

Owatonna Human Rights Commission – Minutes February 20, 2019

The Owatonna Human Rights Commission (OHRC) met in Special Session on Tuesday, February 20, 2019 in Council Chambers. Commission Chairman Cords called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Commissioner Gillespie took roll call with Commissioners Ethan Cords; Jim Gunderson; David Emanuelson; Fred Ventura; Jamie Vanoosbree and Ryan Gillespie present; Commissioner John Worden was not able to attend. Also, present were Owatonna School District Superintendent Jeff Elstad; City Administrator Kris Busse; Administrative Assistant Jeanette Clawson and approximately 30 members of the public.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, Commissioner Cords welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the meeting was called to discuss a plan to create a safe and inclusive environment for all residents in Owatonna.

Jeff Elstad, Owatonna School District Superintendent, said the school has contacted the Minnesota Department of Education to bring facilitators for Support of Justice workshops. Many students have expressed a desire to talk about racism issues and hoping adults will also become involved. The school has scheduled a World Café next Thursday, February 28th at 3:15 p.m. for students to talk.

Commissioner Cords offered several plan suggestions: Create a Racial Advisory Committee; collaborate with other groups that have desire to create a plan for racial equity; create a community-wide readiness plan so future incidents would be handled differently; co-host a listening session with Judge Karen Duncan; support the school district as they make plans to move forward with racial and diversity awareness.

Donovan Bailey, previous speaker at the commission's Martin Luther King Breakfast and employee of the Public Defender's Office agreed forming a council like those of Mankato or Rochester within Owatonna would offer long term benefits.

Mary Kay Feltes, 1217 8th Avenue NE, recommended staff members, commissioners, council members, and employers offer additional diversity training and suggested contacting the Diversity Council in Rochester or Mankato.

During the meeting, Josh Hall, Alexis Walsh, Cathy Hall, Mike Ryan, Annie Granlund, Kristin Haberman, Rebecca Moore, and Melody Hylle made requests to establish programs creating long term effects by increasing public awareness with student input about racist and diversity concerns.

Commissioner Gillespie made a motion to create a Racial Diversity Commission to initiate a listening session for consideration of creating a Diversity Council. Abukar Osman suggesting the Somali Mosque be contacted for input and support; Ashlan Zurbriggen, 2475 Water Tower Lane encouraged holding activities to become better acquainted to decrease the gap of cultural difference unawareness.

Commissioner Gillespie rescinded her motion and made motion to form a sub-committee to begin the process of establishing a group with intention of creating a commission offering opportunity for

discussion of racial and diverse issues. Commissioner Gunderson seconded the motion; all members voted aye, and the motion carried.

Commissioner Vanoosbree made a motion for the Human Rights Commission to participate in the listening sessions with District Court Judge Duncan and the Judicial System; Commissioner Gunderson seconded the motion; all members voted aye in approval.

At 6:45 p.m. Commissioner Vanoosbree made a motion to adjourn, Commissioner Gunderson seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned.