

Minutes for
Decorah Human Rights Commission Meeting
City Hall, 400 Claiborne Drive
January 7, 2020

The meeting was called to order at 5:38 PM. We had quorum with five members present: Andrew Ellingsen, Carol Hemesath, Melissa Koch, Tiffany Macklin, and Laura Wright. City Manager, Chad Bird, Naya Ruach, Clara Muggli-Toyloi, and Sharlene Bohr were also present.

There was no review of the meeting notes in November because the Google Drive was not available. These minutes will be addressed at the next meeting.

The agenda was approved by Carol Hemesath and seconded by Melissa Koch.

Community comment was opened. Nya Ruach, a student at Luther College, was visiting the commission and introduced herself. Andrew Ellingsen also thanked the Decorah Police for their response to the heckler in town. Mr. Ellingsen noted that the police were efficient, kind, and responsive.

We then addressed old and new business. Melissa Koch offered an update on plans for Implicit Bias training for the business community. Koch put together a helpful packet of material and shared it with the commission. She reminded the commission that when we met in November, we discussed training on implicit bias for businesses. The Chamber had discussed with Koch ways they might be supportive in recruitment of business owners for the training. Koch saw two critical pieces to include in the training: an introduction to Iowa civil rights laws that businesses need to be aware of and implicit bias interactions with customers.

Koch then discussed options for staff to perform the legal training for business owners. Elizabeth Johnson, the Executive Director of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission (ICRC), is a specialist in the Iowa civil rights laws. If the Commission wants something for the general public, the Iowa Civil Rights Commission would need to

do a separate training. Koch noted that the Chamber suggested a morning session because business owners prefer this time. For an Implicit Bias workshop, Koch reached out to a number of contacts. One of those contacts, Kelly Larson, Director of Dubuque's Human Rights Department, has three trainers she suggested and all got back to Koch. Koch asked for a proposal from all three trainers, and one responded. Koch also reached out to other contacts in Iowa City and Des Moines but none have followed up with a proposal.

Koch also discussed another exciting opportunity for implicit bias training in the region. Koch contacted academic, lecturer, and author, Robin DiAngelo, about coming to a rural area. DiAngelo's team was interested. Koch then reached out to Lisa Scott, Vice President for Equity and Inclusion at Luther College who put her in contact with several individuals to make the event possible. Luther's Center for Faith and Life has been reserved for this event on Sunday afternoon, September 13, from 1 pm to 4 pm. In order for this opportunity to move forward, Luther College would need to commit to a number of attendees and the larger Decorah community would need to find a number of businesses and city government. Attendance would likely need to be around 750 to 1000 people for DiAngelo's team to commit. It was noted that this opportunity could be more effective at reaching a broader section of the community than organizing an Implicit Bias workshop.

A consensus was reached an Iowa civil rights training could occur before Robin DiAngelo's possible visit. Koch recalled a cost of around \$1000, but would get back to us with a specific cost after checking her notes. Koch noted that the Chamber doesn't have funding for this opportunity. If it is training for business owners and not employees of the city government, Chad Bird says that city cannot fund it. Other funding options were discussed (e.g., the Depot, Community Foundation, local businesses).

We then discussed with Laura Wright revising the current city code for investigating discrimination cases. Wright has assembled over 300 pages of code from the codes of city governments. Wright noted that adjudicating between these different codes was beyond

our expertise since none of the members of the commission are a lawyer and certainly not lawyers who specialize in Human Rights. Koch suggested that we reach out to Joshua Barr, Executive Director of the Human Rights Commission in Des Moines. He has expressed a willingness to come talk to us *pro bono*. Wright will invite him and offer an option to Skype in to a DHRC meeting. Wright will copy Koch on this email so that Koch can offer other amenities, if Barr is able to come.

The matter of making non-city residents members of the commission was discussed again. Bird reiterated that the state law that allows the city to create commissions does not permit us to elect non-city residents as voting members of the DHRC. Individuals from the county can only be non-voting at-large members.

Finally, Koch described her views on creating “All Are Welcome” stickers for businesses who had gone through implicit bias training. Koch is hesitant to connect stickers to training attendance or completion since this could imply a seal of approval from the DHRC. Macklin suggested that the Chamber could have a flyer that explained that businesses that stand against racism might be able to take a sticker that they might display. It was then discussed what to include on a possible sticker. The sticker could include Chad Bird’s phone number for reporting any problems in the community. Bird suggested that the sticker might have a QR code to link to the website portal to get more information. Ellingsen suggested the sticker might include a logo of, say, the state and an indicator of Decorah. The sticker might follow the colors of the Chamber’s branding for the city. Koch said she would reach out to Kristina Wiltgen, IOM Executive Director of the Decorah Area Chamber of Commerce.

We turned briefly to events in Decorah around Martin Luther King Day and Women’s Day / International Women’s Day as time ran short in the meeting. It was noted that Luther College will bring in a lecturer, [Lydia Kelow-Bennett](#), to consider the presence and position of black women in the Civil Rights Movement on Monday, January 20, 2020, in Valders Hall at 7:00 PM. Koch, Muggli-Toyloi,

and Bohr plan to connect on creating an event for MLK. Koch would also share via email ideas for Women's month.

Finally, we wished farewell to Carol Hemesath who has served faithfully on the DHRC for six years. Her service is valued and appreciated.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:41 PM.