

## Decorah Human Rights Commission Meeting Notes - March 20, 2018

Members Present: Kathryn Thompson, Brent Parker, Lisa Scott, Elizabeth Kane, Tiffany Macklin, Melissa Koch, Carol Hemesath

Members Absent: NONE

Guests Present: Lorraine Borrowski, Andrew Ellingson, Eric Ellingson, Carol Hagen, and Tim Englesdorfer.

Official meeting called to order at 5:34 p.m. by Melissa Koch.

1. Welcome
  - a. Melissa introduced our newest member, Lisa Scott, dean for institutional equity and inclusion at Luther College.
2. Approval of Meeting Notes from February meeting
  - a. Motion to approve by Melissa, seconded by Elizabeth.
3. Community Comment
  - a. Rainbow Flag incidents (destroyed or ripped at the homes of numerous community members)
    - i. There have now been 4 reported incidents and at least one more incident.
    - ii. Community members Eric and Andrew Ellingsen were thankful for the police department and their quick and kind response.
    - iii. Brent spoke to the police department's response.
      1. The second string of these started in November of 2017 with one incident, and then incidents in 2018 on February 8th, 20th (2), 21st. These were all formally reported to police. There was another incident this past weekend of March 17th that has not been formally reported to police.
      2. Brent suggested that flag flyers should continue to fly their flags. He also said to keep an eye out in our neighborhoods and not be afraid to call the police to have conversations with people who aren't familiar to the neighborhood.
    - iv. Community member Carol Hagen talked about the history of a proposal for an inclusive flag that would be hung as a "welcome" for diverse peoples in Decorah at the entrances of city limits. There were submissions for a creative flag for this. There was pushback on this project from the city council, and it was dropped.
    - v. Mayor Lorraine Borrowski encouraged us to help make sure people know to report these incidents.
      1. Carol Hemesath wondered if we should write a brief note to publish in the paper. Lorraine said that she would make an announcement at city council.
  - b. Luther College hate crime incident (KKK and swastika trampled in the snow on Luther's football field)

- i. Commission member Brent Parker was the responder to the Luther incident. By the time Brent got there, Luther Security had taken photos and then it had already been wiped away. The swastika and “KKK” letters were stomped in the snow. There are many “people of interest” in the case but no suspects. There are no cameras in public spaces at Luther College.
  - 1. There has already been a conversation with Luther staff about protocols for leaving “evidence” in the future. However, there is a balance between leaving evidence and responding to difficult/hateful things to see.
- ii. Commission member Lisa Scott talked about the fact that some Luther students and community members are calling for cameras, but not everyone has a universal idea about security in this way.
  - 1. There were three well-attended events for students to process the events last week.
  - 2. She emphasized to the Commission, as well as to Luther students last week, that this is about our community - the Decorah and Luther community.
- iii. Brent emphasized that law enforcement is unaware of any hate groups that are in existence in this area.
- iv. Lisa asked if there is an increased/elevated atmosphere of hate in this area, or if this is isolated to young people (high school and/or college). Brent said it is hard to tell about this on a Decorah community level.
  - 1. Lisa wondered if there isn't necessarily an elevated atmosphere of hate, but instead if the national climate is allowing people to feel that they can speak out about their hate more openly.
- c. Melissa reviewed what might be action steps for the Commission to move on from here in response of both incidents:
  - 1. Announcement at city council to encourage community members to report incidents?
  - 2. Pride flags to fly down water street during Pride week?
  - ii. There was a call to talk about how we could educate our students and/or the community. Commission members and guests had many ideas.
    - 1. Tiffany mentioned that we should add “events” to our mission statement. (increase community awareness and appreciation of human diversity through educational programs AND EVENTS)
    - 2. Lisa mentioned that the Ethnic Arts event was a well attended at Luther from many community members and families from Decorah. They came to be observers, but it was a surprising turnout of non-Luther affiliated people.
    - 3. Carol Hagen talked about “town and gown” connection by doing some sort of walk from Luther to the community or vice versa. Overall, she emphasized the need for the community to come together over this.
    - 4. Luther will be doing some anti-racism workshops on a weekend in May for the Luther community.
    - 5. Melissa discussed the differences between our Implicit Bias events and anti-(isms) trainings. In summary, anti-racism work is

more activism and implicit bias trainings are more about awareness.

4. **Old Business - TABLED DUE TO TIME**

- a. Implicit Bias Events (Melissa & Carol)
  - i. Debrief of February 28 event
  - ii. Planning for spring event for local businesses
  - iii. Available times at library (Carol)
  - iv. Next steps
- b. Dinner & Dialogue Update (Chad)

5. New Business

- a. HRC: What are we responsible for and what can we do?
  - 1. Process & Procedures: How we handle formal complaints of discrimination
    - a. Melissa asked about the "*From Hatred to Healing*: internal procedures for handling hate incidents" document from 2009.
    - b. Conversations ensued about the work of the Commission.
      - i. If someone comes to us in the five designated areas, we have a report they can fill out.
      - ii. Hate crime is not technically a responsibility of the charter. These incidents go to the police department first. We then can collaborate with them about educational opportunities, etc.
    - c. It was decided to become the priority of the Commission to dig into what our responsibilities are and also to work on definitions, flow charts of process, etc.
    - d. Lisa talked about a \$250,000 grant that she is aware of for community action. The grant gives \$100,00 a year for collaboration work. Maybe this would be a good opportunity for Luther and Decorah to work together. It is up for application in May, but since that is too soon this year, perhaps we could apply for next year.

- 6. A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Elizabeth and seconded by Melissa at 7:09 p.m.

Next meeting is April 10th at 5:30 p.m.