

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes
September 9, 2024

1. Call to Order

Municipal Policy Analyst Doug Newton called the meeting to order at 6:07 PM.

2. Roll Call

Present were Commission Members Corey Barr, Melvin Poindexter, Sarah Zoen, Xin Peng, Lisa Laplante, Susan Musinsky, and Elizabeth Brusie. Also present were Commission Liaisons Captain Dan Unsworth from the Watertown Police Department and Dr. Ceronne Daly from the Watertown Public Schools.

3. Election of Officers

Several members began by withdrawing themselves from consideration for the role of Chair, Vice, Chair, or Secretary. Susan Musinsky noted the importance of hearing from each member about their interest or lack thereof in a leadership position. Melvin Poindexter noted the importance of gender balance between the leadership roles. There was discussion of having two co-chairs instead of one chair, which Doug Newton conveyed he will report back as to if that is allowed. Ultimately, the Commission voted unanimously to approve Sarah Zoen as Chair, Melvin Poindexter as Vice Chair, and Elizabeth Brusie as Secretary.

4. Discussion

a. Community table at Faire in the Square

The Commission discussed having a document to distribute as a handout to the public from its table. Doug Newton pulled up a draft document from Xin Peng and each Commission member had the opportunity to suggest edits and additions. The Commission unanimously agreed to change the future tense use in the document to present, to add Doug Newton's email as a contact, to eliminate the second page of the document, and to add language noting that the Commission is still in the process of developing a process for addressing concerns or complaints from the public.

b. Membership to the International Association of Human Rights Agencies

Lisa Laplante suggested that the Commission should explore the possibility of joining the International Association of Human Rights Agencies and will inquire on how much it would cost to do so.

- c. Update on bylaw research and discussion on next steps for drafting WHRC rules of procedure

Lisa Laplante explained that she has had one of her law students serve as a research assistant who produced a memo on rules and bylaws used by Human Rights Commissions in other communities. She noted that Watertown's Human Rights Commission needs to be mindful that it has no power to resolve grievances whereas some other Commissions do. The Commission voted to approve the creation of a Rules Committee to examine this research and to present draft rules to the full Commission. The Rules Committee is to consist of Lisa Laplante, Elizabeth Brusie, and Corey Barr.

- d. Community table at Farmers Market 10/23

Some members expressed that they will likely be able to help with the table. This matter will be revisited at the October meeting.

- e. Plan to work with World in Watertown for a "Meet your HRC" event

Discussion began as to how the HRC could be involved in planning for such an event while remaining in compliance with the Open Meeting Law. This topic will also be revisited in the future.

- f. Representative & sponsorship for Watertown's 2025 Unity Breakfast

Xin Peng conveyed that this would be a great opportunity for Commission members to help sponsor and mentor younger residents. Discussion began as to if the Commission can use its budget to sponsor such an event. Doug Newton said that he will report back.

Dr. Ceronne Daly spoke to the importance of engaging students and highlighted several examples in which the Watertown Public Schools have engaged students in matters related to human rights.

- g. Future meeting topics

Sarah Zoen and Mel Poindexter agreed they will touch base with Doug Newton about the next agenda.

5. Date of Next Meeting

The Commission will meet on the second Monday of each month unless it is a holiday, which is the case for each of the next two months. The Commission agreed to meet on October 15th and November 19th.

6. New Business

Resident Russel Arico spoke to the Commission about his suggestion that they investigate if the City's recent snow removal ordinance is a human rights violation in that it mandates disabled residents to shovel.

7. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:26 PM.