



**CITY OF ALBERT LEA  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES**

*June 12, 2025 Meeting – 6:00pm  
City Council Chambers - 221 E. Clark Street*

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Cesar Zamora Victorino, Peggy Olson, Angie Hanson, Jeremy Corey-Gruenes, Rev. Dr. Charles Alkula, Aruna Evenson and Keith Van Beek, Ex-Officio

**MEMBER ABSENT:** Irasema Hernandez

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

**CALL TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called to order by Malakowsky at 6:00pm

**ADOPT AGENDA:**

Due to the Human Rights Commission being a new board, there was no adoption of the agenda. Adoption of the agenda will start with the next meeting.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

- **Orientation – Cathy Malakowsky**
  - Malakowsky reviewed the goals for tonight which included getting to know each other, relationship building and the update to the agenda to cover their orientation. She stated that this is historic in the fact that the City is doing a board orientation of all members at once. It's historic as well in the fact that the City hasn't had a Human Rights Commission meeting since just before covid. Zelenak stated it stopped just before covid and hasn't resumed until now. Malakowsky thanked Hanson and other residents who wanted to bring it back.
  - Commission members introduced themselves, all giving their names and the reasons they wanted to be a part of the Human Rights Commission. The major reason for most is to give a voice to those without a voice regardless of age or skin color, to ensure people's rights are preserved, to make Albert Lea a more welcoming place to all, and to ensure people see the value in Albert Lea's diverse population.
  - Role of Commission: Advisory Board to our City Council
  - Member Responsibilities:
    - Attend meetings. If you cannot make the meeting, let the recording secretary know, which will be Karla Tukua. If there won't be a quorum of at least 4 members, then the meeting will likely be canceled.

- Participate by listening, speaking, asking questions, volunteering.
  - Respect each other. Everyone gets a chance to speak, but no one dominates the discussion.
  - Be an ambassador between the City/Commission and community. Be the city's eyes and ears. Hanson asked how the board would let the City know of anything they might hear in the community they feel the City should know. Malakowsky said to send an e-mail to Ian, Mike or herself and that their business cards were included in their folders.
  - Represent only yourself in any public statements, including social media posts. Giving the example, "I would not write a letter to the editor and sign it with my name and then underneath it put Human Rights Commission, unless the Commission has blessed that statement and Council has approved it."
  - Rigg clarified to the board members about the quorum statement, that Ex-Officio's on the board do not vote. This is another reason it's important to let staff know if they aren't able to make a meeting. He confirmed that City staff do not vote.
- City Staff Responsibilities:
    - Serve as a resource for Commission, if there are questions or research needed.
    - Set agenda based on Chair's requests and Commission input.
    - Provide recording secretary (Karla Tukua) to distribute agenda packets and keep minutes. After minutes are approved, they will be posted on the City's website.
  - Use Robert's Rules of Orders. (Note: Meetings are open to the public.)
    - Malakowsky gave an overview of Robert's rules of orders, adding that the Chair will run the meetings.
    - How to vote on a motion: Malakowsky explained this process and had Hanson and Alkula give an example of how this is done.
    - Chair calls for a motion.
    - Member makes a motion that includes who, what, when, why and how if applicable.
    - Different member seconds the motion.
    - Chair calls for a vote. All member signify with "yes" or "no" or "aye" and "nay."
  - **Adopt a Charter For How Commission Conducts Business (everyone participates)**
    - The Commission operates in a non-partisan manner.
      - All events and actions are based on local needs and issues.
      - The Commission is not an extension of any political party.
      - All events and actions must be branded as City of Albert Lea and not affiliated with any political party. Malakowsky explained the branding guidelines, stating if the HRC would sponsor an event, it would be labeled as a Human Rights Commission event and a logo would be made for it.

