



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, August 20, 2025

4:00 PM

City Hal - Room 301-A

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:07 pm

2. Roll Call

Present 8 - VACANCY, VACANCY, Snell Rodriguez, Guequierre, Boling, Cook, Smith and Johnson
Excused 3 - Crowley, Halo and Staubach

3. Approval of July Minutes

- *July Minutes presented for review.*
- *Motion to approve: Commissioner Guequierre.*
- *Second: Commissioner Cook.*
- *No objections.*
- *Action: July Minutes approved unanimously.*

4. Welcome from Chair

- *Chair welcomed Commissioners, staffs: Omar Barberena (Equal Rights Specialist), & Ramona Ramos (Complaints Liaison), guests, and stakeholders.*
- *Emphasis on collective responsibility to represent community voices.*

5. Communication from Office of Equity and Inclusion Staff**Omar Barberena - Equal Rights Specialist**

- **New Interim Chief Equity Officer: Mary Reed**
- **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**
- **IT Data System Update**
- **Events & Volunteer SignUp**

Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI) – Omar Barberena, Equal Rights Specialist

- *Leadership Transition*
 - o *Chief Equity Officer Bernadette Karanja departed for a new opportunity.*
 - o *Mary Reed appointed Interim Chief Equity Officer (mareed@milwaukee.gov).*
 - o *Communication sent to Department of Administration leadership regarding collaboration during transition.*
- *Commissioners Email Protocol*
 - o *Commissioners reminded to use official City email accounts only (avoid personal emails for open records compliance).*
 - o *When emailing more than four Commissioners, use Bcc to prevent “walking quorum” violations.*
 - o *Training video on open records/communications distributed. Questions can be directed to Assistant City Attorney Peter Black.*
- *International Human Rights Day Planning*
 - o *Committee meets bi-weekly. Exploring partnerships with additional organizations.*
 - o *Potential new venue outside downtown for accessibility and logistics.*
 - o *Tentative dates: December 6 or December 14 (pending Mayor’s confirmation).*
 - o *Commissioners invited to join the Planning Committee.*

Complaints & Walk-Ins Update – Ramona Ramos

- *Walk-Ins:*
 - o *Lower than expected volume at City Hall.*
 - o *Outreach to rotate into community sites starting September.*
 - o *Notices via E-Notify and Facebook.*
- *Online Complaint System:*
 - o *Prototype app in development with ITMD.*
 - o *Features: case numbers, centralized notes, multilingual access, secure ERC staff login.*
 - o *Goal: streamline intake and improve referral process.*
- *Referrals:*
 - o *Connecting complaints to proper agencies and advocacy groups.*
- *Flood-Related Needs:*
 - o *Community requests on sump pumps, debris removal, dumpsters.*
 - o *ERC provided referrals to City services.*

Ad Hoc Complaints Committee

- *Meetings: May, June, August.*

- Focus: Complaint form/signature, referral pathways, voucher housing discrimination, possible Housing Summit.
- Fair Housing Council Input (Megan Wanke):
 - o Voucher discrimination not covered in Chapter 109 (protected in Milwaukee County & Madison).
 - o Report forthcoming on voucher discrimination.
 - o Suggested ordinance updates:
 - Replace “victimhood” with “status as a victim.”
 - Add protections for stalking victims.

Events & Community Outreach

- Mexican Fiesta (Aug. 23–25, 2025): Successful ERC tent, high engagement.
- Silver City Festival (Sept. 6, 2025): Tent confirmed with VIA CDC; volunteer sign-up coordinated.
- Puerto Rican Festival (Sept. 21, 2025): ERC presence confirmed; staffing plan in progress.
- Native Heritage Celebration (Nov. 2025): ERC to participate; collaborations with Native organizations.
- Human Rights Day (Dec. 2025):
 - o Planning Committee meets bi-weekly.
 - o Exploring venues outside downtown.
 - o Tentative dates: Dec. 6 or 14 (pending Mayor’s Office).
 - o Commissioners encouraged to join planning.

