

MINUTES  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
January 18, 2022, 6:00 p.m.  
First Floor Conference Room, City Hall

2022 FEB -8 AM 10:49

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Members' Term Attendance</u> (mtgs attended-mtgs absent)	<u>End of Current</u> <u>Term of Office</u>
<b>MEMBERS PRESENT:</b>	Juniper Brown	(05-00)	10/08/22
	Sean Connors	(10-00)	10/08/23
	Derek Evans	(02-00)	10/08/24
	Kristina Hannon	(01-02)	10/08/24
	Terri Lowdon	(21-07)	10/08/23
	David Mason	(07-01)	10/08/24
	Joyce Starr	(03-00)	10/08/24
<b>MEMBERS ABSENT:</b>	Daniel McGaughy	(05-04)	10/08/23
<b>STAFF PRESENT:</b>	Lisa Robertson, City Attorney		
	Ben Williams, Recording Secretary		

**Item #1 Call to Order**

Connors called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**ROLL CALL:** McGaughy – absent, Brown – Present via Zoom, Connors – present, Evans – present via Zoom, Hannon – Present via Zoom, Lowdon – present, Mason – Present, Starr – present. Quorum is present.

**Item #2 Approval of Minutes**

Lowdon moved to approve the December minutes. Starr seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

**Item #3 Old Business****Item #3a. Update on Human Rights Commission Facebook Page**

Connors stated that he had posted updates about Betty White to the group Facebook page.

**Item #3b. Rainbow Mural/Crosswalk**

Connors stated that after the last Human Rights Commission meeting, he attempted to contact someone from the commission in Kansas City that worked on the rainbow crosswalks. Connors got no response and then reached out to others involved in the project.

He received a call back from the assistant city manager, Melissa Kozakiewicz. Connors inquired of Kozakiewicz how Kansas City was able to install the rainbow crosswalk despite the guidance from the NTB. Kozakiewicz replied that Kansas City just did it. Connors asked about the possibility of liability and Kozakiewicz replied that they would just take it to court. Connors stated that Kozakiewicz explained that there are plenty of distractions around various areas such as billboards, deteriorated crosswalks, and holes in the pavement. Kozakiewicz continued stating “how could someone make a claim that a brightly colored crosswalk caused someone to get hurt.” Connors stated that Kansas City hired out the job of painting the crosswalk to an outside vendor.

Connors stated that the main reasons these crosswalks in Kansas City were installed was to show the community that the LGBTQ+ youth were valued in Kansas City. Connors stated that a rainbow crosswalk in St. Joseph would be a good way for the city to show the LGBTQ+ community that they are supported. Connors listed possibilities to pay for the project, including a partnership with the St. Joseph Tourism Committee. Connors stated that in the past this committee has had a hard time finding projects to fund. Connors stated that First Christian Church was very supportive of the project. Connors said that when he first brought up the idea of a rainbow crosswalk, 10<sup>th</sup> and Faraon was thought to be a good spot since it’s a gateway to the downtown. Connors showed pictures of two different rainbow crosswalks, one in Lakeview IL and another in Kansas City. Connors indicated that Andy Clements, the City’s public works director, had informed him that the stripes were not painted in the correct direction.

Connors opened the subject for group discussion. Starr stated that she felt the most important thing facing the community was the immigrant communication problem. Starr stated that some of the immigrants are very skillful, and that the community can use their expertise. Starr stated that she spoke with Natalie Redmond at the chamber of commerce and stated that Natalie has been working with immigrants who need help getting jobs. It’s been difficult because the community doesn’t have a welcome center to help break the communication barrier. Starr stated that she felt the top issue to deal with was the immigration issue.

Connors inquired of Starr if she felt the issues could be taken care of concurrently. Starr replied that she didn’t know. Starr stated that she didn’t want to go against any policy or regulation that the city has for public safety. Starr continued by reading the duties and powers of the Human Rights Commission. Starr stated that she is not so sure that the crosswalk fits into the duties and powers of the Human Rights Commission. Brown stated that the crosswalk sends a message. Brown stated that being opposed to the crosswalk just because it doesn’t actively achieve something that can be quantified or measured is just a structural discrimination. Starr responded saying that she was not opposed to it but that it was not a top priority at this time when there were citizens in town that had so many different needs. Brown continued saying that yes, the Human Rights Commission is trying to focus on many needs at the same time, but the other need put forward by Starr was more of a theoretical ambiguity and when pushed about Starr’s plan to pursue the crosswalk, she doesn’t have an answer. Brown stated that Starr cannot name how they were going to accomplish anything else. Starr stated the Commission was responsible for doing these

things and that she didn't have anything set up or planned but that's what is set forth in the Commission's duties. Brown stated that the Commission is supposed to recommend something to the city council and especially things that send messages of inclusion.

