

Owatonna Human Rights Commission Minutes – DRAFT Copy

The Owatonna Human Rights Commission (OHRC) met on Tuesday, May 14, 2024, in the Meeting Room of the Charles S. Crandall Center. Vice-Chair Jim Gunderson called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. with Commissioners Jim Gunderson, Jessica Bjore, Edgar Esquivel, Brandy Leon, Jennifer Hansen and Julia Seykora, City Administrator Busse and Administrative Coordinator Clawson present. Commissioner Mustafe Ismael was unable to attend.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, Commissioner Gunderson welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that during the May 7, 2024, City Council Meeting, Council approved Mayor Kuntz's recommendation for three new members to the Human Rights Commission: Jessica Bjore, Jennifer Hansen, and Julia Seykora. Commissioners Hansen and Seykora were present at the City Council Meeting and received their Oath of Office. City Administrator Busse administered the Oath of Office to Commissioner Bjore. Following brief introductions, new members were given OHRC information binders. Commissioner Leon requested a date correction on the meeting agenda and then made a motion for approval, Commissioner Esquivel seconded the motion, all members present voted aye for approval. After reviewing the Minutes of the April 9th OHRC Meeting, Commissioner Gunderson made a motion for approval, Commissioner Leon seconded the motion, and all members present voted aye for approval.

ITEMS of DISCUSSION

Annual Election of Officers

Commissioner Gunderson gave a brief explanation of duties the commission's officers are each responsible for. Commissioner Leon nominated Commissioner Gunderson as the Chairperson, Commissioner Esquivel as Vice-Chair and Commissioner Hansen as Secretary. Commissioners Gunderson and Hansen accepted the nomination proposed but Commissioner Esquivel declined because of employment time constraints. After discussion, Commissioner Seykora nominated Commissioner Gunderson as Chair, Commissioners Leon and Bjore as Co-Vice Chair, and Commissioner Hansen as Secretary. All nominations were accepted, no other nominations were heard, and all members present voted aye for approval.

2024 Welcome Week

Commissioner Gunderson commented following a sub-committee meeting for planning the 2024 Welcome Week activities, they propose the activities happen within a 2–3-week period beginning at the Downtown Thursday Event on September 5th. Commissioner Leon proposed activities would be an activity during the Downtown Thursday event, a soccer game on Saturday, September 7th, and a round table event during the second or third week of September. Commissioner Gunderson commented the soccer field at Grace Baptist Church has been reserved, Commissioner Hansen commented that more details for soccer games are needed. Current plans are uncertain if the number of games offered and if participation would be by adults' or kids' teams. Also, we should have an estimate of the number of participants prior to any discussion on food options. Commissioner Gunderson commented that the 2023 soccer game wasn't well promoted, and no one showed up, he will meet with Commissioners Esquivel and Ismael prior to the June OHRC Meeting to discuss tournament details.

Commissioner Hansen commented that the OHRC Human Library event offered last fall was a good opportunity to interact with someone of a different culture, but that event was not well attended. She believes many were/are uncomfortable holding an in-person discussion with someone from a different culture and proposed a Human Library be offered during the Downtown Thursday when many attend and participate. Subject Books could be present for an in-person discussion or posters with their picture, information and a QR Code which connects to a short video prepared about them. Commissioner Bjore suggested participants receive points for each connection made and Commissioner Seykora suggested an Activity Passport track participation and the participant with the most points receive an award prize. Commissioner Gunderson commented Round Table Event should also be held, the event allows local businesses and employers an opportunity to hold an open discussion about communication barriers they have encountered. Last year, valuable information was shared, and many requested a similar event be offered again. Commissioners Leon, Bjore, Hansen and Seykora will meet prior to the June OHRC Meeting to discuss plans for the 2024 Welcome Week Activities. City Administrator Busse explained a sub-committee meeting must comply with the Open Meeting Laws, if more than three members attend, meeting information must be included on the City's Weekly Meeting Schedule at least three days prior to the meeting date. Commissioner Gunderson suggested contacting previous OHRC Commissioner Emanuelson for list of participants at the 2023 Round Table.

2025 Martin Luther King Jr. Day Event

The commissioners agreed changing the 2024 MLK Jr. Day event from a breakfast to a noon event was a good decision. Commissioner Gunderson commented that the taco bar by Plaza Morena was well received, and he will contact Jose for a quote for the 2025 MLK Jr Day event on January 20th. Many positive comments were received about the presentation by Semma Pothini and multiple requests for her to speak at future events. Commissioner Seykora will contact her; Commissioner Hansen suggested requesting a list of presentation topics for commissioner selection. This year, the Steele County History Center worked well, but a larger space might be considered for 2025. Suggested sites included the Elk's, the Eagles, the Middle School, the High School, or Trinity Church. Commissioner Hansen will contact potential venue locations for discussion during the June OHRC Meeting.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Hansen commented the theme for the 2024 Pride in the Park Event, hosted by Rainbowatonna is Small Town/Big Rainbows. The event is planned for Saturday, July 13th at Manthey Park. Recent comments on social media predict opposition will be present as was last year. Rainbowatonna hoped to acquire an exclusive use of the park, but this is not offered in

Owatonna. They rented the large pavilion and have an Event Permit for use of the park area and several parking spaces for food vendors. There is common ground within the permitted area, but the permit allows them to conduct their event and opposition will be asked to leave. She asked for additional suggestions in creating a positive event environment, city staff recently suggested relocating this event to Dartts Park which the Rainboatonna Board of Directors is currently considering.

Commissioner Gunderson commented that he and Commissioner Cords gave an update to the Council about the OHRC activities during the April 16th Study Session. The 2023 Annual Report was shared and was well received by the Council. He credited previous commissioners Jamie VanOsborne, Ethan Cords and David Emanuelson for transforming the OHRC from being a reactive commission to becoming a proactive group. He considers them as friends and will miss their participation in the OHRC and looks forward to working with the new members. The terms of these previous commission members expired this year, and members were not eligible for reappointment as they had served the maximum number of consecutive terms allowed per the City's ordinance.

ADJOURNMENT

At 6:38 p.m., Commissioner Leon made a motion to adjourn, Commissioner Esquivel seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 11, 2024, at 5:30 p.m. in the Meeting Room of the Charles S. Crandall Center.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanette Clawson, Administrative Coordinator