

Meeting minutes Human rights commission

Members present: Lee Conliffe, Otoha Masaki, Cynthia Tlaiye, Akilah Anderson, Jackie Kay, Isabel Anderson

Members absent: Catherine Lawler Turnbull, Andrea Alvarez

Guest: None

Staff present: Pat Coleman, community engagement coordinator

1. Call to order – roll call – 6:02pm
2. Approval of agenda

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Chair Anderson and seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Approval of minutes

Motion to approve the minutes of the March 17, 2026 Human Rights Commission Meeting was made by Chair Isabelle and seconded by Commissioner Jackie Kay. The motion carried.

4. Old business
 - a. Human Rights Award Recap

Chair Isabelle Anderson reported that she and Commissioner Andrea Alvarez presented the Human Rights Award at the May 4th City Council meeting. Representatives from each award-winning school were present to receive their plaques, followed by a reception in the lobby. Several Council members remarked that, given the difficult start to the year, the award presentation was a welcome and uplifting occasion. Community Engagement Coordinator Pat Coleman noted that there was strong attendance at the Council meeting and that the nominator was given an opportunity to speak on behalf of their nomination — a new practice that was well-received and may be incorporated into future award presentations going forward. Coleman also noted that the elementary schools and middle school accepted the award, but the high school declined, stating they felt they had not done as much work as the other schools. A write-up on the award was published in the *Sun Sailor*, the local newspaper.

If you need special accommodations or have questions about the meeting, please call (Pat Coleman 952-924-2518) or the administration department at 952.924.2525.

These minutes were created with the assistance of a generative AI transcript service, then edited and finalized by a staff person.

b. Robbinsdale Human Rights Event Recap

Chair Anderson provided a recap of a human rights event held in Brooklyn Center at a library, which she attended approximately two weeks prior. The event was structured in two parts. The first portion featured an immigration-focused trivia game designed to dispel common misconceptions about immigrants — most notably, the false belief that immigrants do not pay taxes or health care premiums. The second portion consisted of a panel of four speakers, including a representative from the Attorney General's office, who discussed legal services available to community members, particularly in light of Operation Metro Surge. The former chair of the Brooklyn Park Human Rights Commission, himself an immigrant, also participated and described efforts Brooklyn Park has made at the local level, including distributing resource guides at community events. A brief Q&A session followed the panel.

Commissioner Jackie Kay asked about attendance, and Chair Anderson noted there were approximately 20 attendees. Commissioner Cynthia Tlaiye asked whether the trivia portion was intended to help attendees have better-informed conversations with those who hold misconceptions, rather than to convince skeptics in the room. Chair Anderson affirmed that while the audience was generally supportive, the facts provided were more granular and actionable — allowing attendees to cite specific data points rather than speaking in generalities. Commissioner Lee Conliffe asked for clarification on whether the discussion of immigrants specifically concerned undocumented individuals, which Chair Isabelle confirmed.

5. New business

- a. Welcome Week – Jocelyn I. Hernandez Guiron, Racial Equity and Inclusion Specialist
- Community Engagement Coordinator Pat Coleman introduced Jocelyn Hernandez Guitron, the city's Racial Equity and Inclusion (REI) Specialist, noting that she is currently serving as the acting REI lead while the REI Director is on maternity leave. Hernandez Guitron presented an overview of Welcome Week and solicited ideas and collaboration from the Commission.

Background: Hernandez Guitron explained that Welcome Week is a national initiative organized by Welcoming America, a nonprofit focused on recognizing the contributions of immigrants and newcomers and encouraging communities to be more welcoming. St. Louis Park participated for the first time in 2025. That year's theme was *Stories We Share*, and efforts included a mayoral video with Spanish and Somali captions, a story-sharing campaign, a community resource guide, and window clings distributed to local businesses. The initiative was connected to the Vision 4 Community Gathering Forum.