Hannon stated that it would be a good goal to look at the needs of the immigrant population. Hannon continued saying that she works in the mental health field and that there are significant disparities in the LGBTQ+ community locally in terms of being able to access healthcare and that by the time they are admitted to a healthcare facility, professionals are seeing significant rates of suicide attempts and depression. Hannon stated that during therapy with LGBTQ+ persons she consistently hears that they don't feel seen or heard and don't feel like they have a solid base of support in St. Joseph. Hannon continued saying that the sidewalk shows a symbol of support, and the crosswalk is an outreach to a marginalized group in St. Joseph. Brown then stated that if the money is there and if it is something that can be achieved and moved-on from, instead of tabling it, then it allows the Commission to move on to more pressing matters. Hannon continued saying that the crosswalk helps raise the profile of the community. Hannon also stated that the crosswalk is a symbol of the work that the Commission is doing, and it allows members of the community to see that the Commission is out helping people.

Lowdon stated that initially she felt the idea of a rainbow crosswalk was a nice gesture but what were they accomplishing and what were they asking the citizens to spend their money on. Lowdon stated that after listening to the explanations she heard tonight, she understands. Basically, the crosswalk is a billboard that says welcome and "you're a part of us and we see you." Lowdon stated that she didn't understand the significance of the crosswalk but that now she understands after hearing the explanations. Brown then stated that lots of things are going to seem irrelevant to people who things don't matter to. Brown relayed that they are the only person on their street who has a support flag, which they are in the LGBTQ+ community. Symbolic gestures have much more power. Brown continued saying that painting a crosswalk shows that there was something done that shows St. Joseph supports the LGBTQ+ community. Brown believes that St. Joseph could overcome something as silly as a federal guideline, which is not a law. Lowdon stated that she understood why the crosswalk would be important and how the project educates and demonstrates inclusion. Robertson then stated that one of the duties of the Commission was to make appropriation recommendations to the city manager for funding specific efforts to improve human relations and eliminate discriminatory practices.

Evans asked if it was time to come up with a pitch and task Bryan Carter with relaying it to the council to see where council stands. Evans continued saying that the Commission could be proactive on both the immigrant issue and the crosswalk issue. Mason stated that he didn't see how the crosswalk matches what the Commission is supposed to do. Mason continued saying he believed the issue to be more in the realm of advocacy and political action, as opposed to representing the interests of someone involved in an actual discrimination. Mason stated that the Commission is tasked with housing, public accommodation, and employment and that he doesn't see how the crosswalk matches what the Commission is supposed to do. Mason questioned why someone couldn't just go to the city council and ask them to paint a rainbow crosswalk. Lowdon stated that the duties and

powers of the Commission are also to organize and conduct educational programs, workshops, or other events to improve human relations and eliminate discriminatory practices. Lowdon stated she feels the crosswalk is within the Commission's realm. Mason stated that he feels the crosswalk is overreaching. Mason stated that he is for doing things that promote the Commission, but he stated that there are several other areas that need attention and that could promote the efforts of Commission. Evans stated that there could be advocacy for the crosswalks with a QR code linking to the Commission's website. There was general discussion between Commission members about the role of the Commission.

Robertson stated that the item at hand was the rainbow crosswalk and described the process moving forward. Robertson stated that if the crosswalk is going to be moved forward and submitted to the council then the Commission needs to come up with a specific plan.

Mason stated that he just did not believe the rainbow crosswalk was within the purview of the Commission and that he just wanted his point registered. Brown stated that it is a point of pride but also a point of safety. Brown stated that it is the difference between them knowing where they can get their hair cut in a place that accepts them because the establishment has a pride flag in the window and them not frequenting a place because they think someone will judge them. Brown stated that it is about the sense of inclusion like Brian Kirk stated in his letter. Mason stated that it is just a crosswalk and that it isn't the Commission's responsibility. Lowdon called for a vote on the topic. Robertson stated that part of the motion should be to ask Commission members to develop a plan and return to the next Commission meeting to present it. Lowdon motioned that the Commission appoint three people to bring the Commission an exact plan that they can then propose to the city council, which would include follow up on funding and location. Connors asked for a second. Hannon seconded. Lowdon stated if the Commission is going to recommend it, then the Commission needs to have an exact recommendation. She continued saying that it would be fine if a private citizen would recommend the same thing but as a Commission, they need to have an exact recommendation. Brown, Connors, Evans, Hannon, Lowdon were in favor. Mason and Starr opposed the motion. Motion passed.

