

MINUTES  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
March 15, 2022, 6:00 p.m.  
Basement Conference Room, First Christian Church

CITY OF  
2022 APR 11 PM 4:45

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Members' Term Attendance</u> (mtgs attended-mtgs absent)	<u>End of Current Term of Office</u>
<b>MEMBERS PRESENT:</b>	Juniper Brown	(07-00)	10/08/22
	Sean Connors	(12-00)	10/08/23
	Derek Evans	(03-01)	10/08/24
	Terri Lowdon	(23-07)	10/08/23
	David Mason	(09-01)	10/08/24
	Daniel McGaughy	(06-05)	10/08/23
	Joyce Starr	(05-00)	10/08/24
<b>MEMBERS ABSENT:</b>	Kristina Hannon	(01-04)	10/08/24
<b>STAFF PRESENT:</b>	Lisa Robertson, City Attorney Ben Williams, Recording Secretary		

**Item #1      Call to Order**

Connors called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

**Item #2      ROLL CALL:** McGaughy – Present, Brown – Present, Connors – Present, Evans – Present, Hannon – Absent, Lowdon – Present, Mason – Present, Starr – Present. Quorum is Present.

**Item #3      Approval of Minutes**

Lowdon moved to approve the January minutes. McGaughy seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

**Item #4      Introduction of Human Rights Commission Members**

Connors asked for introductions. Several citizens introduced themselves. Lee Clark also known as Mika Malone introduced themselves and stated that they were on the Equality Coalition board. Amy Stanton introduced herself as the president of the Midland Empire Equality Coalition. Debbie Baker introduced herself and stated that she was involved in many organizations. Mary Cole introduced herself and stated that she was there just to help and listen to people. Jackson Connors introduced himself as Chief of Staff and External Relations director for the Student Government Association at Missouri Western. Danna Massin introduced herself as a business owner and community volunteer and stated that she was in attendance to learn more.

Connors stated that the meeting was an open forum for the LGBTQ community. Connors recounted the history of similar Human Rights Commission forums in the past. Connors recounted a forum at the Bartlett Center and how the Commission was able to address some items that arose from that forum. Connors also recounted a forum done at Interserv that focused on the immigrant community. Connors stated that the Commission is still working on some of the action items from the Interserv meeting. Connors explained how an ADA violation brought forth by a local couple at that meeting was resolved. Connors stated he believes the Commission has a purpose and they can be servants of the community. McGaughy addressed an issue of a bathroom at Bartlett Center that is not ADA compliant, and that the City does not intend to upgrade it.

**Item #5      Open for Discussion**

**Item #5a.      Community Needs**

Connors inquired of MEEC what needs they thought were not being met by the City. Stanton stated that the community has made a lot of progress in the last 30 years on LGBTQ issues. Malone stated that there were a lot of staff and administrators at schools that are apathetic if the students are getting bullied. Some of the administrators relay that the child is getting bullied for being different, but these aren't reasons to be bullied and staff shouldn't be allowing this behavior to take place. Connors asked if Malone was referring to Andrew County. Malone responded, yes. Connors stated that there were two gay straight alliances at high schools in St. Joseph. Brown asked Malone if the hostility was mostly from students or staff in Andrew County. Malone responded that it was mostly from the students and that the teachers were dismissive of the issues. Connors stated that there wasn't much that the commission could do about the school district but that they could help form a good relationship with the school district.

Connors inquired about other community needs. Stanton stated that Pride would be taking place this year and explained several planned activities. Stanton explained that she has sent out MEEC scholarship information to all the high schools in northwest Missouri and northeast Kansas and that the winner would be from St. Joseph this year. Connors stated that Pride is a City sponsored event. Ron Johnson stated that organizations such as MEEC and P-FLAG help to stem the bullying that takes place in schools and that the groups assist administrators with helping local students who face bullying. Lowdon inquired if anyone in the group had seen the HRC window clings in local stores. The group responded they had not. Stanton inquired if there was a rainbow directory for the surrounding area. Stanton stated that MEEC was in the process of finishing one for the purpose of identifying LGBTQ friendly businesses.

