

Owatonna Human Rights Commission
Minutes

The Owatonna Human Rights Commission (OHRC) met on Tuesday, June 9, 2020 in a virtual meeting using Microsoft TEAMS. The meeting was accessed by Call-in Number 507-242-3225 and Conference ID 827 311 366#. Commission Chairman Gunderson called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Participating were Commissioners Ethan Cords, David Emanuelson, Susie Effertz, Jamie Vanoosbree, Ryan Gillespie, Jim Gunderson, and John Worden; City Administrator Kris Busse and Administrative Specialist Jeanette Clawson. Commissioner David Emanuelson was unable to attend.

Commissioner Gunderson welcomed everyone to the meeting. City Administrator Busse read the Virtual Meeting Declaration and Minutes of the May 12, 2020 OHRC Meeting were reviewed. Commissioner Cords made a motion for approval; Commissioner Worden seconded the motion. With a roll call vote, voting aye were Commissioners Cords, Effertz, Vanoosbree, Worden, Gillespie and Gunderson, the motion carried.

During Commissioner Comments, Commissioner Vanoosbree commented she and Commissioner Gunderson attended the protests in Owatonna against racial discrimination and police brutality on Sunday, May 31st. She started in the downtown area and then went to Jaycee Park; she thought these protests were peaceful and well represented with all demographics present. Her son went on to the protest at the Law Enforcement Center (LEC) and was impressed with the back and forth exchanges; police officers first appeared in riot gear but ended by taking a knee in solidarity against the killing of George Floyd. She questioned what the next step should be to move forward regarding institutional racism and asked what the City does to recruit and employ people of color. City Administrator Busse responded everyone is encouraged to apply for positions and we work with the League in reaching out specifically to diverse groups. Lynn Gorski, Human Resource Director for the City will be invited to the next OHRC meeting to further discuss the City's recruiting and employment practices.

Commissioner Gillespie commented a lack of diversity amongst OHRC members was also observed during the open forum held this spring at the school. She believes there is a need to develop leaders in minority communities to overcome their lack of confidence and fear to participate. City Administrator Busse said Mayor Kuntz is always looking for people wanting to serve on various boards and commissions; she and Council Member Raney spoke to a young minority gentleman during the protest who expressed an interest in becoming more involved. Commissioner Cords suggested holding a training seminar with minority groups and Mayor Kuntz to encourage their participation within the community. Commissioner Gunderson also thought this would be a good way to encourage participation and would offer an opportunity for individuals to express interest in becoming involved. Commissioner Worden suggested asking the school to also participate. Chairman Gunderson asked Commissioner Cords to organize a meeting for this and report at the next meeting.

Commissioner Gunderson commented the protest on May 31st started with 25 people but grew to approximately 125. He thought there was positive response seen from people driving by. He felt this protest was very well planned, peaceful, and brought community awareness to these injustices. He also attended the protest on Saturday, June 6th with 25-30 people attending and last Thursday attended a meeting at the LEC with Commissioner Cords, Percy Mayer (protest organizer), City Administrator Busse, Council Member Raney, Police Chief Hiller, Police Captain Mundale, Joe Heegard, and Jazzy Guerra to discuss police training, implicit bias and community engagement opportunities. He thought this meeting was informative and went well, everyone felt the police handled the first protest well, but Percy questioned if they were sincere while kneeling. Protestors were upset when the police arrived in riot gear and some positioned on the building rooftop; Chief Hiller explained the reason why this happened.

Commissioner Gunderson believes the protestors want to be heard and after the meeting the department posted a sign denouncing racism. There was quite a bit of damage and graffiti to City property and parks during these protests.

Commissioner Gillespie expressed concern about the recent protests; she saw social media posts which included a call to action with dialogue saying they were upset with the State of Emergency within Steele County. Several of the comments were agitating, and she believes there is a need to encourage conversations and end the conflict. City Administrator Busse commented Chief Hiller participates in community engagements on a regular basis. Commissioner Worden commented he felt there was a lot of fear being generated and felt the outcome from the recent protest was good and agreed the narratives prior to and after the event should not have been made to agitate the community.

Commissioner Vanoosbree advised the Better Together Committee is planning a community wide book club to encourage open discussions on some difficult racial topics. Participants would read a book and then meet in small groups for open discussion. They are currently working on the logistics to implement this project and hope to offer this to the community by mid-July. Commissioner Gillespie suggested reading "The New Jim Crow" by Michelle Alexander, this book is currently sold out on Amazon but might be available from the public library or the local bookstore. Commissioner Worden suggested using the Hoopla Digital Library which offers a large variety of books.

During Old Business, comments regarding the first edition of the OHRC Newsletter were reviewed. Commissioner Effertz said she received a suggestion to include articles highlighting individual members of the OHRC in future editions. Everyone thought the newsletter was done well and offers a good way to connect with community members. Commissioner Effertz said the next edition will include an interview with a Somali gentleman and his brother and she hopes the article will eliminate misconceptions.

During New Business, draft copy of the letter to the editor to promote cultural diversity was reviewed. The OHRC believes action is vital after the recent protest and value inclusion and justice for all cultures and races. We need to understand and dismantle systemic racism, and that can begin now by listening, learning, and working together. After review, Commissioner Vanoosbree made a motion approving the final draft; Commissioner Effertz seconded the motion and all members voted aye in approval. Commissioner Gunderson will forward the statement to the Owatonna Peoples Press.

Commissioner Gunderson suggested the OHRC message on the LED billboard be changed. Consideration was given to show the former message, "Teach Peace" to encourage peace dialogue. Several possible statements were discussed, and all agreed the statement "End Racism Now" be shown in black letters on a white background; City Administrator Busse will contact the vendor with this request.

Commissioner Cords said he was in Minneapolis during the last several weeks to help protect property from rioters and looters. The protests regarding the death of George Floyd and police brutality started peacefully but got progressively worse on each side. There was no police presence for about a week and local people were expected to control the area until the National Guard was eventually called in. More than 1,000 businesses were damaged, there is an estimated \$500 million dollars in damages. Residents of Minneapolis can use basic supplies as many local grocery stores and pharmacies are closed and destroyed.

At 6:34 pm, Commissioner Worden made a motion to adjourn, Commissioner Vanoosbree seconded the motion. With a roll call vote, Commissioners Effertz, Gillespie, Gunderson, Vanoosbree, Worden and Cords voted aye, and the meeting was adjourned.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, July 14th; this will be an in-person meeting in a larger room, information will be sent when meeting details confirmed.