Robertson informed the Commission that if the council were to discuss the crosswalk and ask about liability issues, she would have to inform the council of the established federal guidelines and to be cautious because people will file claims. Lowdon suggested that the guidelines mention nothing about what can go between the white stripes in the crosswalk and that the rainbow colors wouldn't be a violation. Robertson responded that she believed it to be a violation based on the regulations because of the very specific information related to what colors could be used. Brown stated that if people were that concerned about federal guidelines, then the covid numbers would be lower. Connors asked for volunteers to plan and report back to the Commission. Brown, Connors, and Hannon volunteered.

## **Item #4      New Business**

### **Item #4a.      Plan Meeting with Midland Empire Equality Coalition (MEEC)**

Connors introduced Amy Stanton, the president of MEEC. Connors stated that the Commission has reached out to the Bartlett Center and INTERSERV and now wants to reach out to the LGBTQ+ community. Connors stated his desire to partner with MEEC on an outreach event. Stanton stated that she was open to doing a forum with the Commission and that the other board members of MEEC would likely be interested, as well. Stanton stated that MEEC had been discussing having a public forum with several groups of people. Lowdon stated that the Commission wants to listen and identify issues that the Commission can help resolve or make better. Lowdon stated that she would like people to talk to the Commission. Stanton stated that she is fully behind that and that different organizations should come together and help each other. Lowdon stated that what they really need to know is what issues their community is facing so that the Commission can educate others and the council. Stanton stated that MEEC would contact the businesses in town to make a rainbow directory with LGBTQ+ friendly businesses and that they would go a step further and get stickers. There was discussion amongst commission members about when and where to have a meeting with MEEC.

### **Item #4b.      Plan Black History Month**

Connors inquired if the group knew of any other activities to promote for black history month. Robertson asked Starr if the Hall of Fame induction would be in February or if they were just talking about potential candidates. Starr responded that the meeting would be for nominations.

### **Item #4c.      Discuss Black Archives Hall of Fame Induction**

Connors inquired if anyone knew who was on the Hall of Fame Induction Committee. Starr responded that Gary Wilkinson was co-chair and Alonzo Weston was chairperson. Connors asked if the Hall of Fame induction would take place at the business summit. Starr responded that she was unsure. Connors asked Starr when the next meeting would be. Starr responded that it is the second Tuesday of each month. Connors asked if it would be okay to reach out to Alonzo. Starr stated that it would be fine.

### **Item #4d.      Discuss Attending Small Business Summit**

Connors stated that if anyone would like to attend, it was at the Bartlett Center and there was info posted on the Facebook page. Starr stated she believed the meeting was from 5-7 on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Evans stated that the summit began at 5 p.m.

### **Item #4e.      Discuss Potential Dates for Scheduling Meeting with Chamber Representatives Related to Immigration Services**

Lowdon stated that there was a preliminary meeting with chamber officials about what dates to meet. Lowdon explained that the idea is to help businesses identify talent within members of the immigrant community who don't know how to use their degrees or certifications from other countries. Lowdon stated that there is a barrier to doing that because of a language gap and a lack of resources to be able to connect the two groups. Lowdon stated that most cities have a resource center to help immigrants. Lowdon stated that one thing she thought the council would be behind is promoting business and better employment. She stated it would be beneficial to both the employers and the community. Lowdon stated that the Commission should look at what other communities are doing. Stanton suggested working with the library on helping get immigrants their certifications and to help with finding jobs in the community.

**Item #4f. Related New Business**

None.

**Item #5 City Staff Update**

None.

**Item #6 Public Comment**

Stanton thanked the commission for inviting her.

**Item #7. Future Agenda Overview**

Connors stated that the updates to the human rights commission Facebook page would remain on the agenda. Connors added an item for an update to the rainbow crosswalk. Connors stated that the commission should discuss MEEC and the open forum. Connors suggested adding black history month to the agenda

**Item # 8. Adjourn**

Connors adjourned the meeting. No member opposed.

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted,

Ben Williams, Recording Secretary (Legal Assistant)