



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

*February 12, 2026 Meeting – 6:00pm
City Hall Room 109 - 221 E. Clark Street*

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

Members Absent: Peggy Olson

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 for tonight's meeting and Corey-Gruenes seconded the motion. The commission voted in favor of said motion 6-0, Olson was absent. Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes:

Corey-Gruenes made the motion to approve the minutes from the January 08, 2026 meeting and Hernandez seconded the motion. The commission voted in favor of said motion 6-0, Olson was absent. Motion carried.

New Business:

A. Request to the Albert Lea Mayor and City Council Regarding ICE Activity and Actions in Minneapolis and the State – Presented by Corey-Gruenes

A part of our mission states, "It is the duty and responsibility of the Human Rights Commission to recommend, counsel, and advise the administrative officers and the council in matters relating to human rights," and as such, I propose the HRC consider issuing the following recommendation to the Mayor and City Council:

"In light of recent events throughout the state of Minnesota with well-documented human rights violations of immigrants without legal status, immigrants with legal status, and U.S. citizens at the hands of Department of Homeland Security (DHS), including ICE and CBP agents, such as random stops demanding proof of citizenship from non-citizens and citizens alike, the arrests and detention of law abiding immigrants and U.S. citizens based on race and perceived ethnicity alone, the killings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, the disruption of local schools and businesses due to DHS activity, and the potential erosion of trust in local law enforcement as communicated by multiple chiefs of police across the state, including Brooklyn Park's Mark Bruley and

Minneapolis' Brian O'Hara, the Albert Lea Human Rights Commission asks that the Albert Lea City Council issue a statement calling on Congress to remove DHS, ICE, and CBP agents from Albert Lea and Minnesota until practices respecting basic human rights are restored within DHS as an agency."

Hanson made motion to approve presenting this request to the Mayor and Council and Evenson seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor of said motion, 6-0, Olson was absent. Motion carried.

Rigg clarified that this would be a letter from the Human Rights Commission and even though Corey-Gruenes wrote this statement, the letter should come from the HRC Chair Alkula. Alkula stated he will prepare the letter and send to or drop off at City Hall. Rigg said he will share with the Mayor and Council once received.

Boettcher asked how this statement would be made or issued if this was approved. Rigg stated he is unsure how this would be done, but stated there would possibly be a letter that would be written and if there's a consensus from all, it would be signed by the Mayor and Council. If there wasn't a consensus, it might be individual council members writing a letter to federally elected officials regarding their concerns about ICE activities in the State and in Albert Lea.

Old Business:

- A. Guest Columnist Albert Lea Tribune – Human Rights Shouldn't be Political – by Jeremy Corey-Gruenes

Discussion in regards to the proposed guest article for the Albert Lea Tribune. Tukua read the minutes of the last meeting in regards to the original intent of the guest column for the Tribune. Explaining the article is to bring more awareness to the HRC, to give history of the HRC and to have each member do a short bio and their reason for wanting to be a part of the HRC. Explaining that the proposed article is not the original intent of the guest column. The reference to Nazi Germany would cause some to stop reading altogether and then not reaching the full audience intended. There was additional discussion between staff and members, where it was pointed out that some parts of the article could be perceived as inflammatory to a portion of the population. Even though many agreed with the article, and thought it was well written, it was suggested that parts of the article could be re-worded to show the positives that have come out of these events. As a first article this might not be the article to start with. After overall discussion between members, below are some of the main points suggested.

- Change the tone of the article to one of caring, caring about our community, caring about the immigrant population, caring about those exercising their human and civil rights.
- Change the wording to make it welcoming and share the positives of how members of the community are helping those afraid to leave their homes.
- There was concern if we put out an article that is too strong, there's a jeopardy of not having a commission. The goal should be to educate people and not push a political side.
- Write about the children and their need to be protected, they shouldn't be used as a means to enter homes.

- Suggested that the commission shouldn't be controversial with first article. The information in the article is already out there on Facebook and various platforms.
- It was noted that there are two different viewpoints and the article cannot be too conservative or too liberal, call out what is wrong and what's been documented.
- Statistics and basic information should stay in the article. Also, letting community know that there have been more than just the 2 incidents in Albert Lea that have been reported.
- Once an article is ready, it could be published within a couple of weeks.
- Question asked about still publishing the article without tying to the HRC, to which Rigg said yes, the article can still be published without tying it to the Human Rights Commission.

Consensus of group is to hold off on the article until it can be adjusted to make it a softer guest column for the paper. For now, the article will be tabled.

In the discussion of the article, It was asked what are ways that the HRC can help people in need and show the different ways that the commission can support them. Here is the suggestions that came from this question.

