

**CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
CITY HALL CONFERENCE ROOM 2B – 420 NORTH POKEGAMA AVE.
DATE: APRIL 27, 2011
TIME: 4:00 P.M.**

Est. Times

ACTION

4:00 CALL TO ORDER:

CALL OF ROLL:

	Present	Absent
Commissioner Wartchow, Chair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Dowell	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Freeman, Vice Chair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Hain	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Hall	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Learmont	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Mundt, Sec'y./Treasurer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner Sanderson	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

MEETING PROTOCOL POLICY:

Please be aware that the Council has adopted a Meeting Protocol Policy which informs attendees of the Council's desire to conduct meetings in an orderly manner which welcomes all civil input from citizens and interested parties. If you are unaware of the policy, copies (orange color) are available in the wall file by the Council entrance.

WELCOME GUESTS:

SETTING OF REGULAR AGENDA:

This is an opportunity to approve the regular agenda as presented or add/delete by a majority vote of the Councilmembers present an agenda item.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: March 30, 2011 regular meeting

CORRESPONDENCE:

PUBLIC COMMENT:

GUEST SPEAKER: Possibly Noreen Hautala regarding Mental Health Month

OLD BUSINESS:

- Noreen Hautala update on Mental Health Month (if guest not present)
- Update on Council Worksession presentation – Barb Sanderson
- “Bullied” project update
- Rapids Read and Commission follow-up program update
- Spring Accessibility Project update
- Essar Steel presentation possibly in May 25 - update – Commissioner Learmont

NEW BUSINESS:

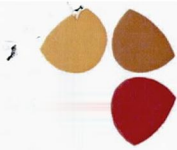
- Human Rights Commission Website

REPORTS ON CALLS AND INQUIRIES:

PENDING COMPLAINTS:

OTHER:

ADJOURNMENT:



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**CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
CONFERENCE ROOM 2B – 420 NORTH POKEGAMA AVENUE
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30, 2011 – 4:00 P.M.**

CALL TO ORDER: Pursuant to due notice and call thereof a regular meeting of the Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission was held in Conference Room 2B of City Hall, 420 North Pokegama Avenue, Grand Rapids, Minnesota, on Wednesday, March 30, 2011, at 4:00 p.m.

CALL OF ROLL: On a Call of Roll, the following members were present: Commission Chair Wartchow, Commissioners: Dowell, Hain, Hall, Mundt and Learmont. Absent: Commissioners: Freeman and Sanderson.

Staff: Lynn DeGrio, Human Resources Director

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. Commission Chair Wartchow welcomed new Commissioner Jackie Dowell to the Commission and had members present introduce themselves.

SETTING OF REGULAR AGENDA:

MOTION BY COMMISSIONER HALL, SECOND BY COMMISSIONER MUNDT TO ADD DISCUSSION OF APRIL SPEAKER TO THE AGENDA UNDER NEW BUSINESS. The following voted in favor thereof: Hall, Mundt, Wartchow, Dowell, Hain and Learmont. Opposed: None, motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: February 23, 2011 regular meeting

MOTION BY COMMISSIONER MUNDT, SECOND BY COMMISSIONER HALL TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 23, 2011 AS PRESENTED. The following voted in favor thereof: Mundt, Hall, Wartchow, Dowell, Hain, and Learmont. Opposed: None, motion carried.

TREASURERS REPORT:

Nothing to report.

OLD BUSINESS:

Rapids Read and Commission follow-up program

Various Commissioners attended the excellent presentation by speaker, Kao Kalia Young, author of "The Latecomer" with 117 in attendance. Human Resources Director DeGrio will try to order a copy of the presentation to have on file.

The Commissioners discussed the follow up program to the Rapids Read presentation. Commissioner Learmont contacted the Itasca County Extension and the Itasca County Collaborative to co-sponsor an event with the Human Rights Commission. They sounded interested but needed more definition. The high school FFA may also be invited to participate. Definition for the Rapids Read presentation follow up would include: grant request of a follow up, give history of the Hmong Farmer's Market, Hmong art, etc. From a Human Rights standpoint the follow up should include diversity and integration into communities.

Commission Chair Wartchow will make the original contact to get the information for contacting the Farmer's Market and possibly Kao Kalia Young for referrals and will pass that information on to Commissioner Hall to follow up with the actual contact. Suggestions for contact include:

- Contact Will Richter at the Library for Kao Kalia Young's contact information to ask for referrals.
- Contact the Minnesota Human Rights Commission for information regarding contacts for information on the Hmong Farmer's Market and Hmong artwork.

Commission Chair Wartchow will also contact MacRostie Art Center regarding a possible Hmong art exhibit.

Spring Accessibility Project:

Letters are to be sent out this spring to businesses in regard to handicap accessibility. Commissioner Hall will contact Rob Mattei, Community Development Director to determine date of mailing.

