
Peekskill Human Relations Commission



Annual Report 2017-2018

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FOREWORD

"Communities in America are made up of people from varied backgrounds. Our neighbors and coworkers are from many different races, cultures, faiths, experiences and traditions. We have different interests, fears and ways of doing things. Some are newcomers, immigrants and refugees. Others are from families, several generations in the United States. We have different preferences in music and food. We have different arrangements in our living situations, and in our domestic and social relationships. Our differences sometimes enrich us and at other times are a source of conflict.

As a nation, unique in being formed by people from many different countries, we have experimented and fought to resolve our differences and make our diversity work. We have a history that houses many examples of difficult challenges regarding differences of race, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, language and other important aspects of our diversity. These have often been complicated and highly charged struggles.

For people of different backgrounds and interests to get along, it is useful for local government to set up places and programs that have the responsibility to help people develop better understanding of each other and to solve differences that might arise. Human Relations Commissions are the most common organization created to help manage relationships between people. Having an organization with the responsibility to examine intergroup relations and promote work that brings people together improves a community's prospects for harmony."

- *Excerpt from U.S. Department of Justice Guidelines for Effective Human Relations Commissions*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Charter Obligations

Per Chapter 73-8 of the charter, the Human Relations Commission shall discharge the obligations as provided by Article 12-D of the General Municipal Law including the submission of an annual report to the Common Council.

Overview

The Peekskill Human Relations Commission (HRC) was revitalized in May, 2017 after years of being inactive. The Commission now consists of 9 active members. Upon Common Council approval of new appointments, the HRC sought to review its charter and establish a mission and vision for itself. Once completed, the HRC began working to fulfill its mission and realize its vision.

Mission

To promote and sustain an inclusive city culture where all community members are treated equitably in community matters and where an environment of fairness, tolerance and respect is maintained.

Vision

Our Vision is for Peekskill to be known as an attractive, inviting, and secure community that respects, values and celebrates all aspects of its diversity.

2017 RESULTS

After having been inactive for several years, the main goal of the HRC in 2017 (June - December) was to develop the foundation required to effectively support efforts to fulfill the responsibilities and obligations of our charter going forward. In developing this foundation, the following results were obtained:

- Developed HRC Mission & Vision statements

After reviewing the responsibilities and obligations defined in our charter, we developed our mission and vision statements to succinctly communicate what we are trying to do and why we are doing it.

- Established HRC Website and implemented "Voice of the Community" (VOC) initiative

We want residents to have access to us and know that we want to hear from them. We set up the HRC webpage with VOC to encourage input from City residents and let them know that their voice matters.

- Conducted Meet & Greet with community organizations

As a community outreach effort, we hosted a meet and greet for various community organizations. Our goal was to introduce ourselves to the leadership of these organizations and open the lines of communication and seek to identify opportunities to work together as we move forward in our efforts.

- Interactions with Westchester County Human Rights Division

In the latter part of 2017, the Peekskill HRC contacted Westchester County HRC to establish a protocol through which we could send complaint cases to them. We spoke with Deputy Exec. Dir. Jerrice Epps and we will set up a memorandum of understanding between our commissions. Our next step is to invite Ms. Epps to one of our meetings and receive valuable insight on how their HRC functions.

- Interactions with New York State Human Rights Division

In October 2017, we contacted the New York State Human Rights Division to inquire about setting up a referral process, whereby the Peekskill HRC could pass on human rights complaints or establish a systematic method for making referrals. We spoke with Manny Kottaram in the State's Human Rights Division's Office of External Affairs who informed us that no other local Human Relations Commission makes direct referrals on behalf of private citizens. He did not rule out setting up such a systematic process but referred us to Gina Martinez in the Division's Regional Affairs Office to determine whether this would be a viable option.