2026 Plans: This year's theme is *Stories We Share: The Courage to Connect*, building on the prior year's theme. Welcome Week is scheduled for September 10–19. Confirmed plans include continuing the window cling

program with local businesses. The planning team has also been exploring a daily "Be a Welcomer" challenge — a social media or neighborhood-oriented campaign using daily action prompts aligned with themes provided by Welcoming America, such as civic engagement and equitable access.

Commission Discussion and Ideas: Hernandez Guitron asked the Commission for feedback on what kinds of actions would feel relevant and engaging to residents, and how to better incorporate the immigrant-welcoming focus into the initiative.

Commissioner Kay asked whether a panel event had been considered. Hernandez Guitron said that while no large event had been formally planned, there were internal conversations about how to support community healing following recent immigration enforcement activities that directly affected St. Louis Park residents. She indicated that a panel with a "know your rights" focus could be a good direction.

Chair Anderson also suggested that the city's neighborhood revitalization program could potentially be reformatted to allow joint funding requests between neighboring organizations, which she noted could facilitate cross-neighborhood collaboration on events. Coleman confirmed that this idea aligns with conversations already underway, and that outreach to neighborhood organizations is planned for a June 11 networking meeting.

Commissioner Conliffe referenced a large cultural festival in Canada called Mosaic, where different cultural groups present food, dance, and traditions in adjacent tents over a multi-week period, and suggested St. Louis Park could consider something similar on a smaller scale during Welcome Week. Hernandez Guitron noted the comparison to Saint Paul's Festival of Nations.

Youth Commissioner Otoha Masaki likened the concept to EPCOT's country pavilions and suggested the idea of a passport activity for attendees, noting that such an event could help immigrant communities connect with one another across language barriers, not only with longtime residents.

Commissioner Kay expressed support for a larger community gathering, noting the value of bringing different cultural groups into a shared space rather than having separate individual events.

Commissioner Tlaiye proposed a multi-layered approach to the daily campaign: rather than prescribing a specific action each day, each day's post could highlight a different St. Louis Park neighborhood, feature a personal story from a resident in that neighborhood, and direct people to a static webpage listing optional actions they could take. This approach was seen as more digestible and less overwhelming for residents. She also suggested featuring neighborhood organizers as tangible points of contact for

residents looking to get involved. The Commission agreed this concept was well-aligned with the initiative's goals.

Commissioner Kay noted that neighborhoods already well-organized could be highlighted, and that the Commission could potentially assist in identifying leaders in neighborhoods that are not yet formally organized. Coleman confirmed that unorganized neighborhoods are identifiable through the city's neighborhood grant webpage (which lists contact information only for organized neighborhoods), and acknowledged the challenge of identifying willing leaders in larger neighborhoods.

The discussion turned to the possibility of a potluck-style event where community members bring dishes representing their cultural backgrounds. Chair Anderson noted that the city's ability to provide food is constrained by state statute, but that a community-led potluck organized by the Commission rather than the city could offer more flexibility. Coleman indicated that food safety and labeling requirements would need to be confirmed. Hernandez Guitron noted that having Commission members commit to bringing dishes would reduce the risk of poor turnout and would model the welcoming behavior being promoted. She also suggested incorporating an educational component, such as cards explaining when or why a particular food is eaten in a given culture.

Commissioner Kay raised the idea of highlighting healing practices across different cultures — whether food-related, spiritual, or otherwise — as a way to go deeper than a typical cultural festival. Hernandez Guitron affirmed this direction and noted that she had worked on a similar concept involving food and healing in a prior role. Youth Commissioner Masaki connected this idea to the racial healing events the city has held and suggested incorporating conversation prompts or table activities.

School board representative Jason Lowe asked which contacts at St. Louis Park Public Schools Hernandez Guitron was working with. She noted she had been in contact with Patrice and was working closely with Becca Star in the evaluation office. Commissioner Lowe offered to connect her with the district's multicultural liaisons — including liaisons serving the Hispanic/Latino, Somali, and American Indian communities — and agreed to make those introductions via email.

