



MINUTES

Civil Rights Commission

6:00 PM - Wednesday, January 8, 2025

Marion Public Library, 1101 6th Avenue

Minutes are in draft format until approved at the next meeting

The Civil Rights Commission of the City of Marion, Linn County, Iowa met on Wednesday, January 8, 2025, at 6:00 PM, in the Boardroom of the Marion Public Library, 1101 6th Avenue, with the following members present:

PRESENT: Denise Bridges, Kathy Hagler, Cody Crawford, Renae Forsyth-Christy, Katie Tanner, and Mary Beth O'Neill

ABSENT: Etherton Muchirahondo

STAFF PRESENT: Alicia Abernathey, Kim Downs, and Jenna Silver

OTHERS PRESENT: Jennifer Tibbetts and Ana Clymer

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

PUBLIC FORUM

Ana Clymer, Marion resident, spoke on her excitement to see the action items on tonight's agenda.

Commissioner Tanner arrived at 6:02 p.m.

REGULAR AGENDA

Motion to approve the December 4, 2024 minutes

Moved by Hagler, seconded by Crawford, to approve the December 4, 2024 minutes.
Approved unanimously

Election of Chair

Alicia Abernathey, staff liaison, reminded the Commission which members were nominated.

Moved by O'Neill, seconded by Crawford, to elect Renae Forsyth-Christy as Chair of the Commission.

Approved unanimously

Election of Vice Chair

Moved by O'Neill, seconded by Crawford, to elect Katie Tanner as Vice Chair of the Commission.

Approved unanimously

Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission Report (CRCRC)

Jennifer Tibbetts, CRCRC interim executive director, shared a CRCRC office update and provided a handout with information on cases for the Marion Civil Rights Commission (MCRC), that would be handled by CRCRC. The handout showed there are currently no cases on file with CRCRC for MCRC. Tibbetts shared what cases are handled by CRCRC versus other organizations, per the 28E Agreement. Tibbetts shared no current outreach events are being planned for partnership at this time and provided information on upcoming trainings.

[CRCRC Report - Jan 2025](#)

Staff Liaison Report

Abernathy provided the staff liaison report including an update on intakes and inquiries and commission vacancies. Abernathy shared the city attorney will provide training at the February meeting and reminded Commissioners the February meeting will be held at City Hall.

Part Time Civil Rights Commission Staff Member

- **Review and discussion of proposed job description**
- **Vote to approve the job description**

Commissioner Crawford shared how he drafted the above referenced job description, after reviewing positions posted by the City of Cedar Rapids and the City of North Liberty. He indicated that he would like this position to be the face of the Commission and feels the work that the position would do is enough for a full time position but he started with a part time position. Commissioner Crawford provided input that he does believe a bachelor's degree should be required.

Commissioner Bridges questioned if other organizations have this position. Crawford indicated that he does not know of any other cities that have this position. Abernathy confirmed that the City of Cedar Rapids previously had an outreach position. Tibbetts shared how the City of Cedar Rapids operates, as well as information on subgroups such as the Iowa League of Civil and Human Rights Agencies.

Discussion took place amongst Commissioners as to the education qualifications for this position. Abernathy stated any approved job description would be reviewed by Human Resources and Finance to finalize educational qualifications, salary range, etc.

Commissioner Tanner proposed the idea of an internship program. Kim Downs, deputy city manager, indicated an internship would need a different job description. Commissioner O'Neill requested confirmation that this position could be an intern. Commissioner Forsyth-Christy indicated that having an internship would be beneficial.

Commissioner Tanner asked if the City had any experience with intern partnerships. Downs could not speak on behalf of Marion but on behalf of the success of the program while she was with the City of Hiawatha. Abernathey provided information on students who have worked with the City.

Abernathey requested the commission look at the event program coordinator position that has recently approved by Council. It was confirmed that the person in the event coordinator position would not attend events on behalf of the Commission but would help plan and organize Commission events.

Abernathey asked the Commission if they felt like they were in a place to bring this to Council for consideration. Commissioner Crawford stated he believes this position needs to provide more support than events and outreach. Commissioner Tanner shared she would like this to be on Council's radar moving forward.

