

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

To join the meeting via Zoom
<https://nicc.zoom.us/j/4966489551>
Meeting ID: 496 648 9551

Tuesday, February 6, 2024, 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 5:37

Approval of Meeting Notes from January Meeting


Maria approves Josh seconds

Approval of February Agenda

Maria approves Josh seconds

Community Comment

Old Business

- Follow up from Action items
 - Nikki updates - Conversation with Andrew
 - Nikki wasn't able to get in touch because Andrew was in Norway, will reach out next week
 - Maria - Document of questions
 -  Questions for City Manager
 - Take turns going to the city council meeting?
 - Nikki and Josh going to Feb 19th

- Maria going to the March 4th city council meeting
 - Dakota Updates
 - Dakota reached out to Kristi and she is resigning
 - Josh can reach out to Alexander Rosenow (works at Decorah News) about housing information
 - Maria: What is our goal on housing?
 - Is it to assist groups or to take action?
 - Josh: thought was to touch base with different groups, then do an event, then pressure policy action
 - Maria: seems like a lot of people want to do something, but no action is being taken. What is our role in this?
 - Josh: maybe being a string to bring these groups together?
 - Nikki: Likes the idea of bringing in conversation of who is actually affected
 - AirBnb
 - Maria: In Austin, TX - city passed ordinance that the owner has to live in the house for at least 6 months of the year. Could there be some law passed like this?
 - Dakota: What ways can we go around the Iowa law that prevents city councils from passing laws restricting Airbnb? Dakota looked at the law and said it will be tough to overcome. Recognize it as a statewide problem
 - Nikki: There are some unique difficulties in Decorah such as geography in terms of places to build. Most people who need affordable housing struggle to live in places that make them car dependent.
 - Maria: This also makes this a public transportation issue
 - Nikki: They built apartments near Toppling Goliath but it is not affordable housing
- Dakota: A number of buildings not being used for anything other than storage. Feed company owns land next to Convergence, old creamery is being used for storage. Number of privately owned properties in town that seem “ugly”. The city can alleviate those nuisances by suing the property owners for violations in city code. This would be prime real estate. Racetrack and grandstand are

also nice pieces of land. Howard County, Wuakon, and West Unions are all on the edge of town compared to other county fairs.

- Nathan: land value/tax income per acre - can show disparity
- Maria: Maybe our part of it is providing solutions, rather than talking about things over again that other people are talking about.
- Nathan: Farmland investment co-op - goal of collecting \$ to sell land to vegetable farmers. Maybe a housing co-op would be a good goal
- Nikki: Reach out to fellow HRC in Iowa and see what they are doing? If the state is overreaching - maybe a coordinated movement would be helpful
 - Nathan: Ames response to legislation was high liability insurance
- What's a manageable goal we can achieve?
 - Josh updates - Onelowa
 - Any luck with recruitment efforts?
 - Maria talked to Lorraine
- LGBTQ+ Event brainstorming
 - Business or Elder care
 - Another Pronoun training event?
- Updates from Racial Healing Event
 - Event this Friday 7:30 PM @ Luther - Jazz for Black History Month
 - Robert Clay email

New Business

- Affordable Housing Brainstorming
 - Documentary + Discussion?
 - Option 1: [Life in the Heartland](#)
 - Explores housing crisis in rural Virginia
 - Option 2: [Poverty, Politics, and Profit](#)
 - "In a nine-month investigation that takes FRONTLINE and NPR from Dallas to Miami, NPR's Laura Sullivan and FRONTLINE's Rick Young find that just one in four households eligible for Section 8 assistance are getting it, and the nation's signature low-income housing construction program is costing more and producing less. The team investigates the inseparability of race and housing programs in America, tracing a legacy of segregation and discrimination that began more than 80 years ago."
 - Panel event with Decorah News?
 - Series of op-eds?

- Collaboration with Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa?:
<https://cwjiowa.org/our-work/>
- Next steps:
 - Doing research
 - Zoning Laws - what the statutory speed bumps are along the way. Decorah's zoning code. The laws that we are bumping up against.
 - That way when a solution is presented, we know if it is legal or not
 - Nikki: Is there a way we can find out what the city has done?
 - Maria: Talking with Emily Neal - asking for an update about what has been done and what the bumps in the road are
 - Nathan: Strong Towns - urbanism/content powerhouse/articles and talking points
 - Find allies
 - Create list of other HRC to reach out to
 - Erin Ryan - one of us talks to her or someone like her. Maybe she knows some of the solutions she is aware of
 - Talk to community members passionate about this
 - Low Rent Housing Agency Commission
 - Nikki: Upper Explorerland and this commission merged in 2020
 - Maria: Group works with Latinos/Immigrants - their focus is housing
 - Aaron Dudder - on sustainability board (another board to reach out to) would also be a good person to reach out to
 - Northeast Iowa community Action
- Action Items for Next Meeting
 - Research (all)
 - List of other HRC (Nikki and Josh)
 - Nikki in touch with Andrew
 - Us going to city council meetings
 - Maria meeting with Emily Neal
 - Josh reaching out to Nursing homes and elder care facilities to see if there is interest
 - Josh and Nikki - List of HRC in other cities in Iowa
 - Josh - Reaching out to Alexander (Decorah News)
 - Josh - Checking Sandhya and Michelle Boike to see if they want to join, checking back in Alejandra

Meeting Adjourned

Josh motions to adjourn Dakota seconds