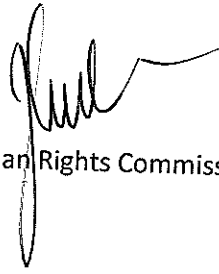


TO: Town Council
FROM: John A. Elsesser, Town Manager
RE: Supplemental charges to the Human Rights Commission
DATE: January 28, 2021



The Steering Committee voted to suggest adopting a supplemental charge to the Human Rights Commission.

Included in this packet are the following:

1. Existing ordinance 58-31
2. Memo from Annemarie Sundgren, Human Services Administrator
3. Survey memo from Olivia Francoline, Intern, on other towns
4. Recommendation for consideration and adoption

Coventry, Connecticut – Code of Ordinances/ Chapter 58 – HUMAN REALTIONS

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Chapter 58 - HUMAN RELATIONS

ARTICLE I. - IN GENERAL

Secs. 58-1—58-30. - Reserved.

ARTICLE II. - DISCRIMINATION

DIVISION 1. - GENERALLY

Sec. 58-31. - Duties of human rights officer.

The human services administrator, acting as the human rights officer, will be responsible for receiving claims of discrimination and assisting the persons claiming discrimination with processing their claims with appropriate state and federal agencies. The human rights officer will report annually or as needed to the human rights commission. The human rights commission shall assist the human rights officer in developing, approving and implementing outreach programs and activities which promote the understanding and enforcement of human rights and opportunities.

(Ord. No. 185, 11-2-92)

Sec. 58-32. - Referral of complaints; development and implementation of equal opportunity plan; updating commission and officer.

The human rights commission will refer complaints to the human rights officer and assist in developing and implementing a feasible equal opportunity plan and keep the officer informed of any changes or additions to human rights laws. The human rights commission and the human rights officer will meet on a yearly and/or on an as needed basis.

(Ord. No. 185, 11-2-92)

Sec. 58-33. - Terms of human rights commission members; commission's enforcement responsibility.

The town council shall appoint five members of the community to serve two-year terms on the human rights commission. It shall be the duty of the commission to enforce this article.

(Ord. No. 185, 11-2-92)

Secs. 58-34—58-55. - Reserved.

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January 13, 2021

To: Julie Blanchard, Town Council Chair

RE: Re-instatement of Human Rights Commission

This memo serves as a follow up to discussion in the Town Council meeting 1/4/2021 regarding the re-instatement of the Human Rights Commission. It was so moved that Carol Kent was appointed to the Human Rights Commission on 1/4/2021, expiration 1/1/2023.

The Human Rights Commission fosters mutual understanding and respect among people. Encourages equality of treatment of all people, regardless of race, color, religious creed, sex, sexual orientation, civil union status, gender identity or expression, marital status, familial status, genetic information, age, economic status, lawful source of income, national origin or ancestry, or present or past history of physical, mental or intellectual or learning disability including but not limited to blindness.

There would be a minimum of five members to the Commission who serve a two year term*.

It was discussed that the primary objectives would be a four prong charge:

1. Education
2. Resource for Discrimination
3. Community Needs Assessment
4. Review of Ordinances & Policies

The 2021 initiative would lead with Community Conversations – joint collaboration with Coventry Board of Education surrounding School Choice. The first planning meeting occurred on 1/12/2021 with CREC, Bd.of Ed. and Human Rights Officer/Human Services Administrator.

*Supporting documentation:

From Ordinance #185:

“That the Human Services Administrator, acting as the Human Rights Officer, will be responsible for receiving claims of discrimination and assisting the person(s) claiming discrimination with processing their claim with appropriate State and Federal agencies, the Human Rights Officer will report annually or as needed to the Human Rights Commission. The commission shall assist the Human Rights Officer in developing, approving and implementing outreach programs and activities which promote the understanding and enforcement of human rights and opportunities.

AND FURTHER, that the Human Rights Commission will refer complaints to the Human Rights Officer and assist in developing and implementing a feasible equal opportunity plan and keep the officer informed of any changes or additions to human rights laws, they will meet on a yearly and/or on an as needed basis.

