

Human Rights Commission (HRC)

APPROVED HRC Meeting Minutes – May 21, 2025

Attendees: Chair Jason Mackey, Commissioners Elyse Best, Christopher Spicer-Hankle (through Item 7), Brian Sokol, Jenny Bonham-Carter.

Absent: Commissioners Martin Poglione, Lauren Chapman.

Staff/Guests: None noted.

1. Opening

- Meeting called order by Interim Chair Jason Mackey.
- Quorum confirmed.
- Minutes from April were unavailable; approval was tabled until June.

2. Status Update on New Commissioners

- Three Commissioners approved by City Council have not yet taken oath.
- Two candidate commissioners are waiting to meet with CAPM.

3. Committee Assignments

- RSJ to investigate whether non-Commissioners can serve on subcommittees.
- Committee assignments approved as follows:
- **Administration** – Best (Chair), Sokol. Chareka
- **Promotion of City Diversity** – Bonham-Carter (Chair), Chapman
- **Rights Violation Response** – Mackey (Chair), Bonham-Carter
- **Compliance and Training** – Sokol (Chair), Spicer-Hankle
- **Information and Advocacy** – Spicer-Hankle (Chair), Elyse Best (Chair)

4. Legal Discussion

Motion: Adopt changes to “Organizational Structure and Procedures.”

- Motion: Commissioner Sokol
- Second: Commissioner Best
- Result: Passed unanimously

5. Priorities

Commissioner Sokol presented priorities derived from survey input.

Commission decided not to adopt formally, but to use them as guidelines.

Priority Areas (in order):

1. Community Engagement
2. Immigration/ICE/Sanctuary Cities/Undocumented
3. Economic Inequity & Basic Needs (including housing)
4. HRC Organizational Capacity
5. Rights and Freedom (expression, religion)
6. Polarization/Discrimination against minority groups

6. Ageism Event

Commissioner Best presented status update.

Motion: Plan to hold Ageism event on October 5.

- Motion: Commissioner Best
- Second: Commissioner Mackey
- Result: Passed unanimously

Budget approval was postponed until FY2026 budget finalized later this Summer.

7. Special Education

Motion: Invite Liz Eldridge, Chair of the Somerville Special Education Parents Advisory Council (SSEPAC), to speak over the summer.

- Motion: Commissioner Bonham-Carter
- Second: Commissioner Mackey
- Result: Passed unanimously

8. Executive Director

Discussion tabled.

9. Public Comment Period

Discussion: Commissioners considered adding a public comment period to agendas.

Decision: No motion; Chair will announce at start of meetings that public may speak at Chair's discretion.

10. Focus Groups

Commissioners Bonham-