

## **Duluth Human Rights Commission**

Wednesday, January 8th 2024 @ 5:30 p.m.

Duluth City Hall Room 155

*Public comment will be taken in person. Individuals may also e-mail or mail comments to the Commission prior to the meeting; see contact information at the bottom of the minutes for more information*

1. Call to Order
  - a. Meeting called to order at 5:34 p.m.
  - b. Commissioners present: Chair Dr. Marsha Lue, Vice Chair Dr. Nomi Ostrander, Tyra Jaramillo-Kraemer, Secretary Jen Harris
  - c. Commissioners absent: Frances Wittenburg
  - d. Guests: City Staff - Human Rights Assistant, Laura Laaksonen, Community members - Kathleen Spencer, Jack Aughey, Jacklyn Janeksela, Amber Anne Weiss
2. Acceptance of October meeting minutes - October 9th, 2024
  - a. No changes; Vice Chair Ostrander motioned to approve the minutes; Commissioner Jaramillo-Kraemer seconded; unanimously approved
3. Public Comments
  - a. Former Goodwill employees attended the meeting to publicly speak about concerns about mistreatment of colleagues. Speaking about these grievances, Jacklyn spoke to the commission regarding employees being treated unfairly and mentioned that there have been instances of managers mocking employees behind their backs, humiliation of vulnerable adults, and disregard of protected classes such as age and race within the workplace. Further, it was stated that many employees are terrified to speak up for fear of retaliation
    - i. Jacklyn handed Laura Laaksonen a packet of additional information as well as contact information; Laura asked Jacklyn how many employees are at Goodwill and Jacklyn let the commission know that over 50 employees work there
    - ii. Laura asked if there are multiple cases regarding mistreatment and there is a waiting period currently regarding intake and an interview with the EEOC and the State Human Rights office to move the process forward; the guests providing the public comment attended the commission meeting to bring the issue to a public forum
    - iii. Community member Kathleen Spencer stated that she heard stories of mistreatment back when she retired in and around 2007

- iv. Laura Laaksonen iterated that a case cannot be filed with the Duluth Human Rights Commission (HRC) if filing with the State, but she will check with the City Attorney as to what the commission's role could be and if we could send a letter; Commissioner Jaramillo-Kraemer said that the HRC can send a letter of support to the vulnerable adult community regarding treatment
- v. It was stated by Laura Laaksonen that if a case is filed, it is private information and if community members come to our public meetings to speak, it is public information

#### 4. Committee Reports

##### a. Executive Team update

- i. Discussion started by Chair Lue regarding the Commission's Annual Work Plan and that the Plan will need to be voted on and dated with today's meeting date. She let the commission know that a Human Rights and Equity Officer will start in February 2025
- ii. Vice Chair Ostrander reiterated that there is a constant need for more commissioners
- iii. Vice Chair Ostrander wanted to bring attention to the Human Rights Award in which it was assumed that updates were going to be given regarding the award on the City's social media
  - 1. The commission had only received 2 applications, but we have not received updates or further submissions that we are aware of
  - 2. Vice Chair Ostrander wonders if the Human Rights Award will be revisited and promoted again publicly once the new Human Rights and Equity Officer for the City is in place
- iv. Secretary Harris brought up the idea of a Coloring with the Commission community event, previously thought of the week after the Presidential election of Donald Trump and his 2nd term
  - 1. This event is inspired by Vice Chair Ostrander after she gathered coloring books, markers, and crayons the day after the Presidential election and posted an invitation to her contacts via social media to arrive at Dovetail Cafe & Marketplace to be with one another in a community space
  - 2. The community event is intended to bring people together with the emphasis that all are welcome, especially for those in the community that are struggling with an uncertain time federally and locally
  - 3. Secretary Harris will send the commission an email regarding dates for a near-future event along with a flyer that is ready for promotion

##### b. Findings Committee update

- i. A woman of color living in Section 8 housing feels targeted by her property manager. He uses inappropriate and unprofessional comments

and she feels targeted about things that happen in common areas and outdoor spaces. We referred the woman to the State for further help and resources. Conversations took place regarding the new Tenants Union in Duluth

- ii. A person who works at a store is Muslim and feels targeted by their employer due to their race. Another Muslim employee has also received poor treatment, for instance, favoring other people for promotions, being given the lowest-level work assignments. Feeling this way, it was brought up to managers at the business and HR has not been helpful. It is stated that a complaint is already opened with the state, so this was brought up to the Duluth Human Rights Commission for us to become aware. The person noted that this is a systemic issue that they see in Duluth

- c. Communications update

- i. There is nothing to comment at this time

- 5. Old Business

- a. Chair Lue stated that we discussed the Human Rights Award during the Executive Team update and no further old business is for discussion at this time

- 6. 2025 Work Plan

- a. Chair Lue asked if there are any thoughts to the plan and if we need to vote on the passage of it. Vice Chair Ostrander made a motion to approve the plan; Secretary Harris seconded; 2025 Work Plan passes unanimously; we will update the document with today's date (January 8th, 2025) and send it to Human Rights Assistant, Laura Laaksonen

- 7. Human Rights Office Report

- a. Laura Laaksonen reported that there are a couple of updates regarding the encampment on Priley Circle at City Hall and what has been happening since the encampment was removed in summer of 2024. These questions were previously asked by the Human Rights Commission.
    - i. The encampment was removed and it was said by DPD that the encampment was deemed a health and safety issue; it was reiterated that there were two arrests for obstruction that day in which one person was arrested for hanging on to belongings while they were being removed and another was screaming profanities; belongings were discarded per city ordinance
    - ii. As of Mid-November 2024, a few citations under the new public safety ordinances were given, but no instances of jail time. Some fines and tickets were for \$200 and it was stated that the tickets with a fine were given to those repeating behavior
    - iii. A warming shelter opened on November 7th 2024 for people to stay the night as Safe Bay closed around that time