6. Communication from Committees

- **Governance Committee**
 - a. Recruitment Update
 - b. Commissioner Handbook Draft – Brief Review
- **Communications Committee**
 - a. Update

Governance Committee Update

- Recruitment:
 - o 9 applications received, 1 new submitted recently.
 - o 3 candidates selected for interviews (to be scheduled after Labor Day).
 - o Goal: Fill 11 vacancies by end of year, pending mayoral appointments.
 - o Committee is optimistic; strong candidate pool noted.
- Commissioner Handbook:
 - o Current version (last updated 2021) is outdated.
 - o Review of Table of Contents to identify missing/irrelevant content.
 - o Suggestions:
 - Add Commission accomplishments (e.g., inclusive bathrooms, bikes).
 - Clarify Commission’s city-level role.
 - Include funding sources (Community Block Grant).
 - Update laws section to include Racism as a Public Health issue.
 - Strengthen sections on Commissioner duties, communications, and public representation.
 - Consider creating video/interactive versions in addition to written handbook.
- Social Gathering:
 - o Tuesday, Chill on the Hill – Informal Commissioner social, open to friends & families.

Communications Committee Update (Chair Rae Johnson)

- Still reviewing materials from Commissioner Nathan Boutiere.
- Plans to prioritize committee work in September.
- Suggestion raised: create a video version of the Commissioner Handbook.
- Dog "Oro" made a guest appearance at the meeting.

7. Budget Proposal Discussion*Budget Discussion**Overview*

- Shared draft budget (\$45,000 allocation, includes carryover) presented on screen and in shared document.
- Goal: adopt a formalized budget that ensures effective and efficient use of funds.
- Intention: professionalize ERC budget management, expand intentional spending, and align with mission.

Committee Feedback & Key Points

- Chair Nathan Guequierre: Commended staff (Ramona & Omar) for preparing draft; emphasized this marks an important step in thoughtful, intentional ERC budgeting.
- Outreach & Inclusion Costs:
 - o Concern raised about limited funds allocated for interpretation and translation (ASL, Hmong, others).
 - o Acknowledged high costs: ASL \$600 for 2 hours).
 - o Suggestion to create a dedicated line item for interpretation/translation services.
 - o Idea to reallocate ~\$2,000 from reserve funds, though noted this amount may be insufficient.
- Language Access Needs:
 - o Website already includes auto-translate option for many languages.
 - o For Hmong community, oral/visual interpretation may be more effective than written translation.
 - o Recommendation: create videos in-language (e.g., complaint process walkthroughs).
- City Resources:
 - o City has interpreter services available; Omar will confirm access and departmental cost responsibilities.
 - o Question raised whether ERC will be charged per use.

Budget Line Item Adjustments Discussed

- Possible renaming/restructuring: "Outreach, Education & Events" (remove "participation").
- Reallocate funds from "Commissioner Training/Conferences" to interpretation/accessibility.
- Advertising & campaigns line could also support interpreter/translation costs.
- Explore event-related costs (tickets, access fees, promotional materials).

Next Steps

- Omar to review current budget balances with Administration (spending-to-date and potential carryover).
- Governance Committee to meet before September ERC meeting to refine budget.
- Explore costs/resources for ASL, Hmong, and oral language interpretation services.
- Draft budget to be presented for adoption at September ERC meeting.
- Informal discussions with DOA and OEI leadership to begin in advance of formal adoption.

8. Other Discussions

Additional Notes

- DPW scheduled to report in September on gender-neutral restroom updates.

9. Community Announcements

- *Community Announcement*

Forward Latino issued statement clarifying that visible National Guard presence downtown (same weekend as Mexican Fiesta) is due to a planned national convention, not activation. Commissioners asked to share with networks to prevent confusion or alarm.

10. Adjournment*Adjournment*

- *Motion to Adjourn by Commissioner Guequierre*
- *Second by Commissioner Cook*
- *Meeting adjourned at 5:05pm.*