Human Rights Commission Meeting

Monday, January 6, 2025 at 5:30 PM

Agenda

ACCESS INFORMATION:

A. This meeting will be held on January 6, 2025 at 5:30 PM. Location: Council Chambers

B. Public may comment through email: dnewton@watertown-ma.gov

C. The public can join the virtual meeting online: https://watertown-ma.zoom.us/j/83605240364

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1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Acceptance of Minutes
   A. Previous Meeting Minutes
4. Discussion
   A. Rules for Human Rights Commission
5. Adjournment

Human Rights Commission Rules Committee Meeting Minutes

November 20, 2024

1. Call to Order
   Doug Newton called the meeting to order at 1:04 PM via Zoom.

2. Roll Call

   Present were Lisa LaPlante, Elizabeth Brusie, and Corey Barr

3. Acceptance of Minutes

   The minutes for the previous meeting which took place just two days prior were not yet available and will be approved at the next full Human Rights Commission meeting.

4. Discussion

   The Commission engaged in wide ranging discussion on its rules. Corey Barr led the discussion with the section of the rules that she has been working on. This included the responsibilities of co-chairs and liaisons, as well as a code of ethics. An action plan, as referenced in the Commission's ordinance, was also discussed. Further discussion took place as to any potential rules in public comment without infringing on free speech and the recent Barron v. Kolenda SJC decision

   The subcommittee discussed how and when it can meet with the City Attorney, including whether or not to complete its rules first prior to meeting with the attorney.

5. Adjournment

   Elizabeth Brusie made a motion, seconded by Lisa LaPlante, to adjourn the meeting. The subcommittee voted three to zero to approve the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 2:07 PM.

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes
November 19, 2024

1. Call to Order

   Chair Sarah Zoen called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

2. Roll Call
   Municipal Policy Analyst Doug Newton called the roll. Present were Elizabeth Brusie, Lisa LaPlante, Sarah Zoen, Mel Poindexter, Xin Peng, Corey Barr, Susan Musinsky. Gabriel Camacho was present via zoom.
3. Acceptance of Minutes

   a. Minutes 10.15.24

   Lisa LaPlante made a motion, seconded by Elizabeth Brusie, that the minutes be approved. The Commission voted eight to zero to approve the motion.
4. Discussion
   a. Participation in Massachusetts Human Rights Commission
      Discussion ensued as to who can attend the monthly meetings of the Massachusetts Human Rights Commission. Several members expressed that they plan to do so.
   b. Participation in International Association of Human Rights Agencies
      Mel Poindexter made a motion, seconded by Corey Barr, that the Commission spend $200 of its budget to join the International Association of Human Rights Agencies. The Commission voted eight to zero to approve the motion.
   c. Meet Your HRC event with World in Watertown, December 10th proposed date.
      The Commission agreed to ask the city to aid in promotion of the event. Doug Newton agreed he would do so. Mel Poindexter made a motion, seconded by Xin Peng, to provide $100 of the Commission's budget towards providing food for the event. The Commission voted eight to zero to approve the motion.
   d. Update on Disability Awareness event with Watertown Free Public Library
      Various Commission members who attended the event spoke positively about the event.
   e. Screening of Borderland: The Line Within with Watertown Free Public Library
      Corey Barr noted that the library informed her that screenings have not been well attended lately. She instead suggested a panel event highlighting immigrant rights in collaboration with the library. Corey Barr noted she will report back on the progress of this at the next meeting.
   f. Watertown Unity Breakfast on January 20th, 2025
      Commission members were asked to attend the breakfast if they are able. It was noted that there will be childcare available at the event. This will be on the agenda for the next meeting as well.
   g. Public Exposure for HRC: School Committee, DEI Council, Community Engagement Specialist
      The Commission discussed how they can best promote their work, which includes the possibility of working with Watertown's Community Engagement Specialist.
   h. Commission statement on immigrant protection

The Commission took this item out of order as it was an appropriate segue from discussion of the event with the library. Xin Peng expressed that he wonders what the Commission could do to ensure that immigrant residents can feel comfortable in Watertown. Captain Dan Unsworth, Liaison to the Commission from the Police Department, educated the Commission on the Police Department's immigration policy. Sarah Zoen made a motion, seconded by Susan Musinsky, to create a subcommittee to craft a statement on immigrant protection. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion and create the subcommittee.

i. Anti-Bias Coalition meeting dates
Dr. Ceronne Daly, Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging for the Watertown Public Schools and liaison to the Human Rights Commission from the Watertown Public Schools offered to distribute the meeting dates to Doug Newton for distribution to the full Commission, which was accepted.

j. Guide to Boards and Commissions distributed to Commission
On a request from Chairs Mel Poindexter and Sarah Zoen, Doug Newton distributed a guide to boards and commissions from the City of Watertown that had been sent to the Commission several months prior for their review. This guide has been included as an addendum to the minutes.