2018 AREAS OF FOCUS

In developing goals for 2018, the HRC is limited in pursuing certain initiatives (e.g., educational symposiums) as a result of not having a budget. Considering that constraint, the following list identifies our areas of focus for 2018:

- Increase HRC visibility by attending community events with Mayor and Council
- Utilize Government Channel for community outreach, special month/events recognition, etc.
- Investigate conducting educational seminars/events
- Develop community events calendar
- Revisit establishing process with county/state for forwarding complaints
- Determine feasibility of recharter based on initial charter
 - Charter was revised in 2015 eliminating HRC responsibility to investigate complaints and provide resolutions but rather forward them to County and State agencies.
- Baseline juvenile crime statistics with comparisons to peer communities (see below)

CRIME STATISTICS

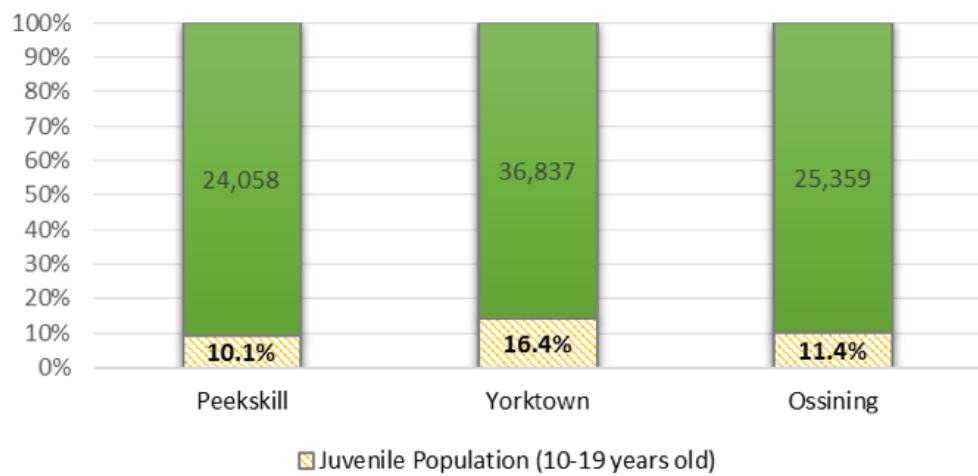
The Peekskill Human Relations Commission has chosen juvenile arrests and crime as a topic we are interested in further understanding. To that end, we analyzed data from the U.S. Census' American Community Survey (ACS) and the Bureau of Justice's FBI Uniform Reporting Crime Program. The most recently released crime statistics came out in August 2017 using data gathered for the year 2014. Census information for the year 2014 was used for accurate comparison. We did a much deeper analysis of the data, however, we've distilled the most relevant information here.

Our goal was to compare and contrast Peekskill to nearby cities and towns. Ossining and Yorktown were selected for comparison based on similarities and differences, respectively. All three towns have a similar overall population, as well as proportion of juvenile population. Whereas Ossining is very similar to Peekskill in racial composition and median household income, Yorktown is dramatically different. Yorktown is overwhelmingly composed of Whites (90%) and the median household income is more than twice that of a Peekskill household.

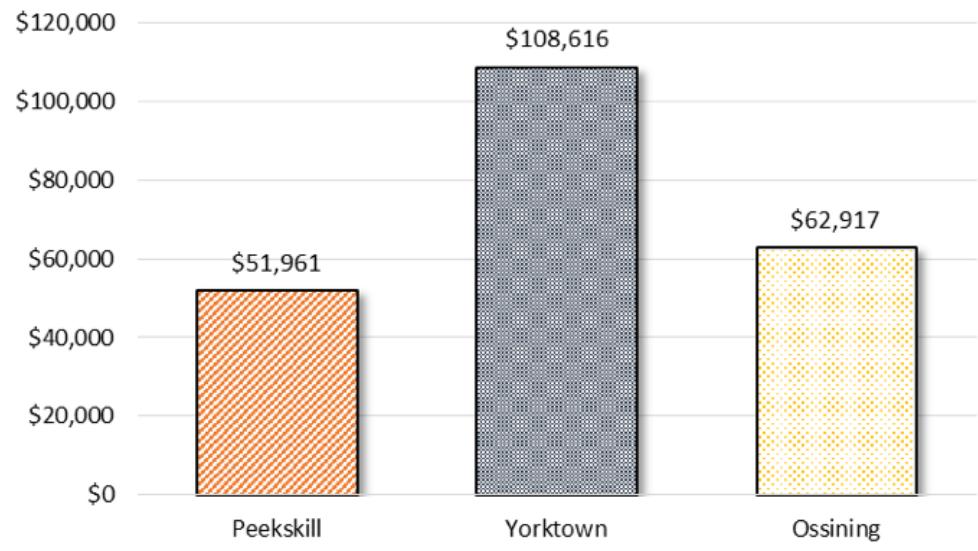
We next present the racial breakdown of juvenile arrests in 2014. It's difficult to make any accurate claims based on the data because the arrests do not separate out the Hispanic population from the White and Black population. It is not uncommon to include Hispanics in either the White or Black race categories; indeed the U.S. Census data treats the Hispanic identity as an ethnicity instead of a race. Therefore, one can identify as Black and also Hispanic. However, given that Hispanics make up 37% of the Peekskill population, it would be more helpful to have data that identifies Hispanics in the arrest statistics.

