



1200 Wilmette Avenue
WILMETTE, ILLINOIS 60091-0040

**MEETING MINUTES
HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION**

**THURSDAY, April 29, 2021
6:00 P.M.**

**VILLAGE HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS – REMOTE MEETING
(VILLAGE HALL CLOSED DUE TO THE VILLAGE PRESIDENT’S DELCARATION OF
LOCAL DISASTER AND PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY ORDER)**

Members Present: Gerald Smith, Chair
Swathi Mothkur
Malaika Myers
Ann Dronen
Van Gilmer
Eric Hellige
Mark Teasdale
Neela Chandraraj
Chloe Molins

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Erik Hallgren, Assistant Village Manager
Alex Arteaga, Management Analyst

Guests: None

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Smith called the meeting to order at 6:04 P.M.

Mr. Hallgren provided a roll call vote to take Commissioner attendance, Commissioners Smith, Mothkur, Myers, Dronen, Hellige, Teasdale, Chandraraj, and Molins were in attendance. Commissioner Gilmer joined the meeting late.

Chair Smith asked Commissioners Teasdale, Chandraraj, and Molins to introduce themselves to the Commission since they were not present at the last meeting. Commissioner Chandraraj introduced herself, noting that she’s a sophomore at New Trier and the daughter of an

immigrant from Sri Lanka, Commissioner Chandraraj said she's excited to be a part of the Commission.

Commissioner Molins introduced herself next, noting that she's a sophomore at Loyola Academy, and is a member of the student council. Commissioner Molins noted her excitement to serve on the Commission.

Next, Commissioner Teasdale introduced himself, noting that he's been a Wilmette resident for the past 10 years, he's ordained in the United Methodist Church, and has served as a professor at the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary for the past 13 years. Commissioner Teasdale's wife is an immigrant from Serbia, having moved to the US during the Balkan wars in the 1990's. Commissioner Teasdale noted his excitement to involve faith communities in the work of the Commission and said that immigration is an issue that is important to him and his family.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE MARCH 24, 2021 MEETING

Chair Smith directed the Commission's attention to the draft minutes of the Human Relations Commission meeting of March 24, 2021.

Chair Smith called for a motion to approve the minutes, Commissioner Dronen motioned to approve the minutes, Commissioner Myers seconded the motion, and Mr. Hallgren called a roll call vote on the approval of the minutes. All Commissioners in attendance voted in favor of approving the minutes, and the March 24, 2021 minutes were approved as drafted.

III. PRIDE MONTH RECOGNITION

Mr. Hallgren discussed the Pride Month and Asian American/Pacific Islander recognition memo and proclamation that were included in the meeting packet, Mr. Hallgren explained that the memo and proclamation was included in hopes of spurring the Commission to discuss how they want to approach recognition of cultural celebrations in the future, and what types of resources or outreach the Commission would like to make available. Commissioner Teasdale inquired as to what the Village's policy has been regarding cultural celebration recognition in the past and if the Commission is tethered to any past practices, additionally, Commissioner Teasdale asked about the Village's ability to partner with outside organizations who are already proactive in recognizing various cultural celebrations. Mr. Hallgren responded that outside organizations and proactive bodies are the types of resources that the Village was hoping to utilize, so any resources that are already available through outside organizations should be passed along to Wilmette residents as appropriate. Mr. Hallgren also noted that the Village has a history of similar proclamations and recognitions, and that these proclamations have been used as a tool to show support of various groups within the Village. As for boundaries and guidelines regarding proclamations, that can be up to Commissioners to determine.

Chair Smith added that in the past, the Commission would typically be approached with proclamations for their approval, and that with the reinvigoration of this Commission, Commissioners should feel free to be more proactive in the drafting and publishing of such

proclamations. Chair Smith then noted that Commissioner Gilmer had joined the meeting at 6:20pm. Commissioner Myers added her support for proclamations, and explained that she thinks an established criteria for proclamations would be wise. She also added her support for the Village to publish resources that are educational on various cultural groups and wondered if the Village could utilize partnerships with other organizations to develop such resources, noting that the Wilmette Library is an example of another organization that could be of help in publishing such resources. Last, she noted that there's the possibility for the Village to partner with businesses that represent various groups, and that these businesses could lend a hand in cultivating such resources. Chair Smith responded that he thinks partnerships with businesses is a wonderful idea to explore.

Commissioner Hellige stated his support for the ideas of Commissioner Myers, he added that partnerships with other communities and community events, for example, the pride parade in Evanston, could serve as an opportunity for the Village to be more involved in celebrations in the future. Chair Smith added that he thinks this is a great idea, Mr. Arteaga explained that he would be happy to contact other communities as needed, and supports the idea of partnerships in celebrations.

