

Owatonna Human Rights Commission – Minutes

The Owatonna Human Rights Commission (OHRC) met on Tuesday, July 9, 2019 in the Second Floor Conference of the City Administration Building. Commission Chairman Cords called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Vice-Chairman Ventura took roll call: Commissioners Ethan Cords, Fred Ventura, Jim Gunderson, David Emanuelson, Jamie Vanoosbree and John Worden were present as were City Administrator Kris Busse and Administrative Specialist Jeanette Clawson. Commissioner Ryan Gillespie was not present.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, Commissioner Cords welcomed everyone to the meeting. Minutes of the June 11th Meeting were reviewed, Commissioner Ventura made motion to approve the minutes as prepared. Commissioner Emanuelson seconded the motion; all members present voted aye for approval.

During Commissioner Comments, Commissioner Worden said he was contacted regarding proposed loss of stoplights at two intersections in town. Resident was concerned after reading a recent article in the People's Press about the street improvement project on Oak Avenue which will remove two traffic lights and not include ADA compliant improvements because of high costs. Commissioner Worden questioned if this would be a Human Rights violation if improvements made do not meet ADA Compliance requirements. City Administrator Busse explained traffic studies completed at the intersections of N Oak/Vine and S Oak/McKinley show traffic lights are no longer warranted. This improvement project includes restriping a section of Oak Avenue from four lanes of traffic to three lanes and bag the traffic lights, traffic will be monitored before removing the traffic lights. Current project plan meets the public needs and is cost efficient; additional enhancements would be considered if warranted. This is a joint project with Steele County, questions about the project can be directed to County Engineer Greg Ilkka.

During Old Business, Commissioner Ventura said he was contacted on Friday, July 5th by the individual he and Commissioner Vanoosbree met with during May regarding a potential workplace violation of human rights. During their meeting, they advised the claimant, the incident was not a violation of her human rights. The claimant now has on-going concern and contacted Commissioner Ventura, he advised her to seek legal counsel as this is not a matter involving the Human Rights Commission.

Commissioner Ventura said he has not had additional contact with the gentlemen he met with during May regarding a possible Workplace Human Rights Issue at the school. Commissioner Ventura said he contacted Superintendent Elstad and considers this matter resolved.

Commissioner Ventura reported approximately, the OHRC spot on the LED billboard changed to read "How a society treats its disabled is the true measure of a civilization". Commissioner Worden stated he has heard comments the sign is too busy with too many words and colors. Commissioner Ventura suggested contacting the company to rotate messages every two to three months.

During New Business, Commissioner Ventura suggested OHRC offer a movie free to the public. Rev. Jim Oberg suggested this during the OHRC event at the History Center in May with recommendation to show "Crash" or "Color of Fear". Commissioner Vanoosbree will contract Library staff for information to host a movie event.

Commissioner Vanoosbree advised the Better Together Community will meet this Friday to begin plans for their next community session. She anticipates the group's next session with speaker

Bukata Hayes of the Greater Mankato Diversity Council will be offered in September. They hope to employ strategies to involve additional community sectors, Afro-American, Hispanic, Somali, and youth. Commission members suggested to encourage church involvements and offer free diverse food during the event. The group hopes everyone who attended the first session will return to the next session and bring a friend with them. Also, they hope city leaders (Mayor, council members, police officers, firemen, etc.) will also plan to attend. Commissioner Gunderson suggested OHRC Commissioners send an invitation to Mayor and Council Members for this event when plans are available.

Commissioner Worden asked if OHRC should become involved in a matter requiring geriatric assistance? He was recently contacted with complaint of care for an elderly parent in an assisted care facility and they were considering filing a legal complaint. The commissioners discussed this and agreed potential litigation for elderly abuse or neglect should be matter for Human Services and not Human Rights. City Administrator Busse suggested recommending they contact the State Attorney General's office for quality of care matters. Commissioner Vanoosbree suggested they contact the Ombudsman at the care facility. Commissioner Worden explained this does not involve a facility within Owatonna and he advised the OHRC would not be involved in their situation. Commissioner Worden wanted to let other commission members know of the request and open discussion for direction if they were contacted about a similar matter.

Commissioner Worden asked if OHRC would assist an individual wanting to acquire a home to rent. The commissioners agreed OHRC members could assist in obtaining housing but would not be involved in any litigation. If someone has concerns including litigation matters, they should be advised to contact the free Law Clinic or pursue the matter with the State Human Rights Commission.

With no additional business, Commissioner Vanoosbree made a motion to adjourn at 6:12 p.m.; Commissioner Gunderson seconded the motion. The next OHRC Meeting will be Tuesday, August 13th at 5:30 p.m. Commissioner Emanuelson said he will not be able to attend the August meeting.