

Council Committee on Rules and Ordinances

Report to City Council

Meetings of February 7, March 13, and June 5, 2023

RE: Creation of a Watertown Human Rights Commission Ordinance

Councilors John G. Gannon, chair; John M. Airasian, vice chair; Lisa J. Feltner, secretary

The Council Rules and Ordinances Committee met in the Richard E. Mastrangelo Council Chamber, in hybrid-virtual meeting format for three discussions on adopting a Human Rights Commission Ordinance for Watertown in 2023 (see attached Minutes).

At the first meeting, on Feb. 7, 2023, present were all committee members. Also present were Councilors Tony Palomba and Vincent Piccirilli, State Representative Steve Owens, and approx. 15 residents. Participating by Zoom were Council President Mark Sideris, Councilors Caroline Bays and Emily Izzo, and approx. 18 residents.

Chair Gannon called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. and announced that the committee would first hear public comments about creating an HRC and what might be included in an ordinance; he wants to hear from community voices as wide as possible. Speakers and comments were received from Rep. Steve Owens, Council President Sideris, Councilors Palomba, Bays, Piccirilli, and residents Nancy Hammett, Susan Falkoff, Louise Enoch, Bevin Croft, Shin Peng, Tiffany York, Chuck Dickinson, Will Twombly, Barbara and Jeremy Ruskin, Nathaniel Harrison, Jennifer Wolfrum, Lisa Capoccia.

All spoke in favor, and no one present was in disfavor of creating or supporting a Human Rights Commission for Watertown. Councilors Airasian and Feltner asked the chair to please disseminate materials soon, as folks are eager to get going with the committee. They would like to receive a copy of the draft Human Rights Commission Ordinance that others have referred to, along with materials for comparison and to give context for how the draft ordinance serves Watertown.

Councilor Feltner made a Motion to Continue the Rules and Ordinances Committee meeting to discuss the framework for the HRC ordinance, and in anticipation of discussing a draft, with a tentative next date of Monday, February 27th at 6:30 p.m. Seconded by Councilor Airasian; 3-0 Approved.

7:33 p.m. Motion to Adjourn by Feltner, Seconded by Airasian; Approved 3-0.

At the second meeting, on Mar. 13, 2023, present were all committee members. Also present were Councilors Caroline Bays, Nicole Gardner, and Vincent Piccirilli; WPD Capt. Dan Unsworth, Capt. John Hanrahan, and Capt. Jamie O'Connor; WPS Superintendent Dede Galdston with Dir. of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Kimberlee Henry; and residents Louise Enoch, Susan Falkoff, Shin Peng, Bevin Croft. Zoom attendees included Councilors Emily Izzo and Tony Palomba; and residents Jacqui Gross, Carol Menton, Rachel Kay, Laurie Garden, Sarah Zoen, Ted Hammett, Jacky van Leeuwen, Lisa Laplante.

Chair Gannon called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m. The committee received a draft HRC ordinance without supporting materials for deliberation, so there was concern expressed about how they would proceed. There was confusion among residents and the working group about what the public process and government requirements are under Open Meeting Law. The committee moved forward by hearing from members of the working group and supporting efforts in drafting an ordinance with guidance from Councilor Gannon. The committee then decided to take a first pass of the working draft presented and we suggested the following changes in:

.03 Appointment of Commissioners and Term (B) (ii) add “subject to confirmation by the city council”; in (vi) add “gender”; (A) is redundant in section .04 Meetings and Officers of the Commission, so this could be deleted, and (B) would become (A).

.04 Duties (J) add “or any marginalized group,”; in (L) add “and Administration”.

.05 Staffing & Funding. We edited this paragraph to read “The Human Rights Commission will recommend staff support and financial resources as needed in its annual report and/or Action Plan to support the commission’s administrative and programmatic activities.”

There were open-ended questions in other parts of the draft ordinance that the committee left open for further deliberation. We also agreed to charge the chair to pursue staff feedback on the draft, in particular from City Manager Proakis to provide thoughts and recommendations re: appointments, staffing and/or funding support for the new HRC as detailed in the draft ordinance.

Motion to Continue for further discussion by Airasian, with anticipation of a meeting with the city manager; the chair may also invite representatives from the MA Human Rights Coalition or other human rights organizations or commission members to attend, and/or provide background materials for the current draft ordinance; Seconded by Feltner; Approved 3-0.

9:09 p.m. Motion to Adjourn by Airasian, Seconded by Feltner; Approved 3-0.