Commissioner Teasdale added that utilizing community organizations like the Wilmette Library, Wilmette Historical Museum, and school districts are often already planning their own forms of celebrations, and by exploring partnerships with these organizations, residents would see a consistency in messaging which could go a long way in being more inclusive of all residents and groups. Chair Smith inquired with Commissioners Molins and Chandraraj about what types of celebrations are held at their respective schools, Commissioner Chandraraj added that with remote schooling, there aren't as many displays as there typically are, but the gender and sexuality alliance at New Trier usually puts together a list of businesses within the community that are supportive of various causes, and the alliance promotes these businesses to other students and their families, noting that a portion of proceeds from the businesses are donated to various charities. Commissioner Molins added that their LGBTQ+ club usually creates a display for pride month, but with remote schooling, she's unsure of what the celebration will look like this year. However, typically the club puts together displays and resources that relevant to various cultural celebrations. Commissioner Hellige mentioned that in the remote space, the Commission can find ways to promote resources and messaging through social media and other online mediums, and suggested that the display of the Pride flag outside of Village Hall would be a significant step for the Village to take to demonstrate their inclusiveness. Mr. Hallgren inquired if staff should deliver a Pride Month and Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage Month proclamation to the Village Board. All Commissioners supported providing the Village Board with such proclamations. Mr. Hallgren added that in response to Commissioner Hellige's suggestion regarding the Pride flag and yard signs, staff will include these suggestions and ideas into a policy review that will be presented to the Commission.

Commissioner Mothkur inquired as to what more the Village could do, aside from proclamations, to appropriately celebrate Pride Month and Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage Month, noting that the beginning of May is soon, she asked if more could be done this year, or is the idea to build out celebrations for future events. Mr. Hallgren responded that

the proclamations are something that can be done immediately, and that proclamations can be modeled off of similar resources from the State of Illinois and City of Chicago, for example. As for additional recognition, Mr. Hallgren explained that staff intends to leave that up to the Commission, and that Commissioners can provide guidance to staff as to how they would like to celebrate various heritage months, adding that Commissioners are expected to complete necessary leg work to support celebration ideas. For example, if the Village wanted to include a business promotion program similar to what Commissioner Chandraraj articulated previously, that Commissioners would be the ones to approach businesses and flesh out collaboration ideas. Mr. Hallgren added that additional resources can be cultivated by Village staff quickly and easily, so if Commissioners want any additional information to be included as part of recognizing various cultural groups, that they can forward these materials to staff to be further publicized by the Village. Last, Commissioner Mothkur asked if a date for the first listening session had been set, Chair Smith responded that it has not, and that will be a point of discussion later in the meeting. Commissioner Hellige suggested considering a proclamation for Juneteenth in addition to Pride Month and Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

IV. BLACK HISTORY MONTH CONTEST

Mr. Arteaga revisited the Black History Month student contest that discussed at the prior HRC meeting, noting that the Village had received several submissions from Wilmette students and that Commissioners had voted in favor of recognizing and rewarding the contest participants. Mr. Arteaga added that he will contact the families of contest participants to let them know they're being recognized and rewarded, and that the Village will be more proactive in contest promotion, noting that with the reinvigoration of the HRC in early 2021, contest promotion proved to be difficult considering the limited timeline. Chair Smith reviewed the submissions and contest participants, and thanked them for their involvement in this important celebratory contest. Chair Smith called for a vote on whether or not to award contest participants with a \$25 gift card, all Commissioners voted in favor of providing contest participants with a financial award.

V. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FORUMS: STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE

Chair Smith then discussed planning the first community listening session, asking Commissioners if they had any preferences for how the first session would be structured and when it would occur. Commissioner Teasdale inquired as to what the goals of these listening sessions are, and how determining these goals beforehand will be crucial to hosting a successful event. Commissioner Dronen supported Commissioner Teasdale's comments, and cautioned the Commission against jumping into a listening session with little planning and consideration of goals. Commissioner Gilmer added his support for Commissioner Teasdale's comments as well, and explained that the Commission must consider how these listening sessions can and will lead to significant change and growth within the Village. Commissioner Myers added that while the Commission develops an agenda and plan for these listening sessions, she thinks the public should have a say as to what the agenda and mission of the Commission should be, rather than coming to the public with planned agenda. Commissioner Myers thinks a general meet and greet event for the HRC would be most helpful since a large

portion of the community may be unaware of the Commissions recent reinvigoration. Commissioner Mothkur added support for Commissioner Dronen's comments regarding structured listening sessions and Commissioner Myers' general meet and greet idea.