5. Committee Report
    a. Rules Committee
    Lisa LaPlante summarized the ongoing work of the Rules Subcommittee. Corey Barr summarized her work on her assigned section of the Rules.
6. Date of Next Meeting
Doug Newton explained to the Commission and the public that meetings are held on the second Monday of each month unless that date is a holiday, as it had been for each of the last two months. As such, the next meeting is on Monday, December 9th, which is a quicker turnaround from one meeting to the next than usual. Various members of the public shared their thoughts on the work of the Commission.
7. Adjournment
Mel Poindexter made a motion, seconded by Sarah Zoen, to adjourn the meeting. The Commission voted eight to zero to approve the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 7:58 PM.

Human Rights Commission Rules Committee Meeting Minutes

November 18, 2024

1. Call to Order

   Doug Newton called the meeting to order at 2:04 PM.

2. Roll Call

   Doug Newton called the roll. Present via zoom were Lisa LaPlante, Elizabeth Brusie, and Corey Barr.

3. Acceptance of Minutes

   Elizabeth Brusie will send her meeting minutes to Doug Newton so that he can distribute them for the Commission's approval.

4. Discussion

   Discussion began as to the rules of the Human Rights Commission. Corey Barr shared her screen to display the work that she has been doing on her section of the rules. A number of topics were discusses such as rules that are already covered by other rules and laws, a code of conduct for the Human Rights Commission, an option for residents to file incident reports, as well as the action plan that is prescribed by the Human Rights Commission ordinance.

   Also discussed were the terms and election of co-chairs and other officers. There was also discussion on code of conduct for public comment without infringing on free speech or the recent Barron v. Kolenda decision in the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

5. Public Comment

   No members of the public offered public comment.

6. Adjournment

   Lisa LaPlante made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Elizabeth Brusie. The subcommittee voted three to zero to approve the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 3:19 PM.

Human Rights Commission Rules Committee Meeting Minutes

November 7, 2024

1. Roll Call

   Doug Newton called the roll. Present were Lisa LaPlante, Corey Barr, and Elizabeth Brusie.

2. Approval of Minutes

   Lisa LaPlante made a motion, seconded by Elizabeth Brusie, that the minutes for the first Rules Committee meeting be approved. The subcommittee voted three to zero to approve the motion and the minutes were approved.

3. Discussion

   Discussion focused on several topics including the Open Meeting law, any potential offer of anonymity to members of the public, the Commission's eventual action plan, and the use of executive session. Much discussion centered around a process by which the Commission can receive and handle complaints and concerns from the public.

   The possibility of additional liaisons in the future for the Commission was also discussed, as well as the procedure for removing a Commissioner for cause.

4. Public Comment

   No member of the public offered public comment

5. Adjournment

   Lisa LaPlante made a motion, seconded by Elizabeth Brusie, to adjourn the meeting. The Commission voted three to zero to approve the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 7:54 PM.

Incident Procedures

Incident Reported

1. Determine extent of incident and whether more than one Commissioner needs to be assigned. [Discuss criteria for assigning to more than one Commissioner]
2. Within 24 hours, assign Commissioner(s)
3. Assigned Commissioner(s) enters information into tracking spreadsheet
4. If extra documentation needs to be captured, Assigned Commissioner should capture images or email and link to the spreadsheet or place in the Incidents Reported folder
5. Within 24 hours, Commissioner reaches out via email or phone to person who raised the concern.
6. Flow of Conversation:
    - ○ Name
    - ○ Introduce yourself and your role
    - ○ Ask them to describe the issue
    - ○ If unclear on details, ask for specifics
    - ○ Show compassion
    - ○ Offer the complaint form
    - ○ Don't promise anything in particular
    - ○ Say you are going to look into this and will get back within a week with more information
    - ○ Offer resources as needed