AND FURTHER, be it resolved:

That the Coventry Town Council shall appoint five members of the community to serve two-year terms on the Human Rights Commission. It shall be the duty of the commission to enforce this ordinance.”

Respectfully submitted: Annemarie Sundgren, Human Rights Officer / Human Services Administrator

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Summary

The Coventry Human Rights Commission helps with the promotion of better understanding and respect among racial, religious and ethnic groups and individuals in the town. It shall pursue a community-wide program of education to further inter-group understanding and to discourage and eliminate prejudice, intolerance, bigotry and discrimination. It shall concern itself with equal opportunities in housing and employment for all said groups and individuals and other areas where tensions between persons or groups exists or might exist.

Take a four prong approach:

1. Discourse
2. Perspective & Understanding
3. Education
4. Facilitate Respect

The objective is to take some of the issues in Coventry that people have been talking about for a long time and more recently and put some energy and force behind making specific policy recommendations to achieve progress on those issues.

Duties

Promotes understanding and respect among various racial, religious, and ethnic groups and individuals.

Where to Begin

5 appointed members, two-year terms (according to the ordinance) – representation containing a broad cross-section of the community

all are volunteers

****Keep in mind different approaches to issues can yield different results, such as collaborative approach versus a confrontational one****

1. Conduct town wide study on race relations
2. Create definitions – there are multiple definitions for racism in certain conversations i.e. interpersonal standpoint vs. systematic perspective
3. Review town policies and procedures for discriminatory practices or implicit bias and recommend changes
4. Review of complaints
5. Hear from the constituents in Coventry of what the pain points are and then make recommendations of how those can be addressed
 - a. Community Conversation
 - b. Police Forum
 - c. Youth Forum
6. Anti-racism training for town leadership and other employees who supervise or hire within the town.

Activities/Projects/Topics of Conversation

- Public Communications (each meeting)
- Conversations' On & About Race 2021
- Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Juneteenth, Indigenous Peoples Day, Martin Luther King Day
- Youth Panel on Racial Injustice, reach out to teachers at Coventry High School for young people
- Latino and Black/Brown and Black people health inequities
- Implicit Bias, Macroaggressions and White Privilege
- Minority businesses in town
- Promote books based on racial justice and equality. Book spotlight of the month?
- Human Relations Commission Scholarship for graduating student(s)
- Police Listening Forum
- Equal Opportunity – Affirmative Action Plan – Municipal Employees
- Review the Police Department Complaints – a section of the town's annual report that provides a statistical summary of complaints against agency employees.
- Affordable Housing
- Open Choice School – Open Choice provides opportunities for students to attend schools outside of their home district.
- Race and Covid-19
- Anti-racism training – municipal employees – partner with National Conference for Community and Justice NCCI Workplace - NCCI
 - o Look at bias, discrimination, oppression, and privilege in the United States. Given the rise of racist acts during the pandemic, as well as the most recent horrific racist incidents, examining these issues takes on an even greater sense of urgency.
 - The history of racism.
 - How racism impacts everyone, generation after generation.
 - How to talk effectively and compassionately about racism.
 - Real-life skills to interrupt all forms of bias and discrimination.
 - Definitions and terms.
 - Ways to take action and build equality in your workplace and community
- Focus groups
- Community conversations – youth

SUPPLEMENTAL CHARGE TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Coventry Town Council is requesting that, in addition to the duties detailed in Ordinance 58-31, the Coventry Human Rights Commission undertake the following duties:

- 1) Review Town policies and procedures for any discriminatory practices or implicit bias, and make recommendations for modifications to the Town Council
- 2) On an annual basis, conduct a community forum on an issue such as diversity, equality, and acceptance
- 3) Annually, meet with the Town Manager and Police Chief to review a report of complaints against the Police Department, and outcomes, and discuss plans for training or policy changes that the information shows should become a priority for the Department and Town
- 4) Be available to respond to other issues of human rights as called upon by the Town Council