Despite these caveats, one of the most notable Peekskill crime statistics presented here is that even though Blacks make up only 28% of the population, they constitute 62% of all arrests. In order to more accurately interpret that information, we would also need to examine the racial composition of the juvenile population in Peekskill. Further analysis can be done if this is a topic of interest for the City of Peekskill. We can also provide more details on the statistics here upon request.

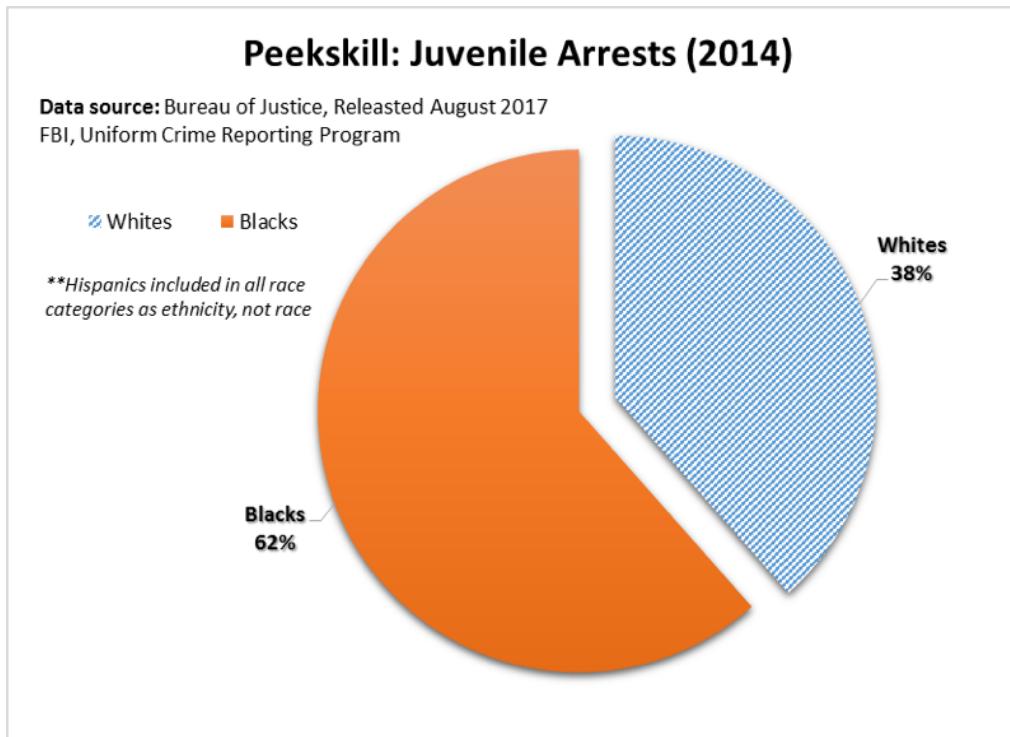
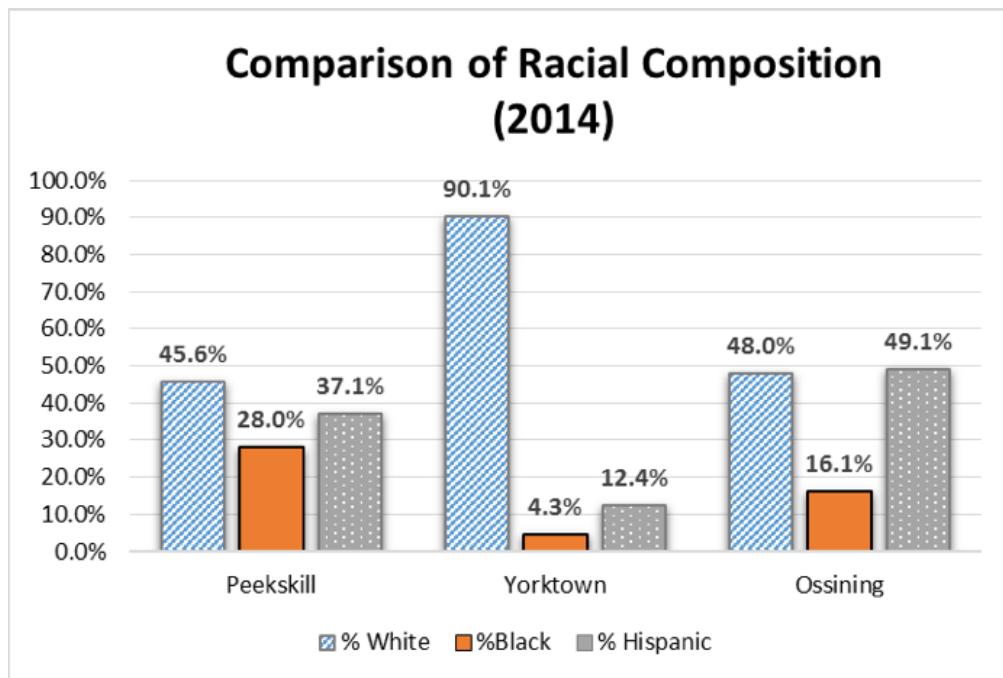
Juvenile Population and Total City Population (2014)



