

2016 - 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

AMES HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

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STRATEGIC PLAN

To be completed by June 30, 2017

CITY OF AMES MUNICIPAL CODE, CHAPTER 14

The purpose of this chapter is to implement the provision of the Iowa Civil Rights Act and to further provide for the general welfare of persons in the City of Ames, Iowa, by prohibiting certain discriminatory practices, and to establish a commission for the investigation of complaints of discrimination; and, **to undertake projects of education to prevent discrimination**; and, to establish procedures for the conciliation of such complaints; and to enforce the provisions hereof.

Powers and Duties under Code: To issues such publications and reports of investigations and research as in the judgment of the Commission shall tend to promote good will among the various racial, religious, and ethnic groups of the state and which shall tend to minimize or eliminate discrimination in public accommodations, employment, apprenticeship and on-the-job training programs, vocational schools, or housing because of race, creed, color, sex, national origin, religion, ancestry, disability or sexual orientation.

The Human Relations Commission commits to undertake activities in the following areas:

Receive, investigate, and determine the merits of discrimination complaints

- Twice per year, meet with investigators to obtain a summary of complaints and discuss educational opportunities for the community.
- One to two times per year, request data from the Iowa Civil Rights Commission regarding complaints filed from the Ames area.

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“Ahora es cuando”
“Now is when”

- Study information obtained from investigators and the Iowa Civil Rights Commission and develop actions to respond to areas of concern.

Study the existence, character, causes, and extent of discriminatory practices in the community; make legislative proposals to the City Council when deemed necessary.

- Identify individuals or groups who are willing to share experiences or unreported complaints related to:
 - Housing
 - Employment
 - Public Accommodation
 - Race or ethnic minority
 - Disabilities
 - Gender identity
- Use the information gained from the Commission's findings to plan educational and promotion efforts for the community.
- Attend conferences and symposiums and share with the Commission any information gained regarding state and national civil rights or discriminatory trends.

Issue reports, conduct educational activities, and participate in and/or sponsor community events which promote good will among various racial, religious, ethnic, disabled, age-oriented, or affectional orientated groups; minimize or eliminate discriminatory practices.

- Develop an annual calendar outlining the Commission's events, activities, and topics, including seminars, existing activities undertaken by the Commission, and activities taken on by partnering organizations.
- Develop a standard to recognize those in the community who have championed non-discrimination in the areas the Commission has chosen to focus its efforts (Housing, employment, public accommodation)
- Promote the Commission as a resource to the community through:
 - Maintaining a public presence (website, literature, events, speaking engagements)
 - Outreach via media outlets
 - Activities with community partners (organizations and individuals with aligned interests)
- Present findings of the commission's self-education efforts to the public.
- Develop materials and resources that educate the community about the Commission's efforts, resources, and topics of importance to accomplishing the Commission's charge.
- Develop a list of organizations and individuals that could partner with the Commission to accomplish its charge or that may find value in being apprised of the Commission's activities.

Prepare and submit an annual report to the Mayor and City Council describing its proceedings, investigations, hearings, studies, educational efforts, and other activities.

- Issue an annual report to the City Council in accordance with the requirements of the Commission ordinance.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

To achieve the charge to “study the existence, character, causes, and extent of discriminatory practices in the community” and “projects of education to prevent discrimination” the Ames Human Relations Commission focused on outreach to the community.

- Community Conversations were held in May at ISU, the Library, and during Food at First. The purpose of these informal conversations were to create a presence and increased awareness of the Commission, and to meet with people in the community to obtain information about concerns and provide education in relation to community resources. Brochures and bookmarks were distributed.
- Outreach initiatives included participating in Farmers Market on Main Street August 13 and Reuse, Recycle, Repurpose Market in conjunction with the Main Street Cultural District August 28th. Bookmarks and brochures were distributed to educate the community on the focus of the Commission and how to submit concerns or participate in meetings. These events facilitated greater awareness of the Commission’s presence and purpose in the community.
- In September the Commissioners participated in the Iowa Resource for International Students (IRIS) Peace Walk at Ada Hayden Park and conducted three Know Your Rights orientation sessions to international ISU students. One was also provided in January.