7. If no answer:
    - leave message with
        - ○ - name and contact information
        - ○ -introduction of your role
        - ○ - explain that you are calling to follow up on report
        - ○ - ask for the person to call you back
    - within one week, if you haven't heard back, call again

After Phone call

7. Enter all gathered information into the spreadsheet
8. Do any necessary reach outs to get more information (and update the spreadsheet as needed)
    - ○ APD
    - ○ HHS
    - ○ Town
    - ○ School
    - ○ Other Commissioners

A Week Later

9. A week after the incident is reported, report back to person. If desirable, offer follow-up, in-person discussion with two Commissioners. [Discuss criteria for when this should be offered]
10. Send summary notes to all Commissioners via email
11. Follow up with any additional details at meeting, if needed

Organization

Presiding officers: The Commission shall elect from its members a Chairperson in April at a regular meeting, by majority of votes cast, to serve a one-year term as the Chairperson with their term beginning upon election.

Nothing in these Rules of Procedure shall prohibit members of the Commission from electing two Co-Chairs to share the responsibilities of being Chair. In any year when Co-Chairs are elected, a Vice Chair need not be elected for that year.

Nothing in these Rules of Procedure prohibits a Chairperson or Co-Chairs to be re-elected for an additional term.

Duties of Chairperson(s): The Chairperson(s) of the Human Rights Commission, if present, shall preside at the full Commission meetings. In the absence of the Chairperson(s), the Vice-Chairperson shall preside, and in the absence of both, a temporary Chairperson as chosen by the Commission shall serve.

The Chairperson(s) shall conduct the meeting to manage it efficiently; preserve decorum and order; may speak to points of order in preference to other members; and shall decide all questions of order, subject to an appeal to the full Commission.

The Chairperson(s) will be responsible for coordinating preparation of the meeting agenda with the City staff liaison. The Chairperson shall have the discretion to appoint committees and perform other duties that arise in the course of business of the Commission.

Additional duties of the Chairperson(s):

- The Chairperson(s) shall not move for action but may second motions.
- The Chairperson(s) shall be responsible for the communications of the Commission.
- The Chairperson(s) shall be responsible for submitting an Annual Work Plan and Annual Report to the Commission for review and approval prior to presenting it to the City Council.

Vacancies: If the Chairperson retires during their term of office, the Vice-Chairperson shall become Chairperson. A new Vice-Chairperson will be elected at the next Commission meeting. If both retire, new officers shall be elected at a meeting called as soon as possible, but not to exceed 60 days from the date of stepping down.

Meetings

Regular meetings: Regular meetings of the Commission shall be held on a regularly monthly basis. A schedule of the regular meetings shall be publicized on the Commission's webpage. Regular meetings shall ordinarily be held at Watertown City Hall with virtual meeting options as regulated by State Law. Meetings may be held in other accessible facilities as the Commission deems necessary. If the Commission decides to hold a regular meeting at a time or place different from the time or place stated in its schedule of regular meetings, it shall give the same notice of the meeting that is required for a special meeting.

<u>Special meetings:</u> Special meetings may be called by the Chairpersons) or by three members of the Commission. Special meetings may be called only when such meetings comply with the advance notice requirements of Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A. A quorum for a special meeting shall be the same as for a regular meeting. A majority of the commissioners participating in this meeting may take action on any matter presented.

<u>Emergency meetings:</u> In an emergency, the Chairperson(s) may call an emergency meeting with forty-eight (48) hours' notice. Notice of the emergency meeting must be given via the public website per Open Meeting laws. A quorum for an emergency meeting shall be the same as for a regular meeting. A majority of the commissioners participating in this meeting may take action on any matter presented. If action is taken, a report shall be presented to the full Commission at the next regularly scheduled meeting. The report shall include the nature of the emergency, the issue(s) presented for consideration, and the action taken.

Committees

The Commission may establish such committees as are deemed necessary to carry out the work of the Commission. The Chairperson(s) shall seek Commissioners' requests for Committee appointments and then appoint members as s/he deems necessary. The Committees shall meet at such times and places as each Committee deems suitable and subject to the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A. The proceedings and/or output of every Committee meeting shall be reported at the full Commission meeting for inclusion in the meeting's minutes.

