

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes

April 14, 2025

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 PM.

2. Roll Call

Present were Corey Barr, Elizabeth Brusie, Sarah Zoen (by zoom), Mel Poindexter, Xin Peng, Susan Musinsky, Liz Aeschlimann, and Gabriel Camacho (by zoom). Lisa Laplante arrived shortly after the roll was called.

3. Acceptance of Minutes

a. Minutes 3.13.25

Sarah Zoen made a motion, seconded by Corey Barr, to approve the minutes. The Commission voted eight to zero to approve the motion.

4. Subcommittee Reports

a. Action Plan Subcommittee

Sarah Zoen reported that the committee has discussed criteria for the Human Rights Commission's involvement in events. This includes events such as Juneteenth, Human Rights Day, and Indigenous People's Day. The Commission considered the degree to which it should be involved in those and other events.

b. Rules Subcommittee

Corey Barr reported that the Committee is working on its final versions of the rules of procedure and complaint procedure based on feedback from the city attorney. They will have final drafts at the next HRC meeting.

c. Immigrant Rights Subcommittee

Corey Barr reported on the committee's discussion on how to respond to events which may call for a more prompt response than can be doable by the full commission. She described discussions with other Human Rights Commissioners across the Commonwealth who have shared that, essentially, none have yet figured out best practice for this. The Commission discussed the possibility of a statement that can be on stand-by for one Commissioner who would have discretion to share the statement in response to potential events.

5. Discussion

a. Community Resources to Share

The Commission discussed having this as part of its action plan. This would be a list of resources which the commission can use to refer residents who are in need of resources beyond what the commission can provide.

b. Support for LGBTQIA+ Community

Xin Peng suggested that the Human Rights Commission can be involved in advocating for policies to help LGBTQIA+ residents feel safer in Watertown. He described how he

has been working on a statement declaring that Watertown is a sanctuary city for LGBTQIA+ individuals. The Commission also discussed the budget request from Watertown Pride and expressed support. The request was received the day prior and will be formally voted on at the next meeting.

c. Support for Non-Conventional Family Structure & Relationships

Xin Peng noted that a number of other cities and towns across the United States have considered this issue and how they can be helpful. He described how this can also be a factor in housing discrimination.

d. Safe Space Campaign

Xin Peng shared that the stickers are being printed and will be distributed to Watertown businesses who may be interested. It was suggested that the student liaisons could potentially be involved in this effort. Student Liaison Maisie Morgan said that she thinks this is a great idea and that she would be happy to be involved.

e. Future Events Potentially Involving the Commission

The Commission decided that it had largely covered this during the Action Plan Subcommittee report.

6. Municipal Policy Analyst's Report

a. Fair Housing Event April 30th

Doug Newton shared that there will be a zoom webinar on Watertown's response to the issue of housing discrimination as highlighted in a recent report on April 30th at 6:00 PM in collaboration with the Affordable Housing Trust. He noted that Human Rights Commissioner Elizabeth Brusie will be serving as a co-moderator.

7. Public Comment

Several residents shared strong support for Watertown declaring itself a sanctuary city for LGBTQIA+ residents. They emphasized that other cities and towns have already done this and Watertown can as well. It was shared that this resolution is especially relevant in a time in which trans individuals and communities are facing attacks.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:23 PM.