

Grinnell Human Rights Commission Meeting

June 9, 2020, 4 p.m.

Members Present, via WebEx virtual meetings:

Don Schild, Tim Hammond, Rita Mertens, Dave Thompson, Jordan Esbrook

Members of the public present: Katie In, Veronica (last name unknown)

Meeting Times

The commission decided not to change the meeting time.

Communications from the Public

Veronica spoke to the Commission. She is a Grinnell College student, who just finished her third year. She reported that most students do not know that the Commission exists. Students experience discrimination when they live off campus, or go into town. The College response is that things that happen off campus are not its responsibility. Students are feeling a lot of momentum with recent Black Lives Matter protests.

Don noted that institutional history and memory at Grinnell College is about 6 years long. Students and staff turn over frequently.

Tim noted that it isn't just students who don't know about the Commission. Many lifelong Grinnell residents do not know either.

Veronica asked the Commission to consider how to get information to College students. Tim said that new student information was very full and the College wouldn't likely allow us to take up much time. The Commission will consider how to raise the profile with students. If Veronica has any ideas she will let us know.

Katie In spoke to the Commission next. Katie is a Grinnell College graduate and now a resident of Grinnell. Katie asked about mediation, whether it is required, how the Commission could ensure it was fair. Don explained the process the Commission would take if a complaint of discrimination were received. The Commission would rely on the Iowa Civil Rights Commission (ICRC) for complaint processing and investigation. Don said that mediation can be a good option and that solutions both parties agree on are more likely to stick. But that it is not always possible.

Katie wanted to know the process if a complaint about the Grinnell police were brought to the Commission. Since the Commission is also a branch of city government the Commission would not determine the outcome of a complaint against another branch, but would refer the case to the ICRC and the county attorney.

Election of Officers

The Commission elected Tim Hammond as Chair, Rita Mertens as Secretary, and Dave Thompson as Vice Chair.

Service on Civil Service Commission

Tim asked who must sit on the Civil Service Commission (CSC) since Iowa Code states the Human Rights Commission Director sit on the CSC. Dave thinks that as long as someone represents the Commission, the requirement is met.

Statement regarding recent protests

The Committee had emailed each other with a draft of a statement regarding recent protests. That draft is reproduced below. The Commission considered the draft. The Commission wanted to be clear that the statement did not accuse the Grinnell Police Department of brutality, but also, that the protests are raising valid concerns related to human rights. The format of the statement was also discussed, as one large paragraph might be difficult to read. Jordan agreed to send a new draft to the Commission, and the Commission agreed to discuss the draft at another meeting, scheduled for June 11 at 4 p.m.

Draft statement:

"The City of Grinnell Human Rights Commission did not put out a statement immediately when the rest of our nation had already started reeling through the racial issues that were put to national attention by the harassment of Christian Cooper while he was birding by a white woman and then George Floyd's killing while being arrested by Minneapolis Police officers.... with another black person being killed by the police in the U. S. A. on average nearly every other day. The Commission has been in discussions with the City of Grinnell Police Department over the past year about how the GPD wants to proactively enhance relationships with marginalized groups. We reached out to all groups we could come up with contacts for inviting them to contact the Chief and other leaders of the GPD and the Human Rights Commission. With further time and consideration it has become obvious that our invitation to groups to reach out to the Chief of GPD puts the onus on those who already have been saddled with an extra burden to make more effort to enhance relationships. We will now follow up by providing the contact information of groups that we contacted before to suggest that our Chief of Police and the GPD reach out to these groups with their own direct invitation. The Chief of Police has repeatedly encouraged any citizen to contact him or the Police Department with any concerns or questions. And as always any questions or concerns about human rights in Grinnell can be sent to the City's Human Rights Commission (<https://www.grinnelliowa.gov/116/Human-Rights-Commission> or 6418219636), the State of Iowa Civil Rights Commission (<https://icrc.iowa.gov/> or 1-800-457-4416), and/or the GPD (<https://www.grinnelliowa.gov/169/Police> or 641 236-2670)."

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

By Jordan Esbrook