeting with concerns about when the meeting was planned.

The six members of council who voted for the resolution commended the committee's work and said it was long overdue.

Council member Kate Baker helped to type up the resolution with the committee, though she said the one council voted on had some edits to it.

"Our country was built on the backs of enslaved people of color and its laws were formed in ways to oppress the inalienable rights of those very people," said Andrew Hill, another member of council. "It is time to stop and listen to those who cry out from oppression and do our part to change the narrative."

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About the Author



Eileen McClory

Eileen McClory is the education reporter for the Dayton Daily News. She grew up in the Dayton area and returned to cover her hometown.

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