Attendance

Commissioners shall attend meetings of the Commission regularly and participate actively. Commissioners who have three (3) unexcused absences during a one-year period shall be recommended for removal. An unexcused absence is defined as an absence without notifying the City staff liaison prior to the beginning of the Commission's regular monthly meeting.

A Commissioner's absence shall constitute a "notified absence" where the Commissioner, in advance of the meeting, informs the staff liaison of the absence. An absence due to unforeseen circumstances, such as illness or emergency, shall also qualify as notified absence where the Commissioner reports such absence to the staff liaison as soon as reasonably possible.

Quorum and Action

A quorum shall consist of five (5) Commissioners. Decision-making shall be subject to a majority vote of the Commissioners present, provided that a quorum has been established. When a quorum fails to attend a scheduled meeting or the Commission loses a quorum because of the departure of some members, the only official actions the Commission may take are: 1) fix the time to which to adjourn; 2) adjourn the meeting; 3) recess the meeting; or 4) take measures to secure quorum. Any other action taken by the Commission while it does not have a quorum is void.

Each meeting must begin with a role call. The staff liaison will ask that the previous meeting's minutes are approved. Before ending the meeting, a commissioner must make a motion to adjourn, which must be seconded.

Cancellation of meetings

The Chairperson(s) may cancel a regular meeting in the event that a quorum will not be present or if the meeting date conflicts with other responsibilities of the Commissioners. Notices of continued, rescheduled, or canceled meetings shall be posted on the City website.

Incidents

The Commission is empowered to respond to incidents brought to its attention. For purposes of these Rules and Regulations, an incident is defined as an occurrence within the City of Watertown which the reporter alleges is motivated, in whole or in part, by prejudice, intolerance, bigotry and/or with the intent to threaten, harm, coerce or intimidate. Incidents may include, but are not limited to: the removal, stealing or defacing of items promoting diversity, equity and inclusion; the placement of signs or graffiti promoting prejudice, intolerance or bigotry; biased statements or slurs; actions with animus related to a protected class; and others.

Responding to incidents: The Commission shall adopt protocols and/or procedures for responding to incidents which are brought to the Commission's attention and shall amend them from time to time as needed in the discretion of the Commission.

Conduct of Commissioners/Code of Ethics

The Chairperson(s) shall be the official spokesperson(s) for the Commission. Individual commissioners shall not express personal opinions on any matter that has come, or is likely to come, before the Commission without clarifying that the opinion is his or her own personal opinion and does not reflect or represent the opinion or position of the Commission on the matter.

Commissioners agree to maintain the highest standards of professional and personal conduct. Each Commissioner shall adhere to the highest standards of ethical conduct and support the Commission's mission, goals and objectives and instill in the public a sense of confidence in the Commission's operations. The standard of conduct for the Commission includes, but is not limited to:

Commented [CB1]: We still have not discussed the potential inclusion of this.

Commented [CB2]: Please see Arlington's protocols (also attached in email).

Commented [CB3]: Outstanding issue.

- Being accountable for its Rules of Procedure and decisions, and promoting accountability of all members of the Commission;
- Treating all members of the Commission, members of the public and colleagues with courtesy, respect, objectivity, reasonableness, and fairness;
- Conducting all Commission business in a timely manner and in public meetings with transparency;
- Reviewing its actions, recommendations, and procedures periodically to determine whether the Commission has adhered to its Code of Ethics and mission in all respects.

Action Plan

The Commission shall develop an Action Plan annually that outlines specific goals and associated activities for the upcoming year, aligned with the Commission's purposes as stated in the ordinance. The goals and activities outlined in the Action Plan shall directly relate to one or more of the Commission's core purposes as outlined in the ordinance.

Action Plan content: The Action Plan shall include:

- Primary goals for the year
- Specific, measurable activities associated with each goal
- Timelines for completion of each activity
- Responsible parties or subcommittees for each activity
- Resources required for implementation

Development process: The Commission shall dedicate at least one full meeting to Action Plan development and/or deliberation annually. Prior to this meeting, Commissioners shall review the previous year's Action Plan and progress and consider current human rights issues affecting the community. The Commission shall endeavor to engage and collaborate with local stakeholders, including through surveys, public forums, or other means. The Commission may form a temporary Action Plan subcommittee to draft the plan for full Commission review and approval.