Mr. Hallgren reminded Commissioners that smaller group working sessions and events will need to abide by the Open Meetings Act, additionally, any public events would need to be formally called to order. Mr. Hallgren noted that he will consult with the Village's Corporation Counsel as to how these listening sessions can be conducted in a way that is permissible under the Open Meetings Act. Chair Smith added that he supports the proposals and ideas that have been made by other Commissioners, and that determining the logistics of a meet and greet event is equally important, in order to facilitate as much public feedback as possible, to that end, he believes a general introductory event, which would include all Commissioners, would be most beneficial to the Commission. Chair Smith noted that he thinks a general introductory event could be planned for late May or early June, whatever date would work best for all Commissioners. Chair Smith asked for a motion to approve the planning of a general introductory event, Commissioner Myers moved to vote on hosting such an event, Commissioner Mothkur seconded the motion. Commissioner Dronen asked for clarification on what she was voting on. Mr. Hallgren noted that he believes the Commission should further clarify event logistics, including Commissioner participation, format, date and time, and location. Mr. Hallgren added that more specific details would better prepare Commissioners for this first introductory event. Commissioner Myers suggested hosting event in conjunction with the French Market, and asked if the Village Hall had space for such an introductory event. Mr. Hallgren responded that the Village Hall would have space for a crowd, and that the Village Green could serve as a good spot since we could try and filter residents from the French Market to Village Hall due to its proximity. Commissioner Mothkur supported the idea of hosting an event on a weekend in conjunction with the French Market. Commissioners began to identify dates that would be ideal for the introductory event, Mr. Hallgren noted that staff had the direction they need to start planning for such an event. Commissioner Dronen suggested having a permanent station at the French Market that would include a Commissioner or two for each Saturday, thus abiding by the Open Meetings Act, and allowing residents to talk with various Commissioners over the course of several weeks in a more intimate setting. Mr. Hallgren suggested that perhaps an introductory event could be planned along with this reoccurring station at the French Market.

Commissioner Mothkur asked Commissioner Dronen what AAPI groups she had been in contact with, or which groups she thinks could lend a hand in providing information and resources. Commissioner Dronen added that she doesn't have a set list of various groups to work with as of now, and wanted to get a better idea of what the structure for a community listening event would look like before approaching various groups. Commissioner Mothkur inquired as to who the audience of the event would be, whether it's just Wilmette residents or a broader group, she then asked Commissioner Gilmer and Chair Smith about their experiences with past listening events. Chair Smith noted that he's participated in similar events in various communities, and often times, the conversations were relatively non-structured, instead hoping for an organic discussion amongst himself and members of the community relating to what their thoughts and views are on current community issues. Commissioner Mothkur mentioned the Teach Act that was currently being worked on by the

Illinois General Assembly, this act would require the teaching of Asian American history in all Illinois schools, Commissioner Mothkur wondered if resources and educational materials could be cultivated around this topic and serve as an educational tool to the community, perhaps utilizing the Wilmette Library as a partner. Chair Smith suggested that staff could contact the library and see what options are available in recognizing AAPI Heritage Month, Commissioner Gilmer cautioned about the timeline of such a collaboration noting that in his previous work with the library, event planning typically occurred far out from a celebration event, so the short notice may make it difficult to collaborate. Mr. Hallgren noted that the community listening events will serve as a great starter point for planning these recognition and celebration events, so community input can be considered regarding how to appropriately recognize various cultural groups in the future. Commissioner Mothkur asked if she would be able to visit with various community groups with another Commissioner, Mr. Hallgren responded that he believes she would be able to without any issues, assuming it's only two Commissioners or less at a time visiting with community groups, due to Open Meetings Act guidelines, Mr. Hallgren said he would inquire with the Village's Corporation Counsel and follow up with all Commissioners. Commissioner Dronen suggested utilizing working groups to appropriately plan for future listening sessions and to meet with community groups, Commissioner Myers added that a working group could also be in contact with relevant businesses relating to different community and cultural groups, Commissioner Hellige supported the idea of contacting businesses and the Chamber of Commerce to facilitate such meetings.

Commissioner Mothkur asked about the Juneteenth event that Commissioner Gilmer had mentioned, she wondered if the HRC could be involved in the planning or execution of the event. Commissioner Gilmer added that the event had been planned with the Village of Glencoe and relates to historical experiences of African Americans within Glencoe, and that the event is open to all, however, he's not sure what contributions the HRC could offer since the event has been planned already. Commissioner Mothkur suggested that the Village could promote the event on various social media channels at the very least. Mr. Hallgren requested for Commissioner Gilmer to forward relevant information and the Village can determine communications once that information is received. Mr. Hallgren asked for a formal vote on proceeding with the planning of an initial introductory listening session event. Commissioner Mothkur moved to vote on conducting the initial listening session, Commissioner Myers seconded the motion. All Commissioners in attendance voted in favor of planning the initial community listening session. Mr. Hallgren noted that staff would be in contact with appropriate parties for the French Market to explore a reoccurring station at the market that would feature Commissioners on various weekends. Mr. Arteaga noted that staff already have contacts for various organizations within the Village, and that he would be happy to contact relevant parties as needed.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was provided.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Myers moved to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Teasdale seconded the motion. Mr. Hallgren provided a roll call on the motion to adjourn the meeting, all Commissioners present voted in favor of adjourning the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 7:46 P.M

Respectfully Submitted,
Alex Arteaga
Management Analyst, Village Manager's Office