



## West Des Moines Human Right Commission Meeting

Thursday, December 14, 2017

**Commissioners Present:** Justine M. Morton, Ila Plasencia, Bernell Edwards  
**Commissioners Absent:** Frank Harty, Sanjita Pradhan  
**Staff Representatives:** Greta Truman, Althea Holcomb  
**Council Liaison:** Rick Messerschmidt  
**Member of the Public:** David Meeks

1. **Call to Order** 4:04 pm by chair, Justine M. Morton
2. **Roll Call**

### Introduction of Guests:

- City Staff:
  - Greta Truman of the City's Legal Department, new staff representative member for the HR Commission.
  - Kristy Henning from the City Manager's Office will be taking minutes on a temporary basis.
  - Althea Holcomb, outgoing staff representative for the HR Commission

### 3. Opportunity for public to address the Commission

David Meeks, WDM Public School liaison at Southwoods

- Invited the Commission members to Southwoods' assembly during the annual "Diversity Week" in February 2018.
  - The school assembly will begin at 8:45 AM with 1-2 speakers; activities and an opportunity for a Commissioner to speak.
  - After the presentations, Commissioners are welcome to stay for the remainder of the assembly.
  - Since this is an annual event, David would like the Commission to use this opportunity to continually develop a relationship with Southwoods, and make attendance a traditional event for the HR Commission.
  - Council Member, John Mickelson has previously attended last year, and will be attending again this year. Commissioners Bernell Edwards and Justine Morton have also attended and spoke to the students.
  - A formal invitation will be sent to Greta, who will forward it on to all Commission members.
- Third Annual Meek Mid-Iowa Inclusion Awards Ceremony
  - This award is to recognize students or youth from Central Iowa who have demonstrated exemplary efforts showing welcoming and/or inclusion in their schools or community. The program is expanding, and David would like this Commission to consider being a partner of this event.
  - Winners in the metro area will receive a \$50 award to Adventureland Park; winners in the Waterloo area will receive \$50 awards to Lost Island Park in Waterloo.
  - The event date is April 15<sup>th</sup>. An invitation will be forwarded to the Commission.
- David was thanked by the Commission for the invitation to the two events.

#### 4. Approval of the August 2017 Minutes

- No additions or corrections. Ila made a motion to accept the August 17, 2017 minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Bernell.

#### 5. Commission Chair Report: Justine M. Morton

- The Human Rights Proclamation was signed and presented at the Dec. 11<sup>th</sup> City Council Meeting. Ila and Justine were in attendance to accept the proclamation. Photo was taken of the commissioners and Mayor Steve Gaer. Copies of the proclamation will be forwarded to the commissioners.
- The commission in the past had received packets of information related to Civil and Human Rights topics and/or events at the bi-monthly meetings. This practice will be reestablished in 2018.
- Sunday, December 10, 2017, was the International Human Rights Day. The theme was the resurrection of Human and Civil Rights, "Death of bias, bigotry and racism in our City, State, Country and the World".
- The email announcing the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Des Moines Civil and Human 2018 "Blueprint to Building Community" on March 14, 2018 was forwarded to the commission. The commission has volunteered, attended and provided financial support of this event. Commissioners were asked to consider attending.
- Justine shared that she had an opportunity to meet Izaah Knox, who is the new director of Urban Dreams and chair of the Des Moines Civil and Human Rights Commission.

#### 6. Staff Report:

##### Current expenditure report and Budget Status

- It was noted that the budget for the HR Commission had not been increased for 2018. Since the commission staff support transitioned from one department Human Services to Legal during the budgeting process the request for increase had not been submitted by staff. Discussion was held on the current upcoming and projected expenses. It was noted that the budget had in prior years been as much as \$6000. It was discussed that an increase is needed in 2018 in order to move forward on the HR commission's strategic plan. Greta will look into steps needed to increase the budget or get approval on expenditures.
  - Community events related to Civil and Human Rights events were identified this year and the commission approved expenditures in advance for those events at a set amount that was supported in the prior year. No vote will necessary unless additional monies are requested. This allows staff to move forward with the request in a timelier manner.
- Ila asked if the \$250 donation to the DSM Civil and Human Rights would include dinner. Justine indicated that the commission hadn't received the sponsorship/donation request yet and didn't know if meal cost was included in the sponsorship.

**Current Expenditure Report:** Justine asked for a motion to accept the expenditure report as presented. Ila made the motion, Bernell seconded.

#### 7. Report on Human Rights phone line: one misdirected call

#### 9. Report from Commissioners on recent activities

- Ila shared that she had receive a "Volunteerism" award of \$1000. A check was made out to her favorite charity's scholarship. She indicated that she matched it with a \$500 contribution. There is an opportunity to provide 3 - \$500 scholarships, or 1 - \$1000 and 1 - \$500 Scholarship.
- Justine attended the WDM Chamber's "Candidate Forum" in October. During Rick Messerschmidt's response to the question asking for the candidate's definition of diversity; he indicated that he was the liaison of the WDM Human Rights Commission but he was disappointed with the Commission. Justine shared that she reached out to Rick about his comment and asked that he share what was his concerns were with the commission which lead to his comment. Justine did indicate that the Human Rights Commission addresses the broader concern of Human Rights for all citizens.