At the third meeting, on June 5, 2023, present were all committee members. Also present were Massachusetts Human Rights Coalition (MAHRC) members Adam LaFrance (Melrose) and Linda Snow Dockser (Reading) via Zoom, City Manager George Proakis, Councilors Nicole Gardner and Vincent Piccirilli, and Susan Falkoff, Louise Enoch, Jane Imai, Shin Peng, Tiffany York (7:19).

Zoom Attendees included Councilors Caroline Bays (7:00) and Tony Palomba (7:20) and residents Gabriel Camacho, Bevin Croft, Rachel Kay, Elodia Thomas, Jacky van Leeuwen, and Sarah Zoen (7:15).

Due to technical difficulties, Chair Gannon called the meeting to order at 6:45 p.m. He announced that this evening’s speakers and presenters would include City Manager Proakis, as well as Adam LaFrance and Linda Snow Dockser, both of whom are members of the MA Human Rights Coalition (MAHRC), which currently includes over 40 active member groups statewide with approximately 35 municipal HRCs. Adam LaFrance previously served on the Melrose HRC for six years, and in Reading before that. His HRC had term limits of two terms, so he has since been serving with the MAHRC (he is also an attorney in legal ethics). Linda Snow Dockser is a member of MAHRC, engages with the Winchester Network for Social Justice, and is a resident of Reading where she also served on School Committee.

Attendees agreed on the importance of adopting human rights principles. Some HRCs have more investigative roles vs. advisory or educational-only roles. It depends somewhat on available resources, but many HRCs have also evolved over the years, and although there has been much discussion about the ability to conduct subpoenas, HRCs have generally moved away from this area due to a lack in legal expertise. HRCs can effectively triage a situation and connect folks with appropriate groups and resources. Attendees expressed that the current draft for Watertown is desirable, as it establishes a role in assessing situations throughout the community about daily lived experiences for residents, workers, and visitors, and it also grants the HRC to have a strong advisory role. Having an open place for safe listening can also address concerns before they become bigger problems.

Participants in the meeting generally agreed that it is preferable to have residents serve as full commissioners, and it would be open to employees who are Watertown residents. Qualifications listed for commissioners are broad and diverse enough to appeal to and include a wide range of candidates with technical expertise or life experience that would benefit an HRC. A goal would be to work across the community, with a variety of groups and city departments, as well as collaborate with other municipalities and human rights and equity organizations. It's a real coming together of all people.

Questions were asked about typical funding for HRCs and/or staff support. It is not usually the case that HRCs have regular funding from municipalities; in fact, they usually rely on donations and grants. Reading, MA recently decided to sunset their Human Relations Advisory Committee (HRAC) with the new hire of a Director of Equity and Social Justice, which is situated in the Reading Public Library Office of Equity and Social Justice. (The Town of Reading is governed by a Select Board, and the HRAC served as an advisory group to them). They didn't want to rely solely on grant writing, since this limits the kind of fundraising that a 501(c)3 can do.

Both Adam LaFrance and Linda Snow Dockser recommend on-going communications with stakeholders in the municipality by all possible means, including working with the mayor or manager, the chief of police, developing a newsletter, working with facilitators in order to hold community conversations to enable discussion of topics in depth, etc. It's important to remember that HRCs are subject to Open Meeting Law, so it's also important to work with the administration and schools to protect both the accuser and accused. Diverse representation is important in creating a comfort level for the public to feel the HRC is approachable, and all conversations do not need to be held in front of a commission. A civil rights officer in the police department or other resources are also helpful to individuals, and the HRC can advocate for more resources, work on data collection and track stories and help implement training. It's important to remember that each municipality is different so they advise creating aspirations but do what you can. Be open about who is serving on the HRC and be sure to have this information published on the city website.

Councilor Feltner read aloud an email from Bevin Croft, which was answered live. Superintendents generally recruit students and it's helpful to let them serve more than one year. The committee added to the draft in .03 - for a term of "at least" one school year- for student liaisons.

Larger cities generally have more resources and funding, but even a \$3000 budget can go a long way. Councilor Airasian asked about success being found in HRCs that focus more on being a general resource for the community. Attendees responded there are positive outcomes when it comes to providing educational programs and reporting out what commissioners have learned. HRC activities vary, and some are more established than others. Community-building and relationship-building are important but assessment advocacy and advising seem to have a lot more room for growth by HRCs. Cambridge and Somerville have done it, and HRCs have shown they are able to evolve.

The committee received feedback that there is an impressive amount of cooperation and specific duties spelled out in Watertown's draft ordinance, which will serve as a good roadmap for what this new HRC. Many other ordinances don't capture this much detail, so it takes longer for those HRC members to build a framework, feel empowered, and get focused.

Chair Gannon reminded participants that the committee has previously heard from the superintendent of schools and our police command staff in support of a Watertown HRC and the ordinance in general. He then invited City Manager George Proakis to speak.