"Bullied" Project Update:

Commissioner Mundt stated the film will be shown April 18th at 6:30 p.m. at the Itasca Community College, Davis Theater followed by a panel discussion lead by Commissioner Sanderson. They believe ICTV will cover the presentation. Human Resources Director DeGrio suggested they also contact Lakeland Television for additional coverage.

Distribution of Islamic Print Information:

Human Resources Director DeGrio presented the Islamic brochures to the Commission. One copy of each brochure will be in the Administration office. Commissioner Learmont suggested we link the website for these brochures to the Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission website. Human Resources Director DeGrio made note.

Essar Steel Presentation Update:

Commissioner Learmont has been in contact with Essar Steel to speak to the Commission. Essar Steel will send two or three individuals who want to be present, two members being the Project Director and Human Resource Manager. Commissioner Learmont asked for a 20 to 30 minute slide presentation focused on diversity and demographic information to be followed by a question and answer period. He asked them to attend the April 27, 2011 meeting at 4:00 p.m. but has not received confirmation.

NEW BUSINESS:

Discussion of April Speaker:

Commissioner Hall stated Noreen Hautala would like the HRC to be represented at the May, 2011 Mental Health Month and will send a proposal and come to a meeting. As of this meeting, Commissioner Hall has not received the proposal. Commissioners felt they could have Essar Steel and Noreen Hautala at the same meeting. Human Resources Director DeGrio will include both on next month's agenda unless otherwise notified.

Commissioners are pleased to see more dialogue on Human Rights issues and that organizations are recognizing the Human Rights Commission as a resource.

Chair Wartchow thanked Commissioner Mundt for his work on the "Bullied" film presentation and Commissioner Sanderson and Human Resources Director DeGrio for their work on ordering Islamic brochures.

REPORTS ON CALLS AND INQUIRIES:

None reported.

PENDING COMPLAINTS:

Nothing reported.

OTHER:

Commissioner Hain reported briefly on the public hearing in regard to the Grace House rezoning a parcel for a permanent facility. The hearing was well attended by residents as well as Grace House representatives. Testimonies from Grace House staff and the homeless were positive. The permanent structure would be able to house 15 individuals. The Council voted in favor of the rezone.

Commissioner Dowell stated the web site needs to be updated on the Human Rights Commission meetings time of 4:00 p.m. Human Resources Director DeGrio made note of the change.

A recommendation for next month's agenda includes the Human Rights Commission website: what is included and how to invite the community. Commission Chair Wartchow invited everyone to take a look at the website and come back with ideas.

The next regularly scheduled meeting will be April 27, 2011 at 4:00 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

ADJOURN:

There being no further business the following motion was made to adjourn the meeting:

MOTION BY COMMISSIONER HAIN, SECOND BY COMMISSIONER DOWELL TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 4:52 P.M. The following voted in favor thereof: Hain, Dowell, Wartchow, Hall, Learmont and Mundt. Opposed: None, motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Dawn Schaefer, Recorder

Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission

Our GR HR Commission was established in 2004 by city ordinance. We are one of about 60 commissions working in cities across the state.

Today we are an active, 9-member volunteer commission whose purpose is to eliminate discrimination in our community and work cooperatively with others to support the Minnesota Human Rights Act. Our annual action plan includes work to promote diversity and a better understanding and appreciation of all people.

For the past 7 years we have focused our work on preparing our community for change. We are still 95 % Caucasian, largely Christian, and about 4 percent of our friends and neighbors are American Indian. But we know that change is coming and that it will be a good thing for our communities here in northern Minnesota. We will become more diverse. With new projects planned for the Iron Range, we will be welcoming new workers and their families to our community.

For the past seven years, our human rights commission has worked to:

- 1) Raise awareness and educate people about human rights and the Minnesota Human Rights Act. We have promoted the roles and services of the State Department of Human Rights, the League of Minnesota Human Rights Commissions and the University of Minnesota's Human Rights Center; and
- 2) We provide leadership in the human rights arena and act cooperatively with other agencies. We let people know where they can go for assistance with potential human rights complaints. (At the bottom of our brochure, we list the areas of protection and those protected by the Minnesota Human Rights Act.)

So what do we do on an annual basis?

