



**City of Albert Lea  
Human Rights Commission  
Meeting Minutes**

*September 11, 2025 Meeting – 6:00pm  
City Council Chambers - 221 E. Clark Street*

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

**Members Absent:** Aruna Evenson

**Staff in Attendance:** City Manager Ian Rigg, Human Resource Director Mike Zelenak, Community Enrichment and Engagement Director Cathy Malakowsky and Administrative Assistant/Deputy Clerk Karla Tukua

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order by Rev. Dr. Charles Alkula at 6:02pm

**Adopt Agenda:**

Hanson made the motion to approve the agenda for tonight's meeting and Olson seconded the motion. The commission voted in favor of said motion 6-0, Evenson was absent. Motion declared passed.

**Approval of Minutes:**

Corey-Gruenes made the motion to approve the minutes from the July 10, 2025 meeting and Hernandez seconded the motion. The commission voted in favor of said motion 6-0, Evenson was absent. Motion declared passed.

**New Business:**

**Discussion Item – Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples Day**

Alkula brought this to the Commission, he wanted to know how Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples Day was recognized in Albert Lea. Being new to this area he wanted to make sure, as the Human Rights Commission, that the HRC is not missing recognizing this Holiday. There was discussion recognizing Indigenous Peoples Day through proclamation or other means. Malakowsky gave an example of a post that could be posted on Facebook, stating "This land used to be the home to the Dakota Tribe and in honor of Indigenous Peoples Day, we recognize this." Alkula agreed with Malakowsky's statement. Malakowsky added that through SELCO's platform, the Library will highlight Native American books on their on-line applications. The Albert Lea Convention and Visitor's bureau also has posted recognition of Indigenous Peoples Day. As the Human Rights Commission they will look at how to recognize Indigenous Peoples Day in 2026.

## **Old Business:**

### **Final Approval of Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Administration, Article VI. – Boards, Commissions and Authorities – Division 4. Human Rights Commission**

The commission reviewed the final draft ordinance in the meeting packet. Corey-Gruenes made the motion to approve the amended ordinance and Hernandez seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 6-0, Evenson was absent. Motion declared passed.

### **Final Approval of the Student HRC Application**

There was a final review of the Student Representative application. Malakowsky suggested that we reduce the number of meetings to attend. Hanson recommended that September 11<sup>th</sup> and October 9<sup>th</sup> meeting dates be taken off the application and to make the deadline for students to submit their applications by October 6<sup>th</sup>. After discussion, the minimum meetings for students to attend was reduced from 8 to 6 meetings. Rigg went through the changes suggested by commission members and asked for a motion if agreeable. Corey-Gruenes made the motion to accept application with the changes discussed and Olson seconded the motion. The commission voted in favor of said motion 6-0, Evenson was absent. Motion declared passed.

Corey-Gruenes asked how the application will be disseminated. Rigg said that the corrected application will be e-mailed to Jeremy on Friday, 9/12, for him to provide to the High School and to also send to the Learning Center.

### **Blue Zones/Farmer's Market Planning**

The volunteer schedule as well as the invoice from Boss Lady Catering was displayed for commission review. Malakowsky handed out post cards with the event information on it and asked commission members to hand out as they invite friends and families. She stated that all is ready for next week, the caterer is booked and Blue Zones is covering the invoice cost. Malakowsky said the caterer suggested it's best to have a backup location in case of inclement weather, rather than a backup date, due to the food being perishable. Malakowsky suggested to have the event here at City Hall, if needed. She went through how the event is being promoted. Some of the marketing has been news releases, farmers market vendors calling into party line, there's been a number of shares on Facebook and there will be a paid ad in the Albert Lea Tribune. Malakowsky asked if anyone wanted to provide recipes from their own heritage, otherwise she will have recipes for the Rice with Green Curry, Traditional Swedish Cookies, Aqua Frescas and Fruit Cups. The group decided that they'd like to keep it just the recipe's that are being sampled.

## **Board Member Items:**

### **Story Show Partnership – Jeremy Corey-Gruenes**

Corey-Gruenes spoke on the Story Show, he stated that he is one of the co-producers. The different shows were displayed for commission members to review. There are 1 to 2 shows per year and they are now held at the Marion Ross Theatre. Explaining that they usually start out with a theme and then recruit about 8 story tellers to write stories based on the theme chosen. He explained that most shows are autobiographical, but they have had a couple fiction and poetry stories. With each show a portion of the proceeds go to charity.

The next show is scheduled for March 7<sup>th</sup> of 2026. Corey-Gruenes said that Shane and Janelle Koepke along with himself and his wife Jenny will be producing this show. Corey-Gruenes mentioned they would like to collaborate with the HRC on a theme that would relate to Human Rights. He asked if there was any interest from HRC members. He said the stories should be 5 to 10 minutes each. A portion of one of the shows was played to give the commission an idea of what they were like. Corey-Gruenes wanted to know what ideas the Commission might have for shows. He then spoke about the "Seeking Peace" show that would fit with the HRC mission, giving an overview of this show. He stated the producers had a meeting last week, and one theme they spoke about was displaying a big heart, with the theme of people coming together.

**Some theme ideas discussed were:**

- Olson talked about a turning point theme; people have turning points in their lives that would be interesting to hear.
- Alkula mentioned that Albert Lea is at a crossroads. He stated where do people stay, go, come from and why Albert Lea. The show could be about the stories they bring with them.
- Victorino talked about the current political atmosphere, we have a number of families leaving other states and they come to Albert Lea due to our education system and staff. He mentioned that he has heard a lot of stories from these families and he will see if they would be interested in telling their story.
- Hanson had a couple story ideas, "Heart of Justice" or "What is Your Why", going into different variations of these themes.
- A couple other themes mentioned were "We Belong" or "We the People".
- Alkula spoke about the residents at Thornecrest and their various backgrounds; they all have stories to tell. Mentioning that they have something to contribute based on stories they have growing up and serving in the war. He also stated it's easy to overlook the youth, or elderly.
- In discussions about youth and the elderly belonging, Hanson added that they stay in our community because they have a sense they belong.
- Malakowsky mentioned that a sense of belonging is part of the 9 pillars of Blue Zones.

Corey-Gruenes asked the commission to e-mail him any additional ideas they have. He will report back at the next meeting on the different ideas.

### **Air Quality Concern – Jeremy Corey-Gruenes**

Corey-Gruenes spoke on a news article from Minnesota Reformer that was published on July 24, 2025. A copy of the article was displayed for the commission to review. The article mentions the air quality in Freeborn County and in particular about Pro Manufacturing in Albert Lea. Corey-Gruenes explained there was a law passed increasing the standards of air quality and emissions within the 7-county metro region, but areas of the state outside of this area will be exempt from the new rules.

To questions in regards to what Pro Manufacturing does, Rigg, Alkula and Victorino all gave input, stating they do metal fabrication, painting and powder coating. There was discussion on the types of powder coatings used for industrial painting. Corey-Gruenes said that as the Human Rights Commission, clean air and the environment ties into Human Rights. Rigg stated that looking at the article, what it shows is concerning. He said the City has a Climate Action Plan, but it's more focused on carbon and pollutants that affect storm water. Rigg mentioned he has questions on how the study in the article was done, was it a single sample or was it continuous monitoring. Rigg said he will meet with the Mayor and look to set up a meeting with the owners of Pro Manufacturing in regards to the findings in this article.

Alkula asked for any other board member items, Corey-Gruenes stated that a resident spoke to him about the closed captioning not working for the City Council Meetings on You Tube. It comes up as closed captioning not available. Rigg stated he'll have someone look into this.

Hanson brought up the reduced services at Mayo Clinic. She is looking for ways to facilitate transportation for individuals that now may need to travel to Austin, Waseca or other areas for care. Malakowsky mentioned that anyone can take the Smart Bus and the City is working on a video letting residents know it travels to Austin. She added the cost is just \$4.00 each way but for seniors it's free and senior means 55 years of age or older. Ian added that he and the Mayor are discussing options with Mayo on transportation options for residents.

Malakowsky added that Age Friendly Freeborn County is working on with seniors through Tech Tuesday at the Senior Center. They are incorporating how to navigate the Mayo portal, how to do on-line appointments etc. Malakowsky added that Deputy Fire Chief Bart Berven brought a presentation to Age Friendly Freeborn County on a program through HealthMED a Minnesota based company. The founder/owner is Steve Pontius and he, gave a very informative presentation on his in-home healthcare system that is using large TV's with remote patient monitoring and healthcare support for people on Medicaid & Medicare. Malakowsky gave additional benefits of this program for anyone that could qualify through Medicare.

Hanson asked about possibly having a spot in Albert Lea, or room space at the Library or Mayo where residents can go to do their tele-health appointments. Giving examples of students that may need a para-professional to help assist them at school, it would be the same for residents needing help with health care needs. There was additional dialog on other options for this space.

Rigg added that he likes the idea of talking to Mayo and if they want to go to more tele-health appointments, for them to set up a tele-health Wi-Fi café. He said he'd send this recommendation to Dr. Bhagra and he wants to continue to talk to Dr. Bhagra about transportation options.

**Staff Communications:**

Rigg said because of the air quality communication he wanted to remind commission members about the Climate Action Plan and if they would familiarize themselves on it, they can bring their comments or anything they see might be missing to the next meeting.

Zelenak stated that when we have events, like the Flavors Without Borders event, we should have brochures or cards to hand out that talks about the Human Rights Commission. There was discussion of different types of hand outs for events.

**Adjournment:**

Motion to adjourn was made by Corey-Gruenes and seconded by Hanson at 7:59pm. On a voice vote, all members present voted in favor of said motion 6-0, Evenson was absent. Meeting adjourned. Next meeting will be Thursday, October 9<sup>th</sup> at 6:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Karla Tukua  
Human Rights Commission Secretary

Approved:



Rev. Dr. Charles Alkula  
Human Rights Commission Chair