Manager Proakis thanked everyone who has participated to date and recognized the positive discussions and support for creating an HRC during Charter Review. He also lives in Melrose and echoed the sentiment that

Melrose has accomplished a lot on a \$3000 budget. Somerville shared a staff person with one other department instead of having a designated full-time employee. Proakis conducted some of his own research, and he also appreciates what is spelled out in our draft. He feels there is some work to do with our administrative team to figure out how to support a new HRC here, but there are a few related things in this year's budget which are helpful, including the deputy manager and the new community outreach officer. Watertown is conducting a Human Resource study to improve how this department works. Plus, as part of the ARPA funding review, he is asking for a grant writer who could help identify funding for the new HRC. Should the city council move forward on this draft ordinance, which he also supports, the new Residents' Advisory Committee is in place and that will help build a diverse and thoughtful HRC. Manager Proakis feels that item (D) in Duties of the Commission describes the most sensitive role that the HRC will play, as they will need to figure out how to be accessible and make folks feel comfortable working with them. Councilor Gardner wanted to be sure lived experience would be considered in (C) Qualifications; the committee agreed to add "if possible" for more clarity.

There were questions about how much flexibility the HRC will have in handling complaints. Councilor Feltner spoke to the empowering nature of the draft ordinance, which includes establishing HRC rules. She suggested not mandating the HRC annually review their Action Plan; the manager recommends this edit and the committee agreed to change this to "reviewed and updated as the commission deems necessary".

Elodia Thomas questioned why we would include non-resident Watertown employees as commissioners. It was acknowledged that this was left over from a previous draft, but it would be removed. Manager Proakis stated confidence in the ability to find nine qualifying residents to serve; he is discovering there are many interested in volunteering to make positive contributions. It was also noted that an employee would be able to access the HRC as a resource, but we recognize it does not replace the role of a human resources department.

ACTION ITEM: Motion by Councilor John Airasian for the Rules and Ordinances Committee to approve the draft with changes as discussed, and Recommend City Council request the city attorney review the proposed ordinance, and then schedule a First Reading of this proposed new Human Rights Commission Ordinance for adoption. Seconded by Councilor Lisa Feltner; Approved 3-0.

9:09 p.m. Motion to Adjourn by Feltner, seconded by Airasian; Approved 3-0.

Report prepared and respectfully submitted, Lisa Feltner

Attached: Minutes of Feb. 7, Mar. 13, June 5, 2023 with relevant attachments;
Proposed draft of Watertown Human Rights Commission Ordinance for adoption.

Watertown City Council Committee on Rules and Ordinances
Administration Building, 149 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02472
2nd Floor Richard E. Mastrangelo Chamber, and with virtual participation
6:30 p.m. Tuesday, February 7, 2023 Meeting Minutes

AGENDA: Discuss the Adoption of the Human Rights Commission Ordinance

Present: Councilors John Gannon, chair; John Airasian, vice chair; Lisa Feltner, secretary.

Also present: Councilors Tony Palomba and Vincent Piccirilli, State Representative Steve Owens, and approx. 15 residents including Will Twombly, Louise Enoch, Bevin Croft, Shin Peng, Chuck Dickinson.

Zoom attendees: Council President Mark Sideris, Councilors Caroline Bays and Emily Izzo; Eric Kemp-Benedict, Rita Colafella, Michael Schade, Susan Flint, Archy LaSalle, Louise Enoch, Ted Hammett, Nancy Hammett, Dylan Marshall, Chuck Dickinson, Pat Rathbone, Roma and Ben Jerome, Tiffany York, Tia Tilson (7:00), Lisa Capoccia (7:05), Jacky van Leeuwen (7:06), Qibin Ye (7:07), Jeri Bayer (7:28).

Chair Gannon called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. He acknowledged that a new Section 9-7 was adopted with the most recent City Charter changes (adopted November 2021), which stipulates the city council shall adopt an ordinance establishing a Human Rights Commission (HRC). He decided the Rules and Ordinances Committee will first take testimony from the community before drafting an ordinance, and residents will have ample opportunity to provide feedback to draft language before the committee refers an ordinance to the full council, as well as when the city council deliberates this new draft ordinance, before it goes to the city manager for implementation. Rep. Steve Owens recognized that folks in the room seemed to be a little shy to speak, so he wanted to start by thanking the committee in kicking this off, and thanks everyone in attendance, the working group and also members of World in Watertown who have been working on this for quite some time. He feels this is something that is important to the greater community, and he is interested in hearing public comments. Councilor Palomba asked about the anticipated powers of the HRC and what the draft looks like since he hasn't seen it yet, although he is confident that the current council will pass an ordinance. Chair Gannon didn't want this first meeting to be about the ordinance he crafted with the working group or talk about his own research yet. Nancy Hammett applauded the efforts made over twenty years ago, as well as the efforts made by the Watertown Citizens for Black Lives years ago. She understands there are many complicated issues that come up and it can be tough to reach consensus. She wonders if there is a summary on what the difficulties were last time, but she is thrilled we are moving forward and thanks the early advocates and well as current work by the council committee. Councilor Gannon wants to hear from more of the public, to hear from as wide as voices as possible.