Welcoming America Certification: Hernandez Guitron also updated the Commission on the city's pursuit of a one-star Welcoming City certification through Welcoming America. This preliminary certification is included within the city's existing membership fee and involves gathering evidence that the city is meeting defined standards across multiple categories — including involvement from the school district, nonprofits, and public safety departments. A self-assessment is planned for June. Hernandez Guitron invited Commissioners to share examples of organizations or programs that

could serve as evidence of meeting the certification criteria, and asked them to pass any suggestions to Coleman.

Commissioner Kay asked whether there was intent to pursue higher certification levels (two-star, three-star, etc.). Hernandez Guitron explained that higher certification levels involve additional costs and are significantly more rigorous, with very few cities nationally having achieved full certification. She indicated that the current focus is on establishing a baseline and that further pursuit would be a future conversation.

Commissioner Conliffe asked why participation in Welcoming America is relatively limited in Minnesota, given that only St. Louis Park, Bloomington, and Willmar were mentioned. Hernandez Guitron attributed this to both limited awareness of the program and the substantial internal coordination required to pursue certification across city departments and community partners.

The Commission agreed to continue the conversation about hosting a Welcome Week event and expressed interest in taking a leading role in organizing a community gathering. The Commission noted that this effort aligns with the work plan item supporting REI initiatives.

b. Purpose Statement Review

Coleman provided background, explaining that earlier in the year, purpose statements were removed from the city code as part of a broader effort to streamline and standardize governing documents across all commissions. The Human Rights Commission and the Environment and Sustainability Commission were the only two commissions that had purpose statements in the code. City Council directed that all commissions should still have purpose statements, and the Commission was asked to review and provide input on a proposed statement developed from existing language across the city code, bylaws, and other commission documents.

Commissioner Kay stated that while she found the proposed statement well-written, it felt somewhat aspirational relative to the Commission's current actual scope of activity. Commissioner Conliffe echoed this, specifically noting that the word "advises" felt strong given the Commission's current relationship with City Council. Coleman clarified that the Commission is, by design, an advisory body to City Council, and that staff are actively working to increase Council's engagement with and direction to the Commission. He noted the advisory communication form is also being refined to strengthen that connection.

Commissioner Kay asked about the phrase "participates in studies," and whether recent activities such as the neighborhood engagement work or the police department consultant review would fall under that category. Coleman confirmed those would be applicable examples.

Chair Anderson suggested adding a reference to public safety, noting the Commission's role in responding to events such as Operation Metro Surge and the importance of having explicit authority to engage on those issues. Commissioner Kay raised a concern that "public safety" could be interpreted as overlapping with the Police Advisory Commission's mandate. Commissioner Tlaiye proposed softer language — rather than stating the Commission directly advises on public safety, the statement could reflect that the Commission aligns its actions with citywide efforts to protect the community. Commissioner Kay asked whether a reference to cross-collaboration with other boards and commissions could serve this purpose. The Commission agreed.

The proposed addition to the statement read: "collaborates with community partners and other boards and commissions."

A motion to approve the purpose statement as amended — adding the phrase "collaborates with community partners and other boards and commissions" — was made by Commissioner Tlaiye and seconded. The motion carried by a show of hands.

Coleman noted that all commissions are currently going through a similar review process, and that the final statements will be compiled and used across outreach materials and the city website.

c. Children's First Literacy Festival

Chair Anderson reported that Children First reached out to ask whether the Commission would like to host a dedicated event at the annual Children's First Literacy Festival, scheduled for August 8–15. She noted that last year, the Commission tabled with the city at the ice cream social component of the festival, featuring a ranked-choice voting activity with a book prize drawing.

Coleman raised the question of whether the outreach may have been referencing the Banned Book Brunch, which the Commission had previously hosted but moved away from after very low attendance the prior year.