Commissioners contacted with similar size cities Civil Rights Offices including Cedar Rapids, Davenport, Iowa City, Mason City, Sioux City, and Dubuque to understand strategies they have used to connect with their communities. It was noted that these cities all have at least one staff person committed to civil rights diversity relations and discrimination prevention. A Know Your Rights power point was obtained from Cedar Rapids and modified for use in Ames. Discrimination quizzes, games, and coloring books were used at community events to provide education. Amy Tehan-Harris created adult and youth quizzes to use at public events to foster discussion and education.

October 17, the Human Relations Commission collaborated with the Ames Library to host two Know Your Rights sessions presented by the Iowa Civil Rights Commission at the Ames Library and ISU. There were 15 participants at the Library and 40 at ISU.

PARTNERSHIPS

The Commission identified a need to understand not only potential and actual discriminatory issues in the community in addition to identifying community organizations to understand existing concerns and programs to prevent discrimination and establish partnerships. The goal of these partnerships is to undertake projects of education to prevent discrimination. These have included meeting with:

- Ames Chamber/Main Street Cultural District (August 16)
- Dr. Reg Stewart, Iowa State University Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion (August 25),
- Mr. Chuck Cychosz, Ames Chief of Police (October 22),
- Ames Library (October 26)
- Ames Progressive Alliance and KHOI (November 17)
- Ames Community School District was contacted but had no response.

Outcomes from these meetings have assisted the Commission with evaluating the Commission's purpose and mechanisms of action such as determining the questions to ask, and re-evaluating what the Commission's focus – Compliance vs. Advocacy and Education focus; creating partnerships with the Library to host Talk Race in January, and with the Ames Progressive Alliance and interested community members to implement a sub-committee, Inclusive Ames. The later partnership has been effective in bringing together many diverse voices to identify and discuss issues as well as identifying actions to improve community support and resources.

Chief Cychosz discussed arrests noting that they are predominantly white as opposed to African American in every category; however it is difficult to determine the percent of population secondary to the fluidity of a college community. Mental health related crises are a substantial concern secondary to decreased healthcare and community resources, police are the end of the line for response. They are collaborating with community partners to manage responses to and support for these individuals. Calls for these situations have increased from 200-300/year to 1,600. Transitional programs for support are a high area of need. The Police Department is meeting with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to discuss concerns and communicate activities.

Responses to Discriminatory Practices

August 1, the Commission formalized a response to Confederate Flag Display on Main Street and in October a response to racist fliers at ISU. These included a letter to the Ames Tribune, Iowa State Daily, and Des Moines Register. Responses were also posted on the Ames city website. In November it was determined that it was more important to discuss how these incidents impact the community climate rather than focusing on whether or not they have the right to discriminatory speech.

In December, the Ames Islamic Center received threats and the Commission Chair, reached out to discuss concerns with Imam Jaily and joined the Imam on a radio broadcast. The Commission invited the Imam, or a representative to attend a meeting to discuss concerns and understand how support may be provided.

Ames Civil Rights Complaints to the Iowa Civil Rights Commission 2014-December 2016

Ames has received no civil rights complaints in the past year. Citizens are able to initiate complaints to the city, or directly to the Iowa Civil Rights Commission. As a matter of procedure, reports made to the city will be sent to the State for investigation, but would be tracked by the Commission. Reports have been made to the Iowa Civil Rights Commission involving Ames that the Ames Human Relations Commission is not notified of. The Commission has initiated contact with the State to obtain aggregate summaries of this information for the purpose of understanding the areas of complaints and concerns identified.