Council Feltner read aloud an email from Barbara and Jeremy Ruskin in support of forming an HRC (attached). Councilor Bays asked about what sort of models were being considered because there are so many different HRCs out there, and she would like Council to consider including a path to restorative justice as one of the commission's role. Councilor Gannon explained that he has been in communication for approx. 8 months to a year with a residents' working group on creating an HRC for Watertown. They have looked at every HRC in the state, including Belmont's. Susan Falkoff has been engaged with the working group and they came to a

consensus in writing a draft ordinance with Councilor Gannon. President Sideris expressed positive feelings toward the input from the working group and discussions that were held around the Charter Review for an HRC, and he thinks we need to get to the nuts and bolts of the matter. Councilor Piccirilli said he would like to learn about what has worked well, or not, in other communities. Bevin Croft has been actively engaged in the working group, and she expressed pleasure that we are speaking to the why for an HRC and what they would do: it's not just about responding to complaints, but they found that residents want an ongoing celebration of the diversity in Watertown, and to be able to hold events among different groups in a positive way. It's an exciting opportunity for an HRC to partner with groups such as the schools and public safety officials. A human rights commission needs to work across the city to be sure that all parties are working together, as well as provide resources and be a place to address complaints. We don't think it needs to be an adjudicating body, but it can help people get to the right avenue to address concerns. Shin Peng said he had concerns about moving to Watertown because of an intimidating experience at a local bus stop; but now he is very happy to be involved with this working group because he was looking for a place to go after immigrating here from China many years ago. He and his husband would like to help push this HRC ordinance over the finish line for the API community as soon as possible, because the resident group has already been working on this for two years. Chuck Dickinson expressed enthusiasm for an infusion from a younger generation, that from his observations are getting more involved.

Councilors Airasian and Feltner stated a desire to receive a copy of the draft Human Rights Commission Ordinance that others have referred to, along with materials for comparison and context for how the draft serves Watertown. February 27th is a tentative next meeting date, although that may conflict with upcoming DEI Training.

7:20 p.m. Councilor Feltner made a Motion to Continue the Rules and Ordinances Committee meeting to discuss the framework for the HRC ordinance, and in anticipation of discussing a draft, Seconded by Councilor Airasian; 3-0 Approved.

Councilor Feltner read aloud an email received from Nathaniel Harrison during the meeting (attached).

Louise Enoch said it was extremely gratifying to see that an HRC will be formed and working in Watertown. She also feels it is a very important value to show the younger generation that everyone is valued in our community, and she is thrilled to see that this first meeting is so positive and hopes this continues throughout the process.

Tiffany York would like to move forward quickly is concerned about funding, since she thinks the current budget is way too low to be able to hire staff to handle concerns and complaints and not just hold events.

At 7:30 p.m. Councilor Feltner read aloud from the Zoom Chat comments (attached).

Will Twombly asked if the committee could please post a draft budget along with the draft ordinance. Chair Gannon stated that the draft ordinance will help identify staff needed, but we don't want to put the cart before the horse, as we need to get the ordinance together first.

7:33 p.m. Feltner made a Motion to Adjourn, Seconded by Airasian; Approved 3-0.

Respectfully submitted, Lisa Feltner

Attached: Emails and Chat recognized during meeting:

-----Original Message-----

From: ruskinb00@icloud.com <ruskinb00@icloud.com>

Sent: Tuesday, February 7, 2023 2:47 PM

To: Gannon, John <jgannon@watertown-ma.gov>; John Airasian <jairasian@watertown-ma.gov>; Feltner, Lisa <lfeltner@watertown-ma.gov>

Subject: Human Rights Commission

John, John, and Lisa,

We support you in forming a Human Rights Commission in Watertown. It will be an important addition to building community and leadership here.

Sincerely,

Barbara and Jeremy Ruskin

Spring Street

From: harrysson@aol.com <harrysson@aol.com>

Sent: Tuesday, February 7, 2023 7:15 PM

To: Feltner, Lisa <lfeltner@watertown-ma.gov>

Subject: Reparations

Lisa,

Would the human rights commission be an appropriate vehicle for Watertown to consider the issue of reparations?

