City of Albert Lea
Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes

August 13, 2026 Meeting – 6:00pm
City Council Chambers - 221 E. Clark Street

Members Present: Rev. Dr. Charles Alkula, Aruna Evenson, Angie Hanson, Cesar Victorino, Irasema Hernandez, Jeremy Corey-Gruenes, Peggy Olson, and Ex-Officio Keith Van Beek

Staff in Attendance: City Manager Ian Rigg, Human Resource Director Mike Zelenak, and Administrative Assistant/Deputy Clerk Karla Tukua

Call to Order:
The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm, by Commission Chair Alkula.

Adopt Agenda:
Hanson made the motion to approve the agenda and Corey-Gruenes seconded the motion. All commission members present voted in favor of said motion. Motion passed.

Approval of Minutes:
Olson made the motion to approve the minutes of the July 09, 2026 meeting
Evenson seconded the motion. All commission members present voted in favor of said motion. Motion passed.

Old Business: - None

New Business:
A. Out of Darkness Walk for Suicide Prevention - Aruna Evenson

Evenson mentioned she reached out to coordinator Sara Barnes on having the HRC participate in this walk and having a table at this event. Adding that the walk will be on Saturday, September 19th. Set-up will be at 8:30am with the walk starting at 10:00am. She asked for anyone else that would like to help at this event and Hanson, Olson, and Hernandez all said they would participate.

B. Commission Planning for Human Rights Day on December 10, 2026 Evenson/Olson

Evenson and Olson, brought this to the HRC, asking to have an event to recognize Human Rights Day. Evenson said that December 10th is a Thursday this year and she asked for suggestions on possibly doing on a Saturday to get more involvement. Possibly the Saturday before or after the 10th and suggested doing from 10am to 2pm.

- Members discussed different venues they could use, mentioning the Northbridge Mall or could hold at the Senior Center.
- Evenson mentioned the Veterans event that provided multiple services for veterans and doing something similar for Human Rights day.
- Alkula said he'd be at the Veterans Stand Down event at the Armory this coming Saturday, if anyone else wanted to stop by, they can pull ideas from this event. Van Beek explained what the Veteran Stand Down event is about; stating it's for Veteran's and their families in need. Jeff Dahlen the Veterans Service Officer will be there. Mentioning that veterans can come and get haircuts, speak with mental health professionals and other services. They can get food, clothes, backpacks and school supplies to help families for back to school. Money is raised through donations through a motorcycle ride and they continue through the year to collect donations for veterans.
- There was continued discussion on possible dates and venues for Human Rights day and after discussing, the decision was made to hold this event on Saturday, December 5th. The Northbridge Mall or the Senior Center space at the Skyline Mall are 2 venues they will look into using.
- Rigg mentioned he will be meeting with the owner of the Skyline Mall and will ask about using that space.

Chair Alkula asked for a motion to approve holding this event. Evenson made motion to approve and Hanson seconded the motion. All commission members present voted in favor of said motion. Motion passed.

C. HRC Engagement and Education within the community. (For example, action items, events, regular articles on Human Rights in the paper and on social media, etc.) - Peggy Olson

Olson brought this to the members to come up with other items/events that the HRC can do to make the community aware of the Human Rights Commission. She asked for what ideas people had.

- Evenson mentioned having a table at one of the schools during lunch and being available to talk to students. Providing educational materials for students to take on the Human Rights Commission.
- Corey-Gruenes mentioned an idea about having a film series to raise awareness in regards to Human Rights. Explaining that previously there was a group called Paths to Peace in Freeborn County and they would show a film relating to social justice issues and it's something that could be brought back. They'd show the film and have discussion afterwards. Corey-Gruenes went into more detail regarding this series and thought it'd be a good thing to bring back.

- Rigg will look into using the City's music/movie rights licensing before our next meeting. He will also double check on being able to use the Senior Center on December 5th as well for Human Rights Day.
- Victorino mentioned having monthly coffee meet-ups on the weekends or monthly breakfast meet-ups. Be there to provide resources, help with questions, bring back to the HRC meeting. Have different spaces to host this, Perkins, Nancy's, Main Street, etc.
- Alkula asked how they would like to proceed with this. Hanson mentioned that if we held off a bit with the coffees, they could plan their first 3 and promote at the Human Rights Day event, to which Corey-Gruenes said they could do the same for the movie series and promote it at the Human Rights day event as well.
- Commission members will need to solidify events and timeline – pick different individuals to organize the various events. There was continued discussion on the planning process and solidifying ideas by the HRC meeting in November.

C. Re-cap of Wind Down Wednesday event from yesterday – Aruna/Peggy

- Overall, it was successful had some good engagement with kids that spun the wheel.
- There was good traffic and the kids had great answers in regards to human rights.
- Alkula noted that the HRC was there to engage with people vs. trying to sell something to them.
- Evenson asked if resources could be provided for events like this. She ordered the prizes and was surprised on how fast they went.
- Rigg said he'll look at adding a small budget for the Human Rights Commission, asking their input on the amount. He also stated he could order a banner.
- Evenson mentioned ordering everyone a Human Rights t-shirt. Saying that currently herself, Olson and Hanson currently have one, and took orders from the rest.

D. Student Representative application for the 2026/2027 school year.

Corey-Gruenes said he will promote this the first week of school to get student applications. Rigg asked Corey-Gruenes to bring applications back to the board meeting on September 10th.

Board Member Items:

- Corey-Gruenes gave an update on the MN Truth Council, stating since our last meeting, he has done 7 listening sessions/interviews. Most were around an hour and he said they have been a great experience. He felt privileged that they trusted him with their stories. He has 3 more scheduled and will look at winding down on this due to school commitments.

Staff Communications:

- Rigg provided commission members with a copy of the City's Strategic Plan and gave an overview of this plan. He wanted the commission members to have a chance to review and send any suggestions to him after reviewing.
- Rigg explained the process that was used to get feedback from Albert Lea residents, which included multi-language translations to ensure language was not a barrier. There was an on-line survey and also staff survey to get feedback to put this plan together. Goals and outcomes are very specific and shows how well the City is doing in reaching their goals.
- Rigg continued to highlight the strategic issues as he read through the plan for commission members.
- Rigg asked commission members to look at the equitable use of resources – example given was do we spend money on enforcement of dealing with junk or junk vehicles, etc. Or, do we spend those resources on things that could prevent this from occurring in the first place. He asked commission members input on how the City can make it more equitable. They can e-mail their suggestions and questions after reviewing the plan.
- Rigg continued through the plan covering the rest of the goals.

Adjournment:
Motion to adjourn was made by Evenson and seconded by Corey-Gruenes at 6:57pm. All members present voted in favor of said motion. Meeting adjourned. Next meeting will be Thursday, September 10, 2026, at 6:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Karla Tukua
Human Rights Commission Secretary

Approved:

Rev. Dr. Charles Alkula
Human Rights Commission Chair