

City of Ypsilanti Human Relations Commission

Annual report to the Mayor and City Council

The members of the Human Relations Commission (HRC) respectfully submit the following report to inform the Mayor and City Council of Ypsilanti, Michigan what the Commission accomplished in 2017 and has set as priorities for 2018.

Commissioners:

The Commission finished 2017 with the following individuals are commissioners: Amber Fellows, Ka'ron Gaines, Kyle Hunter, Sam Jones-Darling, Willow Krupin-Carter, Tanasia Morton, Theresa Saunders and John Shuler. Throughout 2017 we saw D'Real Graham, Krista Nordberg, and Jennifer Symanns depart the Commission.

We were delighted to have Dr. Devika Choudhuri join us in early 2018. Our current number as of June 4, 2018 is 7 commissioners and 1 youth Commissioner, this leaves two regular commissioner vacancies and one youth vacancy.

Accomplishments of the 2017 year:

- **Goals:**

The HRC conducts our goal setting session as our first meeting in January. In 2017, we set forth three major goals for the 2017 years and I am happy to report that each of them have found resounding success within our community.

1. Immigration Enforcement Forum

- This forum hosted in September brought together members of law enforcement, policy makers and the community to discuss the rising presence of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency in the Ypsilanti area. In addition, members of the community were briefed on city ordinances preventing the disclosure of information related to immigration status and city non-discrimination ordinance protections for immigration status. The forum was attended by over 50 individuals at Ypsilanti Community High School.

2. Strategies to Combat Gentrification and Housing Discrimination

- The Commission agreed that Housing is considered a basic human right and that the right to be secure and safe within one's housing is as important as being physically and psychologically safe in the workplace. The Commission is uniquely aware that implicit racism and classism exists within all economic development due to systemic issues within our country. The Commission has acknowledged that the City of Ypsilanti cannot be insulated from the effects of housing discrimination and the forces of gentrification being conducted in other portions of the county. As part of this discussion, we agreed also that source of income discrimination includes the refusal of acceptance for federal housing vouchers (Section 8) and student loans.
- The Commission met in joint session with the Planning Commission and Sustainability Commission to discuss how each commission could act within their

jurisdictions to combat gentrification. This meeting has resulted in a master plan update process.

3. Amendment to the City's Non-Discrimination Ordinance

- The HRC provided City Council with an amendment to the City's Non-discrimination ordinance in mid-2017. The updated NDO included language from the Michigan Department of Civil Rights' model ordinance with the addition of Immigration Status as a protected class.
- The HRC believes to date that the Ypsilanti NDO is the most progressive ordinance to protect minority and historically disadvantaged persons anywhere within the State of Michigan.
- In addition to adding several more protected classes, the ordinance cleaned up language and specified some ambiguity which will allow the HRC and the City to enforce the ordinance to the best of our ability.

Goals for 2018:

For 2018, the Commission has determined the following goals:

1. Implementation of Commission Bylaws

- The Commission has drafted and is preparing to adopt a set of bylaws. The bylaws will set out standards for compliance with policies, how the Commission approaches discrimination cases, and how the Commission handles the behavior of its members.
- The Bylaws are expected to be adopted at the regular meeting to take place at the end of June 2018.

2. Housing Discrimination and Gentrification

- The Commission has determined that housing discrimination and gentrification are two of the most important issues to the City of Ypsilanti's long-term future as a diverse community. Housing, which in our belief is the ability to have a solid roof over one's head that is hazard free and enables the person to develop naturally is a basic human right.
- The Commission has determined that as a body there is little we can do in the way of development aside from ensure our community is educated on historical patterns of discrimination which includes gentrification.
- The Commission has directed the Chair and Vice-Chair to work closely with the Planning Commission to ensure a coordinated citywide effort on affordability.
- The Commission has directed the Chair and Vice-Chair to work with the City of Ann Arbor's Human Rights Commission to establish a future time and day for a joint-session of the two bodies to discuss Housing Affordability and Source of Income discrimination within our two communities.

3. Cultural Competency

- The Commission has determined that the need for cultural competency training is an ongoing concern for the city. We are currently evaluating options for potential policy and training opportunities which the Commission may wish to engage in.

Statement on Community Input:

As a Commission, we believe that the right of the community to provide valuable input into the workings of their government is beneficial to the City of Ypsilanti. We wish to see continuing opportunities for dialog between neighbors both within the city and within our surrounding communities. The Commission believes this type of input is the best possible method to ensure that tensions between the citizenry and the City are minimal and to expand the base of understanding that is required within our diverse and growing community. As part of the bylaw discussions we have determined that our public comment procedures were arcane, we have reformed them and sought to grant a person a minimal of three minutes and granted the Chairperson the ability to extend that time based on the amount of people wishing to participate in public comment.

On Gendered Language:

It is the intent of the Commission to eliminate all gendered references within city ordinances as is legally possible to do. This is to ensure that we may seek to be inclusive of the diversity within our community and acknowledge that gendered language seeking to establish a binary which does not exist except within a social construct.

Finally, on behalf of the Human Relations Commission I would like to thank the community for being supportive of our initiatives. We as a Commission know that some of the issues we discuss are not always easy conversations to have, politically correct, and many topics are loaded with a vile history of intolerance. We must continue to look forward as a community to develop the best possible outcomes for every person that resides within our community whether it be for a day or for decades. It is upon each of us to think about these decisions we make now and look to the future.

Respectfully,
Sam Jones-Darling
Chairperson, Human Relations Commission