Nathaniel Harrison

106 Franklin Street

On February 7, Councilor Feltner read aloud from the Zoom Chat comments at 7:30 p.m.

-from Jennifer Wolfrum: Hi, I'm sorry I'm so late to this hearing and meeting. I'm showing up to support this important move to create a Human Rights Commission for Watertown. Thanks to everyone who supports this effort.

-from Lisa Capocia: I'm sorry I'd stay, but I echo comments encouraging you to rely on the working group to help guide this process. They have worked week after week for months and have been extremely thorough and thoughtful. We are so fortunate they volunteered their time doing this for the community.

Watertown City Council Committee on Rules and Ordinances
Administration Building, 149 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02472
2nd Floor Richard E. Mastrangelo Chamber, and with virtual participation
6:30 p.m. Monday, March 13, 2023 Meeting Minutes

AGENDA: Continue Discussion on Adoption of Human Rights Commission Ordinance

Present: Councilors John Gannon, chair; John Airasian, vice chair; Lisa Feltner, secretary.

Also present: Councilors Caroline Bays, Nicole Gardner, and Vincent Piccirilli; WPD Capt. Dan Unsworth, Capt. Justin Hanrahan, and Lt. Jamie O'Connor; WPS Superintendent Dede Galdston, Dir. of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Kimberlee Henry; residents Susan Falkoff, Louise Enoch, Shin Peng, Bevin Croft, and others.

Zoom attendees: Councilors Emily Izzo and Tony Palomba; residents Jacqui Gross, Carol Menton, Rachel Kay, Laurie Garden, Sarah Zoen, Ted Hammett, Jacky van Leeuwen, Lisa Laplante (7:50).

Chair Gannon called the continued committee meeting to order at 6:36 p.m. Councilor Feltner reminded attendees that we're not deciding whether to create an HRC since this decision was unanimously adopted by the Council, all of whom served on the Charter Review Commission and it was approved by the voters with the recent Charter changes. She did express some concern about the committee process because it is missing context about the recently received draft HRC ordinance, which would also benefit public understanding. Councilor Gannon stated he considers this is an early meeting in the process, and he is not presenting the draft as a take-it or leave-it. He just put a resident working group's ideas together in a draft. Councilor Airasian also expressed some disappointment since it was clear at the first committee meeting that people had seen a draft but we hadn't yet. Gannon wanted to recognize that a working group has been meeting very diligently to discuss what a Watertown Human Rights Commission Ordinance might look like, and he can steer us through the mechanics.

Louise Enoch shared a summary of what a group of residents have been doing. She was involved in a panel at the library, which collaborated with Lexington, Belmont, Melrose and included some residents with the Watertown group for Peace, Justice, and the Environment. The Charter Review process included input from residents who were interested. After the Charter changes were approved, we did research, met with other commissions in other towns, and some of us attended organization meetings by the Massachusetts Human Rights Coalition. And then we tried to think about issues and debate them and come up with recommendations, including questions about whether they handle litigation, if they have liaisons, etc.

Councilor Airasian felt it would be helpful for the committee to also receive guidance from Watertown staff.

Susan Falkoff and others expressed concern about meeting the June 30, 2023 deadline in the city charter to create the HRC ordinance and is worried the committee will negate all the work that has been done so far.

Shin Peng shared that the working group, which he joined in 2021, wants to be open and thought they already held public meetings since they distributed materials at the Faire on the Square, the Farmers' Market and had

neighborhood meetings, so just because city officials weren't there, it doesn't mean we're lacking transparency. We also thought this would be more efficient. Councilor Feltner said she appreciates resident groups' efforts to "hand us the football", but there are specific requirements we need to meet under state law for meetings to be considered open, public and accessible to all. It can be confusing to residents, but government officials do strive to work together. The committee also welcomed hearing from staff who were in attendance.

WPS Superintendent Dede Galdston, along with Dr. Henry will fully support the HRC, and she stated they will be there as an active member. Dr. Galdston advocated for some sort of feedback loop and wonders how it will work to have the superintendent and police department serving as liaisons. She feels Watertown has a really great handle on some of these issues already through efforts by the Council on Aging, the Commission on Disability and others. Councilor Airasian envisions other groups that could be involved as liaisons, such as the Watertown Housing Authority; Councilor Gardner mentioned the Wayside Multi-Service Center. Councilor Piccirilli pointed to the draft ordinance enabling the HRC to hear from department heads or their designee at HRC meetings, and this is generally true for other boards and commissions from time to time; so, he's not sure the superintendent will need to attend every monthly meeting.

