

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**Decorah Human Rights Commission Meeting**  
**Decorah Public Library Meeting Room**  
**202 Winnebago Street**

**To join the meeting via Zoom**

<https://zoom.us/j/96425142792?pwd=a0RiOEI5bIFUa091VWFISnZ6WVU2Zz09>

**Meeting ID: 964 2514 2792**

**Passcode: 745831**

**Tuesday, October 3, 2023, 5:30 pm to 6:30 pm**

The Decorah Human Rights Commission's mission is to increase community awareness and appreciation of human diversity through educational programs, and to provide appropriate remedies where discrimination has been identified.

**Call to Order & Welcome**

Call to order at 5:33 PM

**Approval of Meeting Notes from May and September Meetings**

Sandhya motions to approve and Dakota seconds, approved

**Approval of October Agenda**

Josh motions to approve, Sandhya seconds, approved

**Community Comment**

- Holly Moore and Ellis Arnold (from Decorah Pride) are in attendance to discuss hate vandalism in community and in Decorah UCC
  - Thinking about what kinds of resources are needed in the community
- DHRC sent out a statement to DHS and Luther College
  - Robert Clay from Luther shared a DHRC statement at the student senate meeting. The Luther President did not respond.
    - Holly shared that the President said that Luther has guidelines for when to release a statement and because it was not on campus

and was not violent, that it did not rise to the level of requiring a presidential response. We agree that this decision is disappointing.

- Sandhya - The age of the student who was arrested shows that he is peers to those in college/high school and the necessity to make a statement. Sandhya has observed an increasing cautiousness over the past 20 years she has been in Decorah. Not sure if this is b/c of changes in the U.S.A. or Luther but it is disappointing
  - Holly sees this trend as well - people afraid of public/social media based lash back at a personal and institutional level. One of the responses to that fear is controlling the message. We are now seeing fewer individuals speaking for themselves and the institution.
- The Superintendent of Decorah Schools was receptive to email, and said it would take some time to share out to students, lawyers may need to look at it. Ultimately, no response from the superintendent.
- Where do we go from here?
  - Melissa: OWL: Our Whole Lives Curriculum, an international UU and UCC sex education curriculum, are things outside of the school that creates programs and offerings. We have done a language matters series through DHRC - can we do something like this outside of these structures and attract people to come?
    - Brainstorming:
      - 1) Melissa: Could do a positive Graffiti event as part of the language matter series, and try to attract H.S. and college students. Collaborate with ArtHaus, Melissa knows the muralist from ArtHaus.
        - Nikki: Talk about the difference between hate speech and free speech
        - Maria: Keith Haring would do graffiti and was able to turn it into art
      - 2) Onelowa - have them do training with the Chamber of Commerce - allowing for safe spaces for kids to hang out after school. Subtle cues to signal to people that they are inclusive to LGBTQ kids. How to flag to adults in our community how to support kids.
        - Holly: Thinking about what makes a welcoming space, neurodiversity and other types of inclusivity. Would be good for business owners to be exposed to these types of things. People who are a part of the community and visiting the community get to know

who we (Decorah) are. Agree that businesses need to be a part of this.

- Maria: Unsure if brand people (tourism) or city planning people (revising Decorah) also go to businesses or just around the Decorah area. Do they interface with people around inclusivity?
- Dakota: Love idea of getting chamber involved. Thinking about safe spaces for people of all backgrounds, could there be a possibility of a designation where businesses could get a sticker or something if they meet certain thresholds? (like non-gendered bathrooms, etc) to be designated an LGBT safe space?
  - Ellis: There are initial things that can be done, but also need to work with cultural change such as insurance, etc. Just don't have a sense if this is happening already - Chamber businesses are bigger than just those downtown.
    - Onelowa might have a sense about what has been done
      - They have worked with older LGBTQ lowans. There is a huge retiring population in Decorah. What would this look like in **assisted living facilities?**
    - Holly: We can bring together a lot of different groups. Luther, the pool, the Decorah community schools are all having these same problems. These facilities do not serve the people who are in them and none of them want that to be the case.
      - Maria: This should become a code, just as it is for buildings to be wheelchair accessible
        - Sandhya: This is a great idea for lens of DHRC

- Ellis: What would it take to have an addendum to code? Is there a way to leverage city policy that would move it out of these pockets in a more universal kind of way
  - Maria: Then when have a new business then it would need to include something like gender neutral restrooms because it would be apart of Decorah code
  - Sandhya: City code has to work within state, or national codes, but it can still make changes
- Sandhya: Want to find a way to address youth
  - How do we reach youth?

### Old Business

- Planning next *Language Matters* events for 2023.
  - Disability in Schools - ableism led by Nikki (from parent angle) and Maria (from school angle). Discussing language, resources, etc.
- Inviting new DHRC members
- DHRC Booths at Culture Fest and Pride—Great job!

### New Business

- Finalize Annual Report
  - All in agreement - looks good. If any other comments, send them to Melissa before Friday. Melissa will send it to the City on Friday.
  - Monday, Oct 16th at 5:45 PM at City Council - try to attend
- Next steps with letters about hate speech graffiti to DCSD superintendent and Luther College president
  - DHRC is interested in moving forward with the Graffiti idea - Melissa to discuss with Shannon @ Arthaus. Needs a champion to move forward.
  - Sandhya: Putting in Interfaith Coalition, could submit as letter to the editor -Kristi
  - Melissa: Talking to 4H and talking to Kristin at the Library
- Event: Decorah Housing Crisis Event Oct 19th @ 7 PM @ Pulpit

**Meeting Adjourned: Melissa motions to adjourn at 6:45 pm, all second.**