The Areas of Discrimination (Figure 1), identify the predominant concerns to be related to employment (N=19) with a three year upward trend, of which only one in 2014 has been investigated by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Figure1. Areas of Discrimination

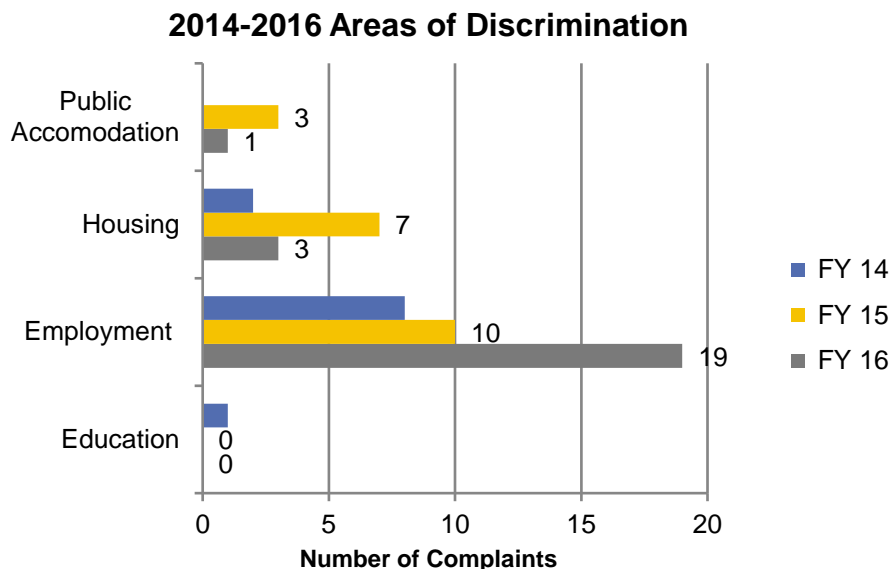
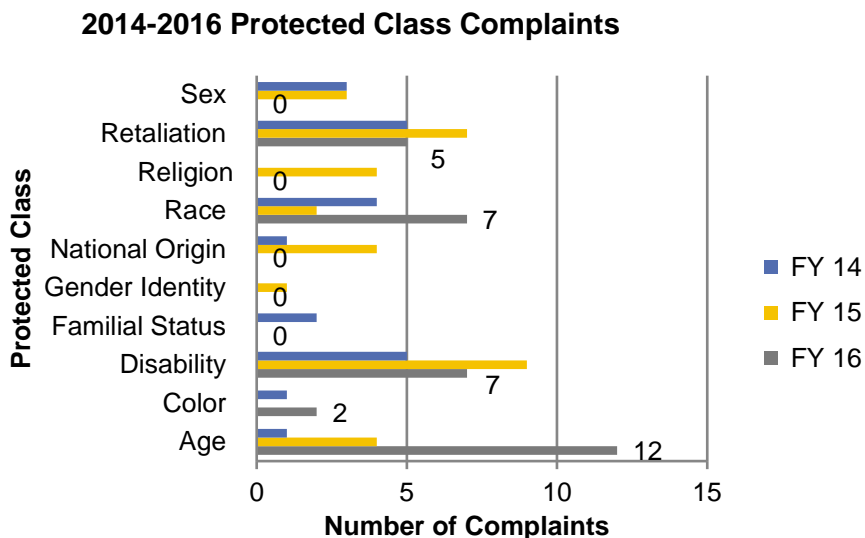


Figure2. Protected Class



The nature of the complaints was highest in protected class areas of age, disability, race, and retaliation (Figure 2). Age has seen a consistent upward trend with decreases seen in disability and retaliation categories. It is not clear from the report if age is related to youth or aging. Individuals may file complaints in more than one area. The Commission has shared this information with the Chamber and offered to assist with education related to sensitivity and diversity if desired. It will also be used in conjunction with information identified from community conversations for planning future education.

Inclusive Ames Subcommittee Recommendations

November 29, the Commission partnered with the Ames Progressive Alliance to host 300 participants at an Inclusive Ames event. Inclusive Ames plans to create a series of these types of discussions.

Recommendations from this event included:

- Establish a database/place to report witnessed events – the Commission established an email site on the city website HumanRelations@city.Ames.org for this purpose.
- Establish community training or intervention for people experiencing bullying or hate and de-escalation bystander training.
- Create specific purposeful gathering space in community, i.e. block parties with intentional discussions to bridge the gap on sensitive subjects.
- Understand the city’s stance on providing sanctuary and public safety to citizens, and responsibilities and attitudes of local law enforcement in regard to assisting Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE); collaborate with citizens, Ames and ISU police, and City Council.
- Encourage Junior and Senior High Student involvement in the Commission to engage them in discussions and develop future Commissioners and Leaders.
- Encourage City Council to develop an Intolerance Manifesto.
- Request the city to review all city publications for nondiscrimination language.