Councilor Palomba thought there was a good turnout at the first committee meeting, as well as a lot of engagement by the working group, so he feels the process has been good. He thinks the one missing thing in the draft is how many commissioners would be "of the city" vs. how many would be residents.

Councilor Feltner asked to hear from the police department, and Councilor Airasian wondered if there was some kind of staff report for input.

WPD Capt. Dan Unsworth expressed thanks for letting them take a look at this draft ordinance before this evening, and the police department recognizes this HRC would be very healthy for the community. Speaking to some of Superintendent Galdston's concerns, working across WPS, the health services, the clergy, the business community, the boys and girls club, it is a city-wide challenge. We'd ideally like to see a little more clarity and definition in the document to understand better what is expected of WPD. For example, the police are specifically empowered with the Licensing Board, so more definition of responsibilities would be helpful.

Councilor Bays and others asked about references to materials used by advocates for drafting the HRC ordinance; Councilor Gannon stated that he looked at every single HRC ordinance in the state, so each Councilor can do that on their own.

Bevin Croft shared that she and Louise Enoch attended other human rights groups once a month, generally on Fridays, such as in Dedham, Belmont, Medford, and with Duxbury for All and a couple of organizations in Wayland, and the Hingham Unity Council.

The Committee proceeded to review the draft HRC ordinance for Watertown. Councilor Feltner appreciated the broadness in the statement of purpose, providing flexibility for a new HRC. Council Gannon shared that the subpoena powers granted in Somerville caused some problems and thought some basics, such as including WPS and WPD would help the HRC get started more quickly in addressing concerns.

It was noted we could delete (A) in .03 Appointment of Commissioners and Term, because it is also covered in .04 (A) Meetings.

Discussion ensued about whether employees should be commissioners, such as from WPS, WPD, and staff such as a community engagement officer. Capt. Justin Hanrahan spoke in favor of having police representation on the commission; he anticipates many of the issues before the HRC, such as threats and harassment would directly involve WPD so the connection would be helpful. Councilor Airasian prefers that employees serve on the HRC.

Bevin Croft learned in their conversations with other HRCs, that some of the most successful ones considered excellent partnerships with the police to be a hallmark of their success. Based on the working group's research across communities, engagement occurring in schools and police departments seemed to be the most successful; they also wondered about involvement with the library, but it does vary by municipality. Louise Enoch said they settled on having liaison roles for WPS and WPD, speaking to Councilor Feltner's point about staff duties and job descriptions, and realistic expectations for students. We were also concerned that if you include two or three employees, then it feels like too much of a reduction in the number of residents on the HRC. However, Councilor Airasian recognized that it can be difficult to fill and maintain resident boards -there are currently about 60 openings for appointments on paper and you want to be able to reach quorum each month.

Lisa Laplante shared that this was the first time she'd seen the draft, but she wondered about including "character" under (C) Qualifications for commissioners. She thinks this could be helpful in looking for the type of person we'd be looking to recruit, including for youth, instead of just looking at the type of someone's background. The committee decided this would probably be too subjective to include as a qualification on paper and the current list is broad and doesn't limit it to someone's employment or technical expertise.

Councilor Feltner expressed concern about mandating the HRC update their Action Plan every year as specified in .04 Duties (B). It seems unrealistic, and they could probably decide as necessary. Councilor Gardner feels strongly this should be mandated and resident Sarah Zoen stated that the Action Plan speaks to transparency; their work plan should be published in the public domain, with a purpose to embed those human rights principles and should happen every year.

Feltner also noted that Duties (D) reads as very important, its text speaks to Purpose, but it also seems sensitive and she wonders what it means in practical terms. Lisa Laplante stated that this is a paragraph she really wanted to weigh in on, as a human rights lawyer. The ability to investigate complaints and support enforcement is the real reason why I think a municipality should have a human rights commission. The committee agreed.

Proceeding to review .04 Duties, the committee added "or any marginalized group," to (J); and added "and Administration" to (L).

It was agreed that section .05 Staffing and Funding would serve as a baseline for the new HRC, and the commission could scale up as needed with support from Administration and City Council. The committee changed the wording for this section to read: The Human Rights Commission will recommend staff support and financial resources as needed in its annual report and/or Action Plan in order to support the commission's administrative and programmatic activities.

We also agreed to charge the chair to pursue staff feedback on the draft. Preferably, we'd like City Manager Proakis to provide thoughts and recommendations re: appointments, staffing and/or funding support for the new HRC as detailed in the draft ordinance.

Motion to Continue for further discussion by Airasian, with anticipation of a meeting with the manager; the chair may also invite representatives from the MA Human Rights Coalition or other human rights organizations or commission members to attend, and/or provide background materials for the current draft ordinance; Seconded by Feltner; Approved 3-0.