Approval and implementation: The Action Plan must be approved by a majority vote of the Commission. Once approved, the Action Plan shall be:

- Published on the Commission's website
- Submitted to the City Council
- Distributed to relevant city departments and community partners

Progress monitoring: The Commission shall review Action Plan progress as a standing agenda item at each regular meeting. Commissioners or subcommittees responsible for specific activities shall provide brief updates on their progress.

Mid-year review and updates: The Commission shall conduct a comprehensive mid-year review of the Action Plan. Based on the review, the Commission may vote to:

- Adjust timelines for existing activities
- Modify or remove activities that are no longer feasible or relevant
- Add new activities in response to emerging issues or opportunities

Any substantive changes to the Action Plan must be approved by a majority vote of the Commission.

Annual Reporting: The Commission shall prepare an annual report summarizing Action Plan achievements, challenges, and lessons learned. This report shall be submitted to the City Council and made publicly available. The Commission may form a temporary subcommittee to draft the annual report for the Chairperson(s) and subsequently the full Commission review and approval.

Continuous improvement: As part of the annual Action Plan development process, the Commission shall reflect on the effectiveness of the previous year's plan and process. Based on this reflection, the Commission may vote to modify these Rules of Procedure to improve the Action Plan's impact and the efficiency of the development process.

Training/onboarding

Each new member of the Commission shall be furnished with orientation materials upon their appointment, to include the Ordinance, Annual Plan, Annual Report, the last two months of minutes, a meeting calendar, and any other pertinent information. An orientation will be held for newly appointed Commissioners to familiarize them with the Ordinance Establishing the Watertown Human Rights Commission; Open Meeting Law; the Commission's purpose, attendance requirements, and meeting dates; these Rules of Procedure; and other relevant information.

Amendment of Rules of Procedure

These Rules of Procedure may be amended, repealed, or suspended following discussion among Commissioners, and new Rules of Procedure adopted, by the Human Rights Commission by majority vote, if a quorum is present. Prior to the adoption of the amendment, each Commissioner shall be given at least 10 days' notice of the date, time, and place of the meeting at which the proposed amendment is to be considered, and the notice shall state that one of the purposes of the meeting is to consider a proposed amendment to the Rules of Procedure and shall contain a copy of the proposed amendment.

Liaisons

The Commission will work with the liaisons from the Watertown Police Department, the Watertown School Department, and the student liaisons chosen by the superintendent to

Commented [CB4]: Per Watertown Home Rule Charter:
On or before March 15 each year, all officers of the City and the boards, committees, commissions and trustees referred to in the preceding section and the Superintendent of the Department of Public Works including report of the City Engineer, shall make a report to the City of the work done and business transacted in their respective department during the fiscal year of the City last preceding. The reports shall be made by filing the original thereof with the City Manager prior to March 15 in the year which it is made and at the same time a copy thereof with the City Clerk for a permanent record. All reports shall be made on paper 8 1/2 inches wide and 11 inches long.

Commented [CB5]: Per Watertown Home Rule Charter:
All boards, officers, commissions, committees, boards of trustees or departments which adopt or promulgate rules or regulations or have heretofore adopted or promulgated the same, shall forthwith file a copy thereof with the City Clerk for a permanent record.

Whenever there are additions to or amendments of any rules and regulations, the board, officer, commissioner, committee, board of trustees or department responsible therefor shall file with the City Clerk a new and complete copy of the rules and regulations in substitution for the copy already on file.

Commented [CB6]: I have paraphrased the ordinance language here.

Still outstanding: Doug to look into whether we can appoint additional liaisons.

understand issues of concern and ideas and help to formulate constructive resolutions, as needed.

Public comments

Responsibilities of Commissioners

Commissioners elected to the Human Rights Commission are expected to attend all Commission meetings, as well as any special meetings. Commissioners are encouraged to join committees of interest or in line with their expertise. Commissioners are expected to contribute to the development of the Action Plan and to assist with the preparation of the annual report.

Commented [CB7]: Outstanding section. To discuss two-minute limit.

Commented [CB8]: I didn't see this included in other ROPs, but have drafted something here for our consideration.