- Any resolution or proclamation must go to the City Council for approval and issuance. Malakowsky gave an example of how to present a proclamation, and once approved by the Commission, it would go to City Council for approval.
- Events and actions should focus on education, collaboration and consensus-building.
- Hanson brought up that with needing council approval, the Commission would need to allow for lead time, stating that they need to think at least a month in advance on items needing approval.
- Other Ideas for ground rules?
  - How many days ahead of meeting for agenda packets? Malakowsky asked if they'd like the Friday before or the Monday before? It was noted that either would work. Rigg explained that some people want it on Friday to have the weekend to review, but either way it would need to be out by Monday at the latest.
  - "Member items" should be a standing agenda item? –Hanson stated this would be nice, if they had nothing, then they didn't need to share anything.
  - If no business to conduct, then no meeting just to meet. –Malakowsky gave different examples, once a month, twice a month. Examples of when other boards meet were given as well.
  - Rigg mentioned that more of this will be worked out, this is to start the discussion. He stated he wants this to be member driven within the parameters that are set up.
  - Additional questions: Hanson asked about the open meeting rules and if it applied to outside conversations, to which Rigg said it wouldn't apply to the Commission, with members being free to meet together if they wanted.
- **History of Albert Lea Human Rights Commission (Mike Zelenak)**
  - Zelenak covered the history of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and how the ordinance was written. He explained that the ordinance had the HRC focus more on equal opportunity in employment. If an employee would have a problem with their employer, they would bring it to the City. Zelenak mentioned the HRC had deviated from this because the State had better resources to handle these issues. He said it wasn't the best use of the Commission's resources as a volunteer board to be responsible for employee related complaints. The HRC became more focused on events and to help Albert Lea be more welcoming and inclusive. He listed examples being the Taste of Heritage with different nationalities, ethnic groups in relation to foods, dancing and culture. There was a film series with discussion groups on different cultural books.
  - Rigg explained that our Convention and Visitors Bureau has been good about expanding cultural events and more in regards to diversity and inclusion. There weren't as many of these events when the HRC met before.
  - Zelenak continued to give different examples one being the Department of Human Rights would give a certain number of presentations a year relating to

Human Rights and the City could provide a place for them and the HRC would be able to help with that. He spoke on when covid hit, the numbers dwindled for the HRC until they just stopped meeting. Now with a group of community members showing interest in bringing this back, the HRC was reestablished, with today being its first meeting.

- Malakowsky explained the City promotes the events that the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) organizes. Victorino questioned if HRC members could volunteer at events and Malakowsky said “Yes.” There was additional dialog in regards to how the HRC would get their information out there. One way was by having a booth at the different CVB events.
- Victorino wanted to know how much of our information was in different languages, specifically the Karen culture, and same with the Spanish speaking. Zelenak explained the City uses a language line service for residents that need assistance. Malakowsky noted that the City had translated a survey in Karen for its Library and there were a number of responses from the Karen community. The library also has a selection of Karen books. Malakowsky said that the Parks and Recreation Fun Guide is translated into Spanish as well. Rigg had mentioned the new website with different languages.

- **Review Ordinance in Regards to Human Rights Commission (everyone participates)**

C.1 – Code of Ordinances – Division 4. Human Rights Commission

- Review, discuss and draft purpose statement for Commission
  - Malakowsky read through the current purpose in the Code of Ordinances listed below.
  - There was discussion on what the Commission would like to focus on and with Malakowsky’s guidance, the committee members reviewed the statement and re-phrased the statement to what they would like it to say to better meet what they would like to focus on.
- Updated Purpose Statement.
  - The purpose of the Commission will be to serve as a resource for all residents seeking equal opportunities in employment, housing, public accommodations, public service, education and state statutes with full participation in the affairs of the albert Lea community. The Commission will advise the City Council on long-range programs to improve community relations in the city.
  - Malakowsky asked commission members to think about this and be ready to suggest changes and vote at their next meeting.
- Draft amendments to ordinance for recommending to Council
  - Next up was the review of the Ordinance, looking at the duties and responsibilities in the current ordinance. Malakowsky provided a listing of items that came from a meeting with interested residents and Zelenak provided a list of duties and responsibilities from when the HRC met before covid. Malakowsky asked members to look at the lists and if there is anything they would like, they

can start adding to their potential duties. Any changes would then need to be drafted and approved. There was continued dialog regarding the process. Malakowsky used other boards as a reference on how best to adjust the HRC duties and responsibilities. Upon discussion the statement below is what the members decided on.