9:09 p.m. Motion to Adjourn by Airasian, Seconded by Feltner; Approved 3-0.

Respectfully submitted, Lisa Feltner

Attached: Initial Draft Watertown Human Rights Commission Ordinance

Watertown City Council Committee on Rules and Ordinances

Administration Building, 149 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02472

2nd Floor Richard E. Mastrangelo Chamber, and with virtual participation

6:30 p.m. Monday, June 5, 2023 Meeting Minutes

AGENDA: Continue Discussion on Adoption of Human Rights Commission Ordinance

Present: Councilors John Gannon, chair; John Airasian, vice chair; Lisa Feltner, secretary.

Also present: Massachusetts Human Rights Coalition (MAHRC) members Adam LaFrance (Melrose) and Linda Snow Dockser (Reading) via Zoom, City Manager George Proakis, Councilors Nicole Gardner and Vincent Piccirilli, and Susan Falkoff, Louise Enoch, Jane Imai, Shin Peng, Tiffany York (7:19).

Zoom Attendees: Gabriel Camacho, Bevin Croft, Rachel Kay, Elodia Thomas, Jacky van Leeuwen, Councilors Caroline Bays (7:00) and Tony Palomba (7:20), and Sarah Zoen (7:15).

Due to technical difficulties, Chair Gannon called the continued meeting to order at 6:45 p.m. He announced that this evening speakers and presenters would include City Manager Proakis, and Adam LaFrance and Linda Snow Dockser, both of whom are members of the MA Human Rights Coalition, which currently includes over 40 active member groups statewide and approximately 35 municipal HRCs. Adam LaFrance previously served in the Melrose HRC for six years, and in Reading before that. His HRC had term limits of two terms, so he has since been serving with the MAHRC (he is also an attorney in legal ethics). Linda Snow Dockser is a member of MAHRC, engages with the Winchester Network for Social Justice, and is a resident of Reading where she also served on School Committee.

Attendees agreed on the importance of adopting human rights principles. Some HRCs have more investigative roles vs. advisory or educational-only roles. It depends somewhat on available resources, but many HRCs have also evolved over the years, and although there has been much discussion about the ability to conduct subpoenas, HRCs have generally moved away from this area due to a lack in legal expertise. HRCs can effectively triage a situation and connect folks with appropriate groups and resources. Attendees expressed that the current draft for Watertown is desirable, as it establishes a role in assessing situations throughout the community about daily lived experiences for residents, workers, and visitors. It also grants the HRC to have a strong advisory role. An investigative role takes more time and funding, and it also requires trust-building in the community, but referrals to departments or other agencies and resources can be quite helpful. Having an open place for safe listening can also address concerns before they become bigger problems.

Participants in the meeting generally agreed that it is preferable to have residents serve as full commissioners, and to also welcome employees who are Watertown residents. Qualifications for commissioners are broad and diverse enough to appeal to and include a wide range of candidates with technical expertise or life experience that would benefit an HRC. One goal would be to work across the community, with a variety of groups and city departments -such as churches, the arts, museums, libraries, businesses, Rotary, schools, educational organizations, sports, boys and girls clubs, public safety, health- as well as collaborate with other municipalities and human rights and equity organizations. It's a real coming together of all people.

Louise Enoch expressed thanks to Adam and Linda for their involvement and stated that the MAHRC has helped to educate and support the Watertown resident working group, and it has also been a help to Watertown individuals. Questions were asked about typical funding for HRCs and/or staff support. It is not usually the case

that HRCs have regular funding from municipalities; in fact, they usually rely on donations and grants. Reading recently decided to sunset their Human Relations Advisory Committee (HRAC) with the new hire of a Director of Equity and Social Justice, which is situated in the Reading Public Library Office of Equity and Social Justice. (The Town of Reading is governed by a Select Board, and the HRAC served as an advisory group to them). They didn't want to rely solely on grant writing, since this limits the kind of fundraising that a 501(c)3 can do.

Both Adam LaFrance and Linda Snow Dockser recommend on-going communications with stakeholders in the municipality by all possible means, including working with the mayor or manager, the chief of police, developing a newsletter, working with facilitators in order to hold community conversations to enable discussion of topics in depth, etc. It's important to remember that HRCs are subject to Open Meeting Law, so it's also important to work with the administration and schools to protect both the accuser and accused. Diverse representation is important in creating a comfort level for the public to feel the HRC is approachable, and all conversations do not need to be held in front of a commission. A civil rights officer in the police department or other resources are also helpful to individuals, and the HRC can advocate for more resources, work on data collection and track stories, help implement training. It's important to get the whole community involved and remember that each municipality is different so you have your aspirations, but you do what you can. Be open about who is serving on the HRC and be sure to have this information published on the city website.