- Suggestion to put a list together on resources available for people looking for help. Once we have this list together, share with commission members for them to share on their own social media. Post also on the Human Rights Commission page on the City's website. Suggested the statement reads – The Human Rights Commission is partnering with United Way, the School system, Churches etc. to help families and individuals in need.
- Include links to where donations could be made. All of this can be included in the guest column in the paper as well, and possibly a contact name and phone number. Noting that the Human Rights Commission will be partnering up with other organizations and resources in the community to help people and families in need. Making it welcoming to all individuals.
- The City would be able to add this information to our website and encourage residents to make donations to the organizations that are helping families in need.
- Suggestion made to get a complete listing from the various agencies so the list is all encompassing, add in healthcare options and ensure it's translated into other languages so all can access the information.
- There was discussion on trying to meet every 2 weeks verses monthly, to get a new article written. Suggested that there be 2 meetings a month, with the 2nd date being tentative. – Rigg stated he would find out what the rules would be regarding Commission communication. If there can be group chats, where work can be done before the next meeting. He will get an answer to the commission members by Monday, 2/16.

B. HRC Engagement Opportunities –

- Hanson spoke about the examples listed, Freeborn County Fair, Glenville Days, Morin Lake Days, Wind Down Wednesday, 3rd of July Parade. With the HRC being part of the City, she suggested that the engagement opportunity be an event in Albert Lea.

- Through discussion it was suggested that the HRC participate in Wind Down Wednesday. The event runs from 11am – 8pm, June 10th, July 8th and August 12th. Will still need to decide if there'd be a booth all day or for just a portion of the day.

Corey-Gruenes made a motion to have a booth at Wind Down Wednesday, with Evenson seconding the motion. On a voice vote, all members present voted in favor of said motion, 6-0, Olson was absent. Motion carried.

Alkula noted that the planning for Wind Down Wednesday should be discussed at our next meeting.

Board Member Items:

- **Victorino** – Partnering up with schools and non-profits, he asked if there is a medical option for individuals needing healthcare options. Evenson stated she'd put it in her resource list.
- **Corey-Gruenes** – Gave an update on the Story Show, adding that the proceeds will go to the Welcome Pantry. There will be 8 story tellers, with two of them being high school students who are immigrants. The story tellers theme will be - We Belong. Ariel Winter will be performing her music before and after the event and the show is at the Marion Ross Theatre on March 7, 2026 at 7:30pm. Once the media kits are ready, Corey-Gruenes will send to Tukua and she will share on the City's website. Corey-Gruenes encouraged everyone to attend.
- **Student Rep. Boettcher** – Reported on the events at Albert Lea High School. Mentioning the student walkout to protest ICE. The event was at the end of January and there was good turnout with approximately 60 to 70 students that walked out and peacefully protested. Also saying that pictures of the protest was on the front page of the Ahlhasa paper and their website.
- Boettcher spoke about a column he wrote for the paper regarding the immigration history of Freeborn County which was also published in the Ahlhasa paper.
- Boettcher shared the concern of students at the high school regarding ICE. There are a number of immigrant students and students of color that are worried about ICE being in the community. This is also impacting students mental health.
- **Hanson** – Asked to circle back to how we will get the resource list put together. In response to this, Victorino said once they partner with schools the social workers will be able to help. The success coaches at the high school shares this information when they do parent-teacher conferences and can make these lists available for the families. Evenson and Zelenak both said they had resources they could add to the listing. Alkula asked that one person gather this information from each individual and Evenson volunteered to do this. Victorino asked about adding healthcare resources to the listing. Evenson mentioned the Althing Clinic, they have telehealth and will add the contact information of the clinic to the list. Evenson added that Althing Clinic has a translation service for anyone that may need it. Victorino also noted that any video on the City's You Tube channel could also be translated into another language by using AI.

- **Corey-Gruenes** – He let members know that he appreciates the feedback on his article and is glad we are talking about this issue.

Staff Communications:

- **Rigg** – Rigg said he will check with our City Attorney on whether there can be communications between members, regarding group chats or messaging, to continue communication between meetings on topics that were not resolved.

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn was made by Hernandez and seconded by Evenson at 7:46 pm. On a voice vote, all members present voted in favor of said motion 6-0, Olson was absent. Meeting adjourned.

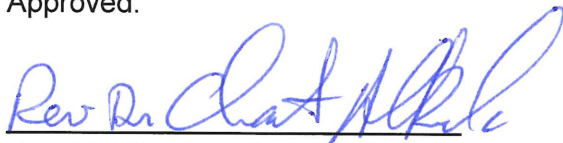
Next meeting will be Thursday, March 12, 2026, at 6:00pm in the City Council Chambers.

Respectfully submitted,



Karla Tukua
Human Rights Commission Secretary

Approved:



Rev. Dr. Charles Alkula
Human Rights Commission Chair