

City of Grand Haven Human Relations Commission  
Thursday, October 26, 2023, 5:30 p.m.  
City Hall | 519 Washington Grand Haven

## **Minutes**

The regular meetings of the Grand Haven Human Relations Commission was called to order by Keith Colson at 535pm in the council chamber of City Hall, 519 Washington Ave.

**Present:** Commission Members Emmet Brown, Andrew Villanueva, Sydney Kroll, Wes McGee, Amber Mendiola-Suarez, & Keith Colson

**Absent:** Greta Fuller, Annie Baker, Jessica Cole Robinson

**Others Present:** Assistant City Manager Tim Price

## **Additions/Deletions to the Agenda & Motion to Approve**

Colson presented the Agenda. Villanueva asked to redact the Visionary Award Transition Report, as no update was available. Colson asked to add a motion to review the Black History Month Statement written by Brown for potential submission to city council. Motion to approve with above edits by McGee, 2nd by Villanueva, all approve.

## **Approval of Minutes of meeting: September 2023**

Colson presented, Brown motion to approve, McGee seconds, all approve.

## **Welcome Guests/Call to Audience**

Welcome call to audience by Colson, none in attendance.

## **Liaison Report**

Colson provided the commission with the following updates: Chelsea Payton (Loutit Library) is participating in Lakeshore Big Read, which is a series of events and book recommendations speaking to a diverse set of perspectives. Esther Fifelski (Holland HRC): Social Justice Awards which will be held on January 18th at Holland City Hall at 6pm. The GH HRC is welcome to attend their meetings (3rd Thursday, City Hall) and see how they do things. Colson suggested that if someone is able to attend and report back they should do so. Barbara Lee VanHorsen

(Momentum Center): Capital Campaign and grant funding going well - adding a sensory room, shower/laundry facilities, and meeting spaces. Operational funding still at risk due to county commissioners against their DEI efforts; asking those who can to speak on behalf of the Momentum Center at the October 30 CMH meeting. Reyna Masko/John Gonzalez (TCPI): hoping to find a way to highlight our City's proclamation for Hispanic Heritage month next year, as this year it was voted on in a bundle and difficult to find information about. Price acknowledged that with a little more forethought and foreplanning this could be better presented, especially if commissioners were present to read it as part of the city council meeting.

## **Old Business**

Colson brought forth the continued topic of Black History Month and brainstorming how the HRC wants to invest their time and energy to come from a position of thoughtfulness and awareness. Price suggested that the Muskegon Community College DEI officer, Ken James, may be willing to facilitate a discussion. Villanueva recommended the commission reach out to the Unicorn Tavern as both a potential future liaison and/or venue. Brown offered to reach out to Denise Kingdom, the pastor who moved Holland to have a day of service for MLK Day. Brown also suggested connecting with Henry & Lindsey Cherry with the I Am Academy, who have worked to directly address racial violence in Holland.

The commission also discussed how the HRC wants to work to recognize Black History Month in the city. Colson recommended that the HRC could serve as a collator for information and events in the city and surrounding areas. Brown and McGee both suggested more active participation and recommended holding different kinds of events. Brown warned, however, that there is a very low population of Black and/or African Americans in Grand Haven, and such an event would need to be very intentional and well thought out or risk doing more harm than good. The commission overall agreed that they were not prepared to host such an event this upcoming February, but did discuss making plans for Juneteenth and looking to make plans for the following year.

## **New Business**

Colson read a letter (see Appendix A) provided by Rev. Dr. Jared C. Cramer in regards to their suit against the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners for discrimination. Colson stated they felt the commission should discuss, or at least be aware, of discrimination claims within their community. The commission discussed how or if the HRC has space to bring this suit and issue to the attention

of city council. A motion was raised to write a letter to city council and ask they provide a platform for this member of our community to speak as they are silenced elsewhere, 1st by Brown, 2nd by McGee, all approved.

Brown then read their draft of a proclamation declaring February as Black History Month. After discussing and identifying typos, a motion to present to city council with the edits discussed was raised by Villanueva, 2nd by McGee, approved by all.

**Second Call to Audience** – No one here.

Meeting adjourned at 6:56pm, motioned by Villanueva, second by Brown approved by all. The next meeting will take place on November 16, 2023.

## ***Appendix A***



## **St. John's Episcopal Church**

524 Washington • Grand Haven, MI • 616.842.6260 • [www.sjegh.com](http://www.sjegh.com)

Human Relations Commission  
The City of Grand Haven  
519 Washington Avenue  
Grand Haven MI 49417

Monday, October 23, 2023  
*The Feast of St. James the Apostle,  
Brother of Our Lord Jesus Christ & Martyr*

Dear Members of the Human Relations Commission,

I'm writing at the request of your chair, Keith Colson, regarding my recent lawsuit against the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners alleging discrimination and violation of the First Amendment of the Constitution by refusing to allow me—or other progressive pastors—to give the invocation at County Commissioner meetings.

While this lawsuit is mine and mine alone, I was motivated in filing it given my work with the Ottawa Coalition of Unifying Christians. Our group has created a statement (available online here: <https://www.unifyingchristians.com/statement>) that has been signed by 11 faith communities and 417 individuals (including 34 pastors), all of whom live, work, or worship in Ottawa County and are distressed by many of the actions that Ottawa Impact has taken. The vast majority of those who have signed are also followers of Jesus Christ who believe that Ottawa Impact, despite their claims to the contrary, does not represent the teachings of Jesus.

It is this alternative Christian voice with Ottawa Impact is currently silencing by their stranglehold on who can give the invocation. People like me, who might pray for the way our

county leadership decisions are going to affect queer kids, migrant farm workers, those struggling to meet their public health needs, and so much more... we are not allowed to say our prayers at their meeting.

My hope is that the courts will bring relief soon. Ottawa County is strongest when we are a county where all truly do belong—and where the voice all Christians, including progressive ones like me (indeed, the voice of every person no matter their faith worldview) is honored and given space.

Thank you for your work trying to ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion remain values that are important in our city. I'm grateful and if there is every anything I can do to support you in your work, please let me know.

Through Grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jared C. Cramer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent "J" and "C".

The Rev. Dr. Jared C. Cramer, SCP  
*Rector, St. John's Episcopal Church*

**Following Jesus. Inspired through Worship. Boldly loving ALL.** *As followers of Jesus, we believe all people—without exception—are God's beloved and are called together by the Holy Spirit. Inspired through time-honored worship, the people of St. John's Episcopal Church strive to boldly love every person and all creation.*