- 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. The purpose of the Commission will be to serve as a resource for all those seeking equal opportunities in employment, housing, public accommodations, public service, education and state statutes with full participation in the affairs of the Albert Lea community. The Commission will advise the City Council on long-range programs to improve community relations in the community.
- Malakowsky noted the recommendation would be to advise the council to strike all the current language. Rigg stated there could be a draft ordinance ready at the next meeting for members to vote on recommending to council.
- Malakowsky asked commission members to think about this and be ready to suggest changes and vote at their next meeting.

○ **Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair**

- Malakowsky asked the commission members if they were ready to vote for a Chair and Vice-Chair. Hanson asked if anyone was interested in one of the positions to which Dr. Charles Alkula said he'd be interested in serving as the Chair.
- Hanson moved to appoint Charles Alkula as their chair and Corey-Gruenes seconded the motion. On a voice vote, the commission voted in favor of said motion 6-0 (Irasema Hernandez was absent). Motion declared passed.
- Alkula asked for volunteers for Vice-Chair and Aruna Evenson said she'd be interested. There were no other members interested. Corey-Gruenes made a motion to appoint Evenson and Olson seconded the motion. On a voice vote, the commission voted in favor of said motion, 6-0, (Irasema Hernandez was absent). Motion declared passed.
- Chair: Rev. Dr. Charles Alkula
- Vice-Chair: Aruna Evenson

**BOARD MEMBER ITEMS:**

- Funding options? City grant opportunities, partnerships, Blue Zones.
- How to get the word out? Column in the Tribune (Jeremy), Cesar's Facebook page and videos to get information out to the Latin American and Hispanic community, reach out to schools, churches.
- Open meetings with translators

- Need to be aware of the time it will take to get items ready for Council. Plan ahead for any events they'd like to do.
- Resource Fair or Community Connect in one location at the same time: help with haircuts, gas money, shoes, blood pressure checks, etc. Van Beek mentioned that Ride for Hero's is having a "Stand Down" in August at the Armory for veterans and their families. It includes backpacks for kids, legal advice, haircuts and a lot of the same things mentioned.
- Malakowsky also noted that Irasema sits on the Homelessness Response Team and they are talking about doing an event like this. It's possible that the HRC can partner with them to help with this. Utilize Karen outreach workers.
- Malakowsky circled back to "How to get the word out" and covered the different avenues to get the word out. The commission can help by spreading the word to people they know, the city has different social media accounts for various departments, covering the different avenues that the city uses to get information out to residents, including the new website.
- Hanson brought up having a School Board Member as a non-voting member on the board. Malakowsky said the City could issue an invitation to the School Board if anyone would be interested as being part of the board as a non-voting member. There was dialog between members and ex-officio's on the benefits of having a school board member on the commission.
- Elderly: Hunger issues, resources for them.
- How big do you want the Commission to be?
- How can Commission address misinformation?
- Interested in exploring events on timely topics on human rights.

**EX-OFFICIO COMMUNICATIONS:** None

**STAFF COMMUNICATIONS:**

- 2 student reps or youth reps? There was continued dialog in regards to adding a student rep to the HRC, discussed having an example of what we'd look for in the ideal rep.
- The members came up with the description of student rep.
  - Non-voting member
  - Well-rounded, interested in Human Rights and advocating for them.
  - Be responsible to attend meetings.
  - At least a sophomore.
  - Need to give a one-year commitment
  - Application process for Commission review
- Staff will prepare the application and the Commission will issue the application in August, choose their top 2. Student reps will take seats in September.
- Malakowsky will send out the notes from the resident meeting she was a part
- Malakowsky asked the board to review the new city website that will launch in July. Is it welcoming to everybody, does it include everybody and are there any languages that would need to be added?

Alkula asked for a motion to adjourn. Motion to adjourn was made by Hanson and seconded by Corey-Gruenes. The next HRC meeting will be at 6:00pm on Thursday, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025. On a voice vote, all members present voted in favor of said motion 6-0 (Irasema Hernandez was absent). Motion declared passed. Meeting adjourned.


**ADJOURNMENT: 8:02PM**

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karla Tukua', written over a horizontal line.

Karla Tukua  
Human Rights Commission Secretary

Approved:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charles Alkula', written over a horizontal line.

Rev. Dr. Charles Alkula  
Human Rights Commission Chair