**Item #5b.      Educational Needs**

Connors inquired about education needs outside of the school district. Connors stated that the commission could partner with the district on certain things but not on others. Johnson inquired if the commission had anything to do with advertising on the City buses. Connors

stated they did not. Johnson stated he saw an advertisement about HIV and suggested maybe the Commission could educate the public by posting information on the side of a bus. Connors inquired if there were things the Commission could be talking to the Health Department about that maybe they aren't thinking of. Lowdon stated that she was happy that no one in attendance was saying anything horrible.

Mason stated the areas the commission covered were housing, employment, and public accommodation. Mason inquired if there was discrimination in any of these areas. Stanton stated that she faced discrimination in housing back in the 90's, but that she doesn't see that as much today. Connors stated that it is no longer the younger people having problems, it is the older people. Malone agreed. Starr asked if people were being treated fairly at local businesses. Stanton stated that she had never faced any discrimination in St. Joseph at businesses. Baker stated that at the hospital there were some staff members who refused to use the appropriate pronouns for her father around 5 years ago. Stanton stated that her sister will go to Kansas City because there aren't many doctors for trans people in St. Joseph. Starr asked if trans people could go to the emergency room and other things. Stanton stated that for their hormones, they go down to Kansas City.

Connors asked Jackson if there was any discrimination on campus at Missouri Western. Jackson stated the campus was very inclusive and accepting of everyone. Brown inquired of the size of the LGBTQ footprint on campus. Mason asked if there were other groups on campus who faced discrimination. Jackson stated that some African American people on campus would discuss issues occasionally. Mason inquired if the issues were from staff or other students. Jackson stated that the staff was open and accepting and that he thought the issues were more peer to peer.

#### **Item #5b. Other Unidentified Needs**

Brown informed the group of an issue related to public access at Missouri Western. Brown stated that when they are early to class and must go to the bathroom, there is nowhere for them to go because there is no inclusive bathroom at the university. Brown stated that they either must hold it or go to the edge of the wood line. Brown stated that as soon as they go to the bathroom, they accept a societal norm that says they are something that they don't agree with. Brown stated that it is a systemic issue and a structural violence issue. Jackson asked if Brown was referring to gender neutral bathrooms. Brown responded, yes. Jackson recommended that Brown take it to the president or vice-president of the Student Government Association so that they can present legislation to the student senate. Connors asked Brown if they knew of any issues with City facilities. Brown responded that if you thought about access from a non-gender standpoint then most facilities in St. Joseph require people to use a male or female bathroom or possibly occupy a bathroom where someone who is in a wheelchair needs access. Brown explained their vision of a gender-neutral bathroom and explained that they understood this is a large funding issue but that it was a fundamental structural issue on how society is set up to handle people and a massive oversight on public access. Mason asked if the issue was just changing the wording on the door to read only "bathroom." Brown responded that it was a bigger conversation than

could be solved in one night. Brown continued saying that it was something that needs to be thought of and that the issue went further than bathrooms. They continued explaining that all facilities are sex-based systems. Brown gave solutions for those who might be concerned about the other people in the bathroom. Evans questioned if there were any gender-neutral bathrooms in City Hall. Mason asked what one even looked like. Jackson asked if Mason would like to go see one in the building in which the meeting was being held. The group then went to view a gender-neutral bathroom.

Connors inquired who to contact at City Hall for a gender-neutral bathroom. Robertson responded that Mary Robertson managed facilities and that she would be the one to contact. Brown stated that the discussion surrounding gender-neutral bathrooms needs to happen and that they understand there are fears and concerns surrounding it. Connors stated that the Commission exists to address these problems and that we are all humans who deserve to be treated fairly. Evans stated that educating people is where the group can be proactive against discrimination and that education can prevent discrimination. There was then lengthy discussion about the difference between education and advocacy. Evans recounted a story about a friend of his who used to work for the City in the Public Works Department, stating that his friend quit because of a culture where his friend felt uncomfortable coming forward with their issues due to a macho culture at that particular point in time.

Brown asked if there was a way to link the information from all the local groups into one place. Brown gives the example of putting the rainbow directory on the HRC Facebook page. There was general discussion on the topic.

**Item #6      City Staff Update**

None.

**Item #7      Future Agenda Overview**

None.

**Item #8      Adjourn**

Connors moved to adjourn the meeting. Starr seconded. No member opposed.

The meeting adjourned at 7:29 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted,

Ben Williams, Recording Secretary (Legal Assistant)