- b. Chair Lue asked how citizens are paying their fines and whether they are repeat offenders or not. If they are unable to get into housing, have a secure job, what kind of assistance is out there for those needing to pay fines?
  - i. Vice Chair Ostrander wanted to know how many outstanding fines there are after being ticketed and if the fines get absorbed; Secretary Harris asked if fines cannot get paid, what happens? Kathleen Spencer said if unpaid tickets are accumulated, a person ends up in jail
  - ii. Chair Lue inquired if there is legal help and if there are any resources with getting out of jail if tickets are unpaid and a citizen ends up in jail; Commissioner Jaramillo-Kraemer said that Justice North is a good resource; Vice Chair Ostrander says that this is a structural issue and if people cannot find housing, then nothing changes; Chair Lue wonders if there are known demographics of those getting fines
  - iii. Laura Laaksonen said that we can have further discussions as a commission and said that Duluth Police Department is at Citizens Review Board meetings; Vice Chair Ostrander asked when CRB meetings take place and they take place every month on the 4th Wednesday with the next meeting being on January 22nd
- c. Laura Laaksonen fielded a question regarding the crisis response team and she let the commission know that the City Council passed a resolution continuing funding for up to 1 year with no commitment after that (\$600,000 for 2025) and that nobody knows what will happen after that in 2026 regarding the crisis response team or any word on funding
  - i. Laura Laaksonen said that these conversations need to happen before October 2025; Vice Chair Ostrander says that the focus should be on local help with a change in the federal administration
- d. An update regarding our need for Human Rights commissioners
  - i. Laura Laaksonen has repeatedly brought this up with people in the administration and stated that she said that we need new commissioners with no success to get any new persons on the Council agenda. The administration has said John Dukich is now the contact person for commission appointments but he has not provided any update or timeline for getting new commissioners on board. The HRC discussed sending a letter to Mayor Reinert noting the need as we will be down to only a few members. It is a statutory obligation to having a certain amount of commissioners to be in a fully functional role; Vice Chair Ostrander will draft a letter
  - ii. Commissioner Jaramillo-Kraemer asked what is the minimum number needed to conduct business effectively and at what point is the commission deemed ineffective? We need a minimum of 5 commissioners as it does not work with the public meeting law with less than 5 attendees

- iii. Chair Lue wondered if the new Human Rights & Equity Officer can step in and say something to escalate the importance of prioritization of new commissioners
- iv. Commissioner Jaramillo-Kraemer mentioned how long applications to be on the HRC have been sitting there; Laura Laaksonen let us know that she knows of one applicant that asks if there are any updates and we cannot provide any concise answers regarding a timeline.

#### 8. Announcements and Upcoming Events

- a. Commissioner Wittenburg shared a flyer regarding the National Days of Dialogue 2025 which highlights strengthening democracy and this event takes place on January 14th, 2025 from 6 p.m. to 730 p.m. at Zeitgeist
- b. Commissioner Jaramillo-Kraemer brought up the February 13th, 2025 Vibrant Streets Duluth event which is a nonprofit to help make streets safer and this will take place at Dovetail Cafe & Marketplace
- c. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day community-wide events taking place in the Twin Ports
  - i. Community Worship Service at Peace United Church of Christ on January 19th at 4 p.m. featuring Rev. Angela Barnes of St. Mark AME, Clinton Strother, and the Central Hillside Community Gospel Choir
  - ii. Community Breakfast at the First United Methodist Church on January 20th at 7 a.m featuring keynote speaker Michele Norris, the Sounds of Blackness, and a collaborative performance by Threads Dance Project and Vocalessence; freewill offering supporting the United Negro College Fund
  - iii. Gathering and MLK Rally at Family Freedom Center on January 20th at 10:30 a.m with the rally being located at the DECC Symphony Hall featuring a performance by Majur Attraktion, speaker Rebeka Ndosi of Maji ya Chai Land Sanctuary, and MLK essay contest winners
    - 1. Laura Laaksonen will likely attend the march and Chair Lue is unsure if she will be able to attend as she is traveling around that time and unsure when she'll return
- d. Chair Lue shared an event at University of Superior-Wisconsin taking place on February 20th (TRIO Day at UWS) and let the commission know that TRIO federal programs help underserved students; the event is open to the public; Chair Lue further mentioned that the TRIO program is at risk to be cut or changed and said it would be a good idea to write local Senators or Congress people to say that there is support for the program

#### 9. Additional public comments and commissioner comments

- a. None at this time from the commission; Kathleen Spencer brought up homeless fires and will keep us posted at our future meetings

#### 10. Adjournment time: 6:20 p.m.

- a. Next meeting is Wednesday, February 12th, 2025 at City Hall Room 430 at 5:30 p.m.

Minutes submitted by:  
Jen Harris, Secretary

*The public is encouraged to submit comment to the Commission prior to the meeting by emailing [humanrights@duluthmn.gov](mailto:humanrights@duluthmn.gov) or mailing comments to City Hall at 411 W 1st St, Attn: Human Rights Office Room 434, Duluth, MN 55802.*

*Please note that all public comment is considered Public Data.*