The Commission discussed the matter and agreed that organizing a dedicated event this year was not the preferred path, given capacity and competing priorities. Instead, the Commission agreed to table again with the city at the ice cream social, likely on August 9th. Chair Isabelle confirmed she would contact Ryan Whitaker at Children First to communicate the Commission's intention to table collaboratively with the city rather than host a standalone event.

Commissioner Kay noted the importance of confirming the specific date as soon as possible given how quickly August arrives.

d. Sidewalk Poetry Review Committee

Coleman explained that the city's annual Sidewalk Poetry program, conducted in partnership with Friends of the Arts, invites residents to submit poems each April during National Poetry Month. Selected poems are sandblasted into sidewalks in a designated neighborhood. This year, poems will be placed in the Pennsylvania Park neighborhood. Approximately 80 poems were received by the submission deadline. Coleman noted that last year set a record with over 120 submissions, and that poems are submitted from a wide range of ages, from elementary school students to senior citizens.

Coleman noted that as part of an ongoing effort to diversify the review committee, a block captain from the Pennsylvania Park neighborhood has been invited to participate this year. He asked whether a Commission member would also be willing to join the review committee. He noted that the review would take place during daytime hours in mid-to-late June, and that the session would require a meaningful block of time.

Commissioner Kay expressed interest, noting she could adjust her schedule with advance notice. Chair Isabelle Anderson indicated she also has daytime flexibility on most weekdays. Coleman agreed to send a follow-up email with the confirmed date so that a Commission representative could be identified.

Coleman also noted that a ribbon-cutting or community celebration event is being planned for when the poems are sandblasted, likely in early-to-mid August, before the state fair — as the sandblasting vendor is unavailable during those two weeks. The Commission will be kept informed as dates are confirmed.

e. Golden Valley Pride

Chair Anderson noted that Golden Valley Pride is scheduled for June 13 from noon to 6:00 PM at the same location as last year. The Commission agreed to again assist the city by tabling at the event. Commissioner Conliffe, who participated last year, described it as a positive experience. The Commission confirmed that shifts were two hours in length and were coordinated by REI staff. Commissioner Kay expressed interest in volunteering and noted she may bring a family member.

It was agreed that staff Jocelyn Hernandez Guitron would send out a sign-up link to Commission members for shift selection, consistent with the process used last year.

6. Work group/subcommittee updates

Chair Anderson reported that she and Coleman met with Jewish Family and Community Services to learn about PRISM, a local resource organization. The takeaway from the meeting was that PRISM does important work and that the Commission could help by increasing awareness among St. Louis Park residents, particularly in the event that demand for services increases

due to potential state or federal funding cuts to programs like SNAP. PRISM indicated they would send outreach materials for the Commission to share and post in community spaces. Chair Isabelle noted she would forward those materials to Coleman if needed.

Commissioner Kay asked how PRISM's services compare to STEP, another local resource organization. Coleman noted significant overlap between the two, with one distinguishing feature being that STEP has implemented a fresh produce model resembling a small grocery store, allowing clients to select items directly rather than receiving pre-packed donations. The source of that fresh produce — likely through a grocery distribution or food sharing arrangement — was not recalled with specificity.

7. Chair and staff updates

a. Strategic Priorities Updates

Coleman then provided an update on the city's new strategic priorities, noting that they are now being incorporated into city communications and materials. Five priorities were identified following approximately two years of planning and community engagement, supported by outside consultants and with input from commissions including the HRC. The five priorities are:

1. Welcoming and safe community
2. Good governance
3. Connected and safe infrastructure
4. Diverse, affordable, and dignified housing
5. Climate leadership and natural spaces

Coleman noted that internal workshops are currently underway across city departments to establish goals and implementation plans for each priority.

b. June Meeting reschedule

Coleman noted that both Chair Anderson and he will be unavailable for the regularly scheduled June meeting on June 16. Chair Isabelle indicated she is also unavailable on June 23. After brief discussion, the Commission agreed to reschedule the June meeting to **Tuesday, June 30**. Coleman confirmed he would follow up via email to verify availability with all members.

8. Adjournment – 7:40p.m.