2016 Human Rights Campaign and Municipal Equality Index

The Commission reviewed the 2016 Human Rights Campaign Municipal Equality Index (MEI). Ames scored low on the index compared to what we know its services to be and in comparison to other cities surveyed in Iowa. The survey is sent to municipalities across the country and is compared to metrics established by the Human Rights Campaign (a LGBT civil rights organization). The index provides a roadmap to increasing welcomeness and equity to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Community as outlined by the metrics in the MEI. Opportunities for improvement include an LGBTQ liaison with the Mayor’s or Manager’s Office and with the police, offering transgender-inclusive health care benefits, clarity in relation to city contractor non-discrimination policy, and legislative or policy statements in support of LGBTQ legislation and advocacy. A taskforce was established with Commissioners, city, ISU, and the community to explore the current state and develop strategies to improve Ames score on the MEI. Recommendations have been provided to Council for review in hopes that Council will recommend looking at potential improvements and will send those recommendations to city staff for review.

A HOME FOR EVERYONE AWARD (2017)

The Commission discussed different ways to recognize individuals and organizations that have made a significant impact in Ames by having a strong commitment towards providing safe and equitable housing opportunities for the residents.

“A Home for Everyone” award was formed by the Commission to recognize such individuals and groups with the recipient being awarded a plaque during the month of April, which is also Fair Housing Month.



2017 Home for Everyone Award Recipients:
Rev. Eileen Gebbe, Jason Paull, Steve Ringlee, John Klaus, Chair, Ames Human Relations Commission.

At the meeting of the Ames City Council on April 11, 2017 three individuals were recognized for their work with the Story County Housing Trust Fund Task Force. The awards were presented by Mayor Ann Campbell. The recipients were Rev. Eileen Gebbe, Jason Paull, and Steve Ringlee. These individuals have collaborated for the purpose of incorporating and finding a local match for state funding. This is in response to identifying economic disparities that create challenges to finding affordable housing, a Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy in March on affordable housing, and identifying a 2003 state housing trust fund to provide financial assistance for housing projects related to the development and preservation of affordable housing for low-income households.

In addition to incorporating and finding a total of \$68,000 in local funding for over two years, the task force is exploring with local developers and landlords possible initiatives that could be funded by the housing trust, such as a possible rent-buy-down, and submission of the application to the state for funding. The work of Rev. Gebbe, Jason Paull, and Steve Ringlee is instrumental to creating equitable and fair affordable housing opportunities in Ames and Story County.

AMES HUMAN RELATIONS HUMANITARIAN AWARD (2017)

The Commission selected Jamet Colton as the 2016-2017 recipient of the Ames Human Relations Commission Humanitarian Award. Jamet, a native of Chile and immigrant to Ames was identified as being a bridge to connect and bring people together across multiple areas of difference. Her immigration experience in becoming a U.S. citizen has developed her 16 year passion for advocacy. She assists new families in the Ames Community School District with her bilingual skills, has organized a LGBTQ inclusive community-wide potluck, volunteers at ACCESS to assist Spanish-speaking victims of domestic violence, organized a "Call for Action Rally against Hate and Gun Violence" in response to LGBTQ hate crimes as well as community conversations around criminal justice systems and violence against people of color.

During her acceptance speech, Jamet shared a saying in Chile “Ahora es cuando” “Now is when”. Jamet does not just give lip service, but models “now is when.” She does not hesitate to encourage others and to act herself to stand up to bullying, hatred, prejudice, to promote unity, solidarity, social justice, racial and cultural equity, inclusion and to love one another. Jamet embodies and acts in the true spirit of the Humanitarian Award. In her employment with the school district and in her life, Jamet accepts people and promotes that we “do not all have to match” and is recognized as someone who helps others navigate impassible systems.



Jamet Colton, 2017 Ames Humanitarian Award Recipient