Household Median Income (2014)



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Ossining: Juvenile Arrests (2014)

Data source: Bureau of Justice, Released August 2017
FBI, Uniform Crime Reporting Program

■ Whites ■ Blacks

***Hispanics included in all race categories as ethnicity, not race*

Blacks
48%

Whites
52%

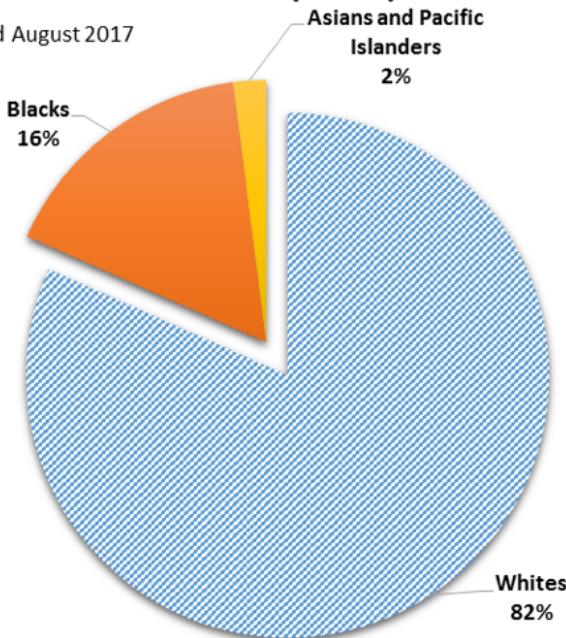


Yorktown: Juvenile Arrests (2014)

Data source: Bureau of Justice, Released August 2017
FBI, Uniform Crime Reporting Program

■ Whites
■ Blacks
■ Asians and Pacific Islanders

***Hispanics included in all race categories as ethnicity, not race*



RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMMON COUNCIL

As a result of issues that came to the attention of this Commission in 2017, we would like to recommend the following to the Mayor and Common Council:

1. Investigate establishing an employee diversity program for city agencies to ensure that all individuals are considered equally in matters of hiring, promotion, retention and job assignment. Maintaining a special focus on hiring, advancing and retaining diverse individuals sets the foundation for an inclusive and balanced workforce.
2. Engage the Peekskill Housing Authority Board and its Executive Director, as necessary, to address and resolve complaints raised by tenants against them and ensure that they are operating in a manner that is consistent with fulfilling their mission to provide decent, safe and affordable housing for low and moderate income residents of the city.

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION MEMBERS

- Katharine Bloeser
- Yao Lawrence Cunningham
- Fred Galloway
- Marlene Jackson
- Mai Miksic
- Joe Schuder
- Renee Smith
- Mishiba Taylor
- Milagros Tompkins