



City of Milwaukee

200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
53202

Meeting Minutes

EQUAL RIGHTS COMMISSION

TONY SNELL RODRIGUEZ, CHAIR
NATHAN GUEQUIERRE, VICE-CHAIR
Jacqueline Cook, William Crowley, Jessica Boling, Rae Johnson, Paul Smith, Elle Halo and Alexandria Staubach

Staffing: Omar Barberena

Wednesday, September 17, 2025

4:00 PM

City Hall - 301-A

1. Call to Order

This meeting was called to order at 4:02pm

2. Roll Call

Present 10 - VACANCY, VACANCY, Snell Rodriguez, Guequierre, Crowley, Boling, Smith, Johnson, Halo and Staubach

Excused 1 - Cook

3. Approval of August Minutes

- *No additions or corrections.*
- *Motion to approve: Commissioner Crowley.*
- *Second: Commissioner Johnson.*
- *Minutes approved unanimously.*

4. Welcome from Chair

- *Chair welcomed commissioners and public attendees (virtual and in-person).*
- *Acknowledged Hispanic Heritage Month, highlighting contributions of Hispanic and Latino communities to the city.*

5. Communication from Office of Equity and Inclusion Director Mary Reed

- *Introduction: Mary Reed, new interim/acting Chief Equity Officer.*
 - o *Background: 20+ years public service (case management, compliance, W-2 administration).*
 - o *Former City Contract Compliance Officer.*
 - o *Focus: accountability, compliance, engagement.*
- *Current Focus:*
 - o *Contract compliance (construction & development).*
 - o *Small business certification (~200 certified; goal to double in 2–3 years).*
 - o *American Disability Act compliance.*

- o *Racial equity & inclusion initiatives.*
- o *Workforce outreach (Direct Connect Milwaukee).*
- o *Staffing support for Equal Rights Commission.*
- *Vision & Priorities:*
 - o *Grow workforce opportunities, esp. RPP workers (apprenticeships, family-sustaining wages).*
 - o *Expand outreach to Latino/Hispanic & multilingual communities.*
 - o *Use social media, better timing, and strategic outreach.*
 - o *Strengthen collaboration with ERC.*
- *Budget:*
 - o *No cuts anticipated; sufficient resources.*
 - o *Strong support from Mayor’s Office & DOA.*
- *Q&A Highlights:*
 - o *Outreach must avoid “performative” efforts → OEI committed to consistency.*
 - o *Building trust with disconnected communities is key.*
 - o *Equity in public safety: OEI provides racial equity training, but department buy-in needed.*
 - o *Reed emphasized collaboration and transparency, inviting commissioner input.*

6. Communication from Department of Public Works - Thomas E. Tarkowski .

- *Presenter: Tom Tarkowski, Department of Public Works Engineering.*
- *Policy Background: Adopted 2024 after collaboration (ERC, DPW, ADA Coordinator, Council).*
- *Progress Report:*
 - o *~10% complete (goal delayed due to backlog).*
 - o *Completed at sites incl. Fondy Farmers Market, Keenan Health Center, Southside Health Center, Election Commission.*
 - o *Ongoing at multiple facilities.*
- *Challenges: ADA compliance signage, lock modifications, limited staff capacity.*
- *Timeline: ~20% completion in 6 months; phased completion of 236 restrooms by 2026.*
- *Commission Response: Appreciated progress, emphasized transparency, suggested progress updates online.*

7. Communication from Office of Equity and Inclusion Staff

Omar Barberena - Equal Rights Specialist

- **Commissioners Accounts & Usage**
- **International Human Rights Day Planning Committee Updates**

Ramona Ramos - Equal Rights Complaints Liaison

- **Ad Hoc Complaints Group Update**
- **Walk-ins Update**
- **Online Complaint System**
- **Events & Volunteer SignUp**

Communication – Office of Equity & Inclusion Staff (Omar Barberena)

- a. *Commissioner Email Accounts*
 - *Ensure ERC emails are working; IT has been responsive.*
 - *Check at least weekly or risk deactivation.*
 - *Suggested: add ERC email to Gmail app for easier access.*
- b. *Proper Use of ERC Email*
 - *Use only for Commission business: internal communications, outreach, responses*

to public inquiries.

- Avoid personal email (open records concerns).
 - Quorum note: If emailing >4 commissioners, use BCC.
 - Media/public requests must go through Omar, Nathan, or OEI staff.
- c. International Human Rights Day (IHRD) Planning
- Date: Tentative Saturday, Dec. 6, 2025 (10:00 AM–1:30 PM).
 - Committee Members: Boling, Murdoch, Murtaugh, Halo, Barberena, Guled.
 - Venues: Top choice – Milwaukee Youth Arts Center; alternatives – UMOs, Sherman Phoenix; ABHM considered (capacity/cost issues).
 - Theme: Art as a Voice for Human Rights.
 - Program Draft: Opening remarks; 3–4 creative art sessions (poetry, mural, collaborative art); ERC Commissioner Halo as MC.
 - Artists: Public call by late Sept; 3–4 selected; stipends & supply support to be arranged.
 - Food: No restrictions; exploring sponsorships & minority-owned vendors.
 - Next Steps: Finalize venue/program within 2 weeks; release call for artists; determine stipend structure.
- d. Report – Complaints Liaison (Ramona Ramos)
- Complaints: Group inactive pending online system; August flood calls cleared; interviews weekly (Wednesdays); expanding access via libraries.
 - Community Engagement:
 - o Puerto Rican Festival: ERC booth.
 - o Silver City Fest: successful participation.
 - o Upcoming: Independence First Gala (Harley Museum, Friday), Milwaukee Hmong New Year (Dec. 13–14).
 - o Emphasis on ERC visibility to raise awareness.

8. Communication from Committees

- **Governance Committee**
 - a. New Recruitment Update
 - b. Commissioner Handbook Draft – Update
 - c. Budget Discussion - Update

- **Communications Committee**
 - a. Update

- Communications Committee (R. Johnson / Chair Snell Rodriguez)*
- No new updates.
 - Chair highlighted:
 - o Strong ERC visibility in DOA newsletter.
 - o Importance of internal city visibility.
 - o Thanks to Christina Close (DOA) & Director Preston Cole.
 - Social Media: Commissioners encouraged to follow ERC Facebook page.

9. Other Discussions

- Fair Housing Council Updates (via Ramona Ramos):
 - o Shared ordinances: Milwaukee County Ch. 107, Dane County Ch. 31, City of Madison 31.09.
 - o ERC interest in LRB review for possible City ordinance (re: source of income/housing discrimination).
 - o Current County ordinance exists but lacks enforcement.
 - o Fair Housing Trainings: Oct. 21 (Cudahy), Oct. 27 (Franklin), Nov. 6 (Greenfield)

Library).

10. Community Announcements

- *Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15–Oct. 15): United Community Center & Latino Arts Center mural.*
- *Native American Heritage Month (November):*
 - o *Bucks Heritage Night – Nov. 29.*
 - o *UWM Event – Nov. 13 (possible ERC tabling).*

11. Adjournment

- *Meeting adjourned at 5:33 PM*
- *No objections*