On a regional and statewide basis, we provided leadership or participated in such programs as:

- Regional workshop series with Hibbing, Virginia and Duluth. One example was state human services department conference in Duluth.
- Strategic planning for Mille Lacs Commission
- Workshops at State Department of Human Rights annual conference
- Guest speaker at League annual meeting
- Member for three years of the League Board of Directors

Our work closer to home, has involved dozens of education and training programs, such as:

- Law Enforcement Training about human rights for city, county and regional law enforcement personnel
- Sexual Harassment training for city and county personnel
- Work with the U of M Human Rights Department to bring This is My Home curriculum to area school districts
- Wrote grants to secure funding for American Indian education materials for school programs
- Participated in panels and co-sponsored civil and human rights workshops with ICC
- Brought speakers such as St. Paul Episcopal bishop to talk about welcoming newcomers
- Hosted a series of presentations by the former Commissioner of Human Rights and her staff
- Hosted two series of workshops on disability and the law for local officials and citizens
- Co-sponsored a symposium on the role that Jewish resistance played under Nazi occupation that drew more than 500 students and adults
- Facilitated Great Decisions programs on human rights
- Spoke to community organizations such as AAUW and Rotary Clubs on the State Human Rights Act
- Participated in hearings by the Department of Justice in Bemidji on American Indian issues
- Hosted a speaker from the Islamic Center of Minnesota and distributed Islamic literature to area health care centers and law enforcement centers
- Worked with high school and college students to produce public service announcements that are running on northern Minnesota community and public television stations about discrimination in schools
- Developed a new accessibility improvement education program that will work with businesses and nonprofits to serve people living with a disability and make our community facilities more accessible for all
- Sponsored a speaker on homeless veterans' issues and worked in previous years with landlords, Legal Aid, Housing and Redevelopment Authorities on housing discrimination issues
- Secured funding from the Bremer Foundation and state department to purchase a new collection of human rights materials for the Grand Rapids Area Library. The collection of human rights books, DVDs and other information is designed for both recreational enjoyment and for more

scholarly pursuits. Included in the collection are materials that relate to all protected classes under the Minnesota Human Rights Act.

- Worked with MacRostie Art Center to sponsor programs that highlight the talents of artists with mental illness and those who live with a physical disability
- Facilitated a number of forums on human rights issues (Upcoming is one on bullying in the schools)
- Secured grant funding from the Bremer Foundation and the State Department to bring keynote speaker for the Rapids Read project and purchase 50 books for the community reading project. Kao Kalia Yang, author of “The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir” and a Minnesota Book Award winner, spoke to a crowd of 110 people as a culmination to the month-long project. Our commission will host several follow-up events in the next months to highlight the achievements of Hmong immigrants to our state.

So what have we learned in our seven years of human rights work in northern Minnesota?

- The first is in the words of HL Menkin, who said, “For every complex problem there is a simple solution, and it is wrong.” Complex problems such as discrimination are not solved over night. They took time to develop and they will take time to improve.
- None of our projects or educational activities is possible unless we have developed trusting relationships with people in our communities. We need to leverage limited dollars and limited volunteer resources by working with others.



May 2, 2011

Dear Grand Rapids Area Business Owners/Managers and Nonprofit Directors,

The Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission recently received a grant from the Blandin Foundation to promote a new **Accessibility Improvement Program** within the City of Grand Rapids. This program is designed to encourage local businesses and nonprofits to improve parking lots and sidewalks/entries into their places of business. **The goal is to make all area businesses and organizations accessible for people who live with a mobility disability.**

Earlier this year, the Human Rights Commission heard from local residents that the greatest limitation to accessing facilities is getting out of a van and reaching the front door. This is due to a lack of, or improperly established, handicapped designated parking space, in addition to dealing with barriers on walkways and sidewalks. **These limitations make it virtually impossible for a person with a wheelchair and a handicapped van to park and enter many facilities within the city of Grand Rapids.**

According to the Itasca County Health and Human Service Department, there are currently more than 3,800 persons with physical disabilities living in Itasca County (about 7,900 when we count all disabilities). Additional numbers arrive in our city each day for shopping, medical, education, government or personal business. Moreover, some 18 percent of the county population is over age 65 and our proportion of elderly residents and visitors is expected to continue to be considerably above the state average. **All of these factors add to this current and future mobility issue for our city.**

While a majority of area businesses and most government facilities meet ADA and State of Minnesota statues dealing with accessibility, some, often unknowingly, do not. With this in mind, we are attaching materials from the U.S. Department of Justice explaining ADA requirements for restriping parking stalls. Keep in mind when reviewing this publication, however, that Minnesota Accessibility Code exceeds the ADA requirements, in that **all accessible stalls must have a minimum 96" aisle width.** Also attached to this letter is a copy of our Grand Rapids Human Rights Commission brochure that references the Minnesota Human Rights Act protecting persons with a disability.

We believe that most improvements to parking lots (resealing, restriping, for example, to allow for people to safely move in and out of a handicapped van) or for sidewalk repairs (curb cuts, proper

slope, for example) **can be done with minimal cost**. City staff will be pleased to answer your questions and work with you as you make these important adjustments to your place of business, whether or not a permit is a requirement for the improvement. Call the Community Development Department at 326-7601 for assistance.

We thank you for your consideration of this request to make our city accessible for all residents and visitors. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact us.

Sincerely,



Jeff Wartchow, Human Rights Commission Chair