Commissioner Hagler stated she likes the idea of an intern to document what is being done and show proof of why the position is needed. Commissioner Crawford expressed the job description needs to be brought to Council and for them to back the Commission. He believes that this is more than an intern position. Commissioner Hagler asked if an intern position could it be done yet in FY25. Abernathey provided the timeline, with deadlines, for the FY25 budget.

Commissioner Tanner asked if the job description was brought to Council and the request was denied if adjustments could be made and brought back. Downs explained the budget process and the importance of having data to support position requests. Downs stated, speaking from experience, she believes an internship might be the best course of action right now to show Council the data and justification for the position.

Abernathey indicated she does not believe that the Commission is using current staff to the full potential, and until current resources are exhausted the request might be received as premature. Commissioner Crawford stated he thinks staff is pushing for this position to not happen. Downs and Abernathey provided feedback that is not the case and they want the Commission to be successful. Staff is working for the greater good of the community and have to take that into consideration when thinking of adding positions to the budget.

Commissioner O'Neill requested information about the 28E agreement and asked if those dollars could be spent in Marion and not in Cedar Rapids. Abernathey confirmed the budget for that line item has been reduced for the upcoming budget as it was not being used.

Commissioner Bridges stated she thinks that requesting an intern is the way to go. She indicated she believes the Commission should start using staff to the full potential, and someone should attend the Iowa League of Civil and Human Rights Agencies (League) meetings. Abernathey stated that due to subject of the meetings, meeting times and other assigned tasks, she has not been attending the League meetings, but is happy to rejoin.

Commissioner Tanner shared information about Kirkwood Community College, including the classes and internship opportunities, and asked if this position could be a paid

internship. Downs indicated the City does have opportunities for paid interns. In the past she has worked with professors to identify guidelines and the possibilities for summer and school year interns.

Commissioner O'Neill asked staff could plant seeds with Council regarding the current job description. Staff confirmed.

Moved by O'Neill, seconded by Tanner, to approve the current job description and move forward with submitting the request to Council, after data has been collected, an intern has been utilized and the current staff resources have been utilized.

Approved unanimously

January 2025 - June 2026 Outreach Plan

- **Review and discussion of draft outreach plan**
- **Vote of approval for the January 2025 - June 2026 Outreach Plan**

Abernathey stated the draft outreach plan was shared with City leadership, including the Mayor, some Councilmembers and the city manager. Abernathey shared leadership was excited to see the initiatives and support the plan.

Commissioner Tanner asked questions about City branding. Commissioner O'Neill expressed information about projects should be at the forefront to get community members informed and involved. Abernathey confirmed details of each initiative will be determined by the various working groups, in partnership with staff.

Commissioner Crawford inquired about the verbiage in the *Outreach event participation* portion to confirm that outreach events could be done outside of city limits. Abernathey confirmed she will amend the language to prioritize Marion events.

Moved by Tanner, seconded by O'Neill, to approve the January 2025 - June 2026 Outreach Plan.

Approved unanimously

Outreach Working Groups Establishment

Commissioners volunteered to serve on working groups to address initiatives in the newly adopted outreach plan. Volunteers include:

- Minority owned business data collection - Tanner, Hagler and Bridges
- Information sharing - Crawford
- Pride celebration - O'Neill and Tanner
- Public forum - Hagler and Forsyth-Christy.
- Social media prepared statements - O'Neill and Forsyth-Christy

Abernathey indicated she will ask the new Commissioners if they would like to join a working group. Abernathey also shared information that has been gathered for some of the initiatives. Commissioner Forsyth-Christy indicated work should start right away on the public forums. Commissioner O'Neill expressed the importance of statements being readily available.

PUBLIC FORUM

Ana Clymer, Marion resident, read a statement on behalf of herself and the Marion Alliance for Racial Equity (MARE) focused on the new year being a fearful year for immigrants. Clymer and MARE hope the community can stand tall together regardless of class and status.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Tanner questioned the status of current diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) statements and if changes or adjustments need to be made to verbiage. Abernathey and Downs were unaware if anything needed to be changed but would follow up with the city attorney.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 7:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:
Jenna Silver, Administrative Assistant