Councilor Feltner read aloud email questions from Bevin Croft. Superintendents generally recruit students and it's helpful to let them serve more than one year; Committee added "at least one school year" to the draft.

Larger cities generally have more resources and funding, so it depends on scale, but even a \$3000 budget can go a long way. Councilor Airasian asked about success being found in HRCs that focus more on being a general resource for the community. Attendees responded there are positive outcomes when it comes to providing educational program and reporting out what they've learned. HRC activities vary, and some are more established than others. Community-building and relationship-building are important but assessment advocacy and advising seem to have a lot more room for growth by HRCs. Cambridge and Somerville have done it, and HRCs have shown they are able to evolve.

Tiffany York spoke as a member of Watertown Community for Black Lives, where she attended a Belmont Human Rights Commission session that included their chief of police and schools' superintendent, to address a case of hate mail, and she found the experience to be really amazing.

The committee received feedback that there is an impressive amount of cooperation and specific duties spelled out in Watertown's draft ordinance, which will serve as a good roadmap for what this new HRC. Many other ordinances don't capture this much detail, so it takes longer for those HRC members to build a framework, feel empowered, and get focused.

The discussion also emphasized the importance of networking and working with other communities, which can serve as inspiration and as role models. Human rights groups' efforts are becoming a more localized effort across the U.S. including internationally.

Chair Gannon reminded participants that the committee has previously heard from the superintendent of schools and our police command staff. He then invited City Manager George Proakis to speak.

Manager Proakis thanked everyone who has participated to date and recognized the positive discussions and support for creating an HRC during Charter Review. He also lives in Melrose and echoed the sentiment that Melrose has accomplished a lot on a \$3000 budget. Somerville shared a staff person with one other department instead of having a designated full-time employee. Proakis conducted some of his own research, and he also

appreciates what is spelled out in our draft. He feels there is some work to do with our administrative team to figure out how to support a new HRC here, but there are a few related things in this year's budget which are helpful, including the deputy manager and the new community outreach officer. Watertown is conducting a Human Resource study to improve how this department works. Plus, as part of the ARPA funding review, he is asking for a grant writer who could help identify funding for the new HRC. Should the city council move forward on this draft ordinance, which he also supports, the new Residents' Advisory Committee is in place and that will help build a diverse and thoughtful HRC. Manager Proakis feels that item (D) in Duties of the Commission describes the most sensitive role that the HRC will play, as they will need to figure out how to be accessible and make folks feel comfortable working with them. Councilor Gardner wanted to be sure lived experience would be considered in (C) Qualifications; the committee agreed to add "if possible" for more clarity.

There were questions about how much flexibility the HRC will have in handling complaints. Councilor Feltner spoke to the empowering nature of the draft ordinance, which includes establishing HRC rules. She suggested not mandating the HRC annually review their Action Plan; the manager recommends this edit and the committee agreed to change this to "reviewed and updated as the commission deems necessary".

Councilor Piccirilli welcomed the very helpful information shared by guests at this meeting, which supports previous public discussions and conversations he has had with individuals from the resident working group.

Elodia Thomas questioned why we would include non-resident Watertown employees as commissioners. It was acknowledged that this was left over from a previous draft, but it would be removed. Manager Proakis stated confidence in the ability to find nine qualifying residents to serve; he is discovering there are many interested in volunteering to make positive contributions. It was also noted that an employee would be able to access the HRC as a resource, but we recognize it does not replace the role of a human resources department.

MOTION by Councilor John Airasian for the Rules and Ordinances Committee to approve the draft with changes as discussed, and Recommend City Council request the city attorney review the proposed ordinance, and then schedule a First Reading of this proposed new Human Rights Commission Ordinance for adoption. Seconded by Councilor Lisa Feltner. Approved 3-0.

9:09 p.m. Motion to Adjourn by Feltner, seconded by Airasian; Approved 3-0.

Respectfully submitted, Lisa Feltner

Attached: Updated draft Watertown Human Rights Committee Ordinance; Email recognized during meeting.

From: Bevin Croft <bevincroft@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 5, 2023 7:12 PM
To: Feltner, Lisa <lfeltner@watertown-ma.gov>
Subject: questions for meeting

Hello Lisa! I put these questions in chat but not sure if that's the appropriate place. Including them here instead:

Given the experiences of cities the size of Watertown, and given the activities described in the draft ordinance, what might be the level of resources (staffing and funding) for the HRC to function well?

Have any communities successfully recruited and supported student members or liaisons, and if so what strategies did they use?

Bevin Croft
11 Wilmot Street