



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

*November 13, 2025 Meeting – 6:00pm  
City Council Chambers - 221 E. Clark Street*

**Members Present:** Aruna Evenson, Cesar Victorino, Irasema Hernandez, Jeremy Corey-Gruenes, and Ex-Officio Keith Van Beek

**Members Absent:** Rev. Dr. Charles Alkula, Angie Hanson and Peggy Olson

**Staff Absent:** Human Resource Director Mike Zelenak

**Staff in Attendance:** City Manager Ian Rigg, Administrative Assistant/Deputy Clerk Karla Tukua

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order by Deputy Chair Aruna Evenson

**Adopt Agenda:**

Corey Gruenes made the motion to approve the agenda for tonight's meeting and Victorino seconded the motion. The commission voted in favor of said motion 4-0. Commission members Alkula, Hanson and Olson were absent. Motion declared passed.

**Approval of Minutes:**

Corey-Gruenes made the motion to approve the minutes with changing adjournment to 6:59pm from 7:59pm for the October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025 meeting and Hernandez seconded the motion. The commission voted in favor of said motion 4-0. Commission members Alkula, Hanson and Olson were absent. Motion declared passed.

**Old Business:**

Story Show Follow-up by Corey-Gruenes

- A. Corey-Gruenes updated the commission on the next Story Show. The theme will be We Belong, the date will be March 7, 2026 and the Charity is the Ecumenical Food Pantry. He noted they have partnered with Mom's Bread Company, who will provide small loaves of fresh bread to the food pantry. Commission members will be added to the mailing list to the Story show to receive updates.

**New Business:**

- A. Rice Boettcher introduction – Rice is the High-School student representative on the HRC. He was welcomed to the Commission, with introductions made by commission members.

**Board Member Items:**

Irasema Hernandez let Commission Members know about the Karen New Year celebration that will be December 20<sup>th</sup> at the High School. She invited commission members to attend and show support. She gave an overview of the event, noting a flyer will be sent out with more specifics. They estimate approximately 500 people will be in attendance. This is the first year for the Karen New Year celebration here in Albert Lea. Hernandez will send the flyer to the Commission Secretary Tukua to forward on.

Corey-Gruenes asked for updates on the Air Quality article from a previous meeting. City Manager Rigg stated they have not had an opportunity yet to meet with Pro-Manufacturing. It's still on the agenda, just haven't been able to coordinate a time and date.

Corey-Gruenes also spoke about the Respectful Conversation event at Wedgewood Cove held by the Minnesota Council of Churches. He gave an overview of the event to the HRC noting that everyone was asked to sit at tables with people they did not know or who they did not come with. There was a trained facilitator at each table to help with the process. There was a round of questions asked and each person had 2 minutes to answer the question. The goal was to be respectful of each person's opinion or answer to the questions asked. Corey-Gruenes said it was a really good event.

Boettcher asked about resources for the homeless population to access. Hernandez spoke about what is available through SEMCAC. Stating that currently there is funding to provide 14-day hotel stays for individuals and she covered the process for this. Hernandez said it's also up to the individuals to make a plan for themselves and follow the agreement that is set up for them. Hernandez explained there is more of a need than what can currently be covered, due to funding. She went through some of the other options that are available. Discussion continued in regards to the homeless population and what could be done. Corey-Gruenes gave an example of where he had previously worked, Opportunity Housing. It was a former hotel that was converted to housing for individuals on the verge of being homeless. He went into detail of the program and asked if it was something that could be done here in Albert Lea. Rigg answered that the HRA may be the place to start, but there are a lot of regulations for this as well. There was additional discussion in regards to support for this and different funding options to make this work.

Boettcher asked about the potential for ICE activities in Albert Lea due to the Freeborn County Jail housing ICE detainees. Evenson and Rigg explained the process for any detainees in the Freeborn County Jail. Rigg covered the City's stance/protocol in regards to ICE. Stating the City does not actively notify ICE in regards to detainees. Rigg explained the process and City will ensure the agents are actual ICE agents and that they provide a legal warrant. Stating they do not have free access.

**Staff Communications:**

**A. ICMA Conference Communication – City Manager Rigg**

Rigg provided commission members with an overview of his ICMA conference in Tampa, Florida. One of the items he wanted to discuss was on housing and he liked a statement made in one of his sessions, “the future is not a place that we visit, it’s something we build”. It’s on the premise that we plan and make things better for future generations. Rigg spoke on more people moving back to rural areas, but the challenge is there’s not enough housing in these rural areas. Rigg spoke on the various challenges, older citizens living longer in their homes, expense of building new. Noting it’s important for the City to be involved to help. He gave an example of a non-profit in Madison, WI that are targeting individuals who don’t always have access to home ownership. This group went to the banks and to the realtors, built relationships and then asked for a percent of every transaction in regards to real estate transfers to go into their non-profit fund. These funds then are distributed to individuals to help cover gaps that might exist. Rigg stated it was a program he’d like to institute here to help with housing disparity. There was continued discussion in regards to housing matters with Rigg answering questions about housing and HRA funding.

**Adjournment:**

Motion to adjourn was made by Corey-Gruenes and seconded by Victorino at 7:05pm. On a voice vote, all members present voted in favor of said motion 4-0, Alkula, Hanson and Olson were absent. Meeting adjourned. Next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. if there are agenda items to cover.

Respectfully submitted,



Karla Tukua  
Human Rights Commission Secretary

Approved:



Rev. Dr. Charles Alkula  
Human Rights Commission Chair