- Rick Messerschmidt's Remarks
  - Rick believes we have opportunities to do more with our Human Rights Commission, and is suggesting that our structure be changed.
    - Move from a 5-member Board to 7-members. We need more staff support, and a higher level of staff interaction and support. We are happy that Greta Truman is now a part of this Board.
  - Diversity, while not as open in West Des Moines, it still is an issue. The City needs to run parallel to the West Des Moines Community Schools, and become more collaborative with our schools. Any diversity problems experienced at the schools is also a City problem.
  - We have three gentlemen in our community that are working together to move diversity forward in our community (aka: WDM Community Equity, Diversity and Multicultural Discussion meetings). They are: Milton Cole, David Maxwell and Mark Hillenbrand. They are working independent from the WDM school system. However, the school does provide them meeting space.
    - They are making good progress and welcome more involvement from the HR Commission.
    - Mark Hillenbrand has shared a "Welcoming" model, but it is different from the "Welcoming America" model. The City needs to develop a policy related to this model.
      - Most communities do not want to be identified as a "Sanctuary City".
      - This is an opportunity for the HR Commission to get involved.
      - The City of DSM is getting very close to adopting their "Sanctuary City" policy.
    - The group has no funding, and their focus is on race relations. Meetings are attended by parents and former students. There is always good dialogue, and people get to know each other.
      - It's always the same people who attend - would like to see more diversity at these meetings. This is an opportunity to go outside the WDM box, and invite others in.
  - WDMCS is under contract with CORE ONE, a consulting firm assisting with diversity planning to help build stronger communities.
  - The school is stepping up, and the City needs to make our own commitment.
  - Rick indicated that the HR Commission could do the following:
    - Open our community and have diversity "Open House".
    - Teach our children to be open to others, and show them the significant contributions made by others. Allow others ethnic groups to come in and share their experiences, and their backgrounds.
    - We need to educate our kids and our residents to treat others equally, not to be prejudice.

Discussion following Rick's comments:

Justine thanked Rick for his remarks and commented that many of the recommendations had been discussed and committed to in the HR Commission Strategic Plan which is targeted to move forward in the upcoming year.

Rick thanked the Commission for the opportunity to be part of this Board, and hope the Commission will continue to push forward with the diversity issue and equality for all.

Justine indicated that at the last council meeting the topic of Human Trafficking regulations for businesses was shared. Justine complimented the Council for indicating that they are mindful of the financial impact the new regulations may have on business owners.

Since Human Trafficking does fall under the umbrella of Human Rights, Justine suggested that the commission explore ways to be involved in educating the community on the issue.

## 9. Old Business

### HR Commission Strategic Plan

- The plan has been on hold until dedicated staff and commission budget is increased for 2018.
- Greta asked how much the commission needs to move forward with the commission action plan did. Justine thought the budget had been \$6000 but had dwindled over the years.
  - Currently there is \$2400 in budget with allocated upcoming expenses planned.
    - The budget increase is to be used for activities outlined in the strategic action plan. (See: attached)

### Other Comments:

Althea recommended removing the Human Rights Commission from the Human Services page. The commission needs to be more visible on the WDM City's website; include a blog and/or educational page.

- a. Internal staff can be the resource to set this up - contact Lucinda Stephenson.
  - b. Greta will look into costs
  - Include funds for travel and meals as commission publicizes actions get the word out and get the community involved.
  - Would like to double our current budget funding.
  - Althea commented that Human Services funding and Human Rights Commission funding need to be completely separate from each other – which can be done.
  - The HR Commission members need to sit down with Tim Stiles (City Budget Director) and Chris Hamlett, Budget Analyst to discuss a proposed spending plan for the FY18/19 budget.
  - Althea reminded the group that new fiscal dollars will not be available until July 1, 2018.
- Affordable Housing in WDM
    - Rick also commented that this group needs to pay close attention to the Affordable Housing Program that is going on. We need to have a detailed plan concerning diversity and pricing in planning for future housing.
      - We need to have a detailed housing study to gather information and then educate.
    - The City had a housing workshop at the last meeting, but we didn't have any developers show up. The developer that did present provided information more on a statewide level, not specifically related to the City of West Des Moines.

## 10. New Business

### a. New Brochure

Greta has reviewed the brochure from a legal perspective.

Before having the brochure printed, the commissioner picture will need to updated to include new appointed commissioners.

Ila made a motion to approve the brochure, and motion was seconded by Bernell.

## 13. Next Meeting Date

- The next meeting will be on February 8, 2018.

## 14. Adjourn

- Justine asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:54. Ila made the motion and was second by Bernell.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kristy K. Henning  
Executive Assistant