

## Minutes

### AMES HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

Conference Room 135  
City Hall, 515 Clark Avenue  
Thursday, June 27, 2024

**Call to Order:** Chair Chunhui Chen called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m. Commission Members Annabella Marquez, Shawn Kenny, Pablo Suarez Beltran, Wayne Clinton, and Brennan Sorkin and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Coordinator Casandra Eames were also present.

**Public Forum:** Chair Chen opened and closed the Public Forum when no one came to speak.

**Approval of Minutes:** Moved by Clinton, seconded by Sorkin, to approve the minutes of the May 23, 2024, meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

**Presentation by Kristen Stiffler, Director of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission:** Coordinator Eames introduced Kristen Stiffler, Director of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission (ICRC), who joined the meeting electronically. Director Stiffler explained that the unit's name would change to the Iowa Office of Civil Rights as of July 1.

The agency's mission is to provide impartial, fact-driven investigations of discrimination complaints in the state and to conduct education and outreach activities. The ICRC often works in partnership with local civil rights commissions, which are statutorily required of cities above a certain population threshold. The largest areas of complaints are employment and housing, often with regards to disability. Investigators first gather facts to make a determination of the likelihood of probable cause, and cases meeting that threshold receive more extensive investigation. A professional mediator on staff works toward mutually acceptable resolutions in housing cases, often able to resolve a case with an average of 50 to 60 days. Full investigations take between 100 and 365 days. With regard to education and outreach, Director Stiffler described a new initiative offering proactive compliance advice aimed at small businesses like gas stations, hotels, and landlords.

Director Stiffler shared some statistics about the ICRC's work. In 2023, ICRC processed over 1700 complaints with a staff of 27 FTEs. Of these 1700+ complaints, 21 cases received a determination of probable cause (~1%). 173 cases (~10%) were issued a right to sue letter, meaning that the complainant requested to bypass the administrative process and pursue legal action. This does not mean that probable cause was determined; rather, individuals in these cases

typically have private attorneys willing to pursue the case. Successful mediations resolved 86 cases (~5%). Director Stiffler stated that over 90% of the cases that come to the ICRC do not meet the threshold for illegal discrimination.

In response to several questions about available data, Director Stiffler explained that the current data available does not demonstrate data integrity, as files are counted manually and the categories of discrimination are self-reported. The agency is in the process of implementing processes to track and maintain more useful data in the future. She emphasized that the data available only reflects cases that are reported to the ICRC; cases investigated directly by local commissions are not reflected in ICRC reports.

Director Stiffler also explained that the ICRC offers a number of free training opportunities throughout the year that may be of interest. The Commissioners thanked Director Stiffler for joining them.

**Juneteenth Feedback:** Commissioner Marquez shared that the event was successful, with many coloring books distributed and several email list signups. Commissioner Clinton noted that attendance was on par with past years despite the weather.

**Budget Update:** Coordinator Eames explained that more specific information about the anniversary celebration was needed to move forward with the request for additional funding for that event.

**AHRC Planning Retreat:** Coordinator Eames reminded everyone to review the questions emailed by the facilitator from ISU Extension before the retreat, which would be held in the Homewood Golf Course Clubhouse on Saturday, June 29.

**T-Shirt Design Contest Review of Submissions:** Coordinator Eames noted that two submissions meeting the criteria were received. The Commissioners discussed the possibility of using both designs on the same shirt and considered ordering a sample before the end of the fiscal year.

Moved by Sorkin, seconded Marquez, to table a final decision on the t-shirt contest until the July meeting and to order two sample t-shirts combining the design submissions. Motion carried unanimously.

**Summer Quarterly Meet & Greet:** Coordinator Eames reviewed what was done for past Quarterly Meet & Greets. Chair Chen volunteered to be the point person and figure out the location and date for the event. Possible locations discussed were Ames Fitness Center and Ames Public Library.

**National Night Out:** Coordinator Eames noted the event will be held at the Ames Middle School on Tuesday, August 6, starting at 5:30 p.m. Commissioner Beltran volunteered to be the point person.

**Pridefest:** Commissioner Beltran noted that he did not get a response to his email reaching out to Ames Pride, and Coordinator Eames planned to follow up with her contact on the board. The event will be held on Saturday, September 14. Commissioners Clinton and Sorkin volunteered to be the point people.

**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in October:** Commissioners Beltran and Marquez shared several ideas for the event and led discussion about the possibilities. Consensus arose around including a tree planting ceremony and providing food.

Moved by Beltran, seconded by Sorkin, to set the date of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration for Sunday, October 20, and to include a tree planting ceremony in the event. Motion carried unanimously.

**Commissioner Announcements:** Commissioner Sorkin noted that a friend who works with a local nonprofit will be attending the next meeting's Public Forum to share about the organization.

**Next Meeting:** Thursday, July 25, 2024

**Adjournment:** Chair Chen adjourned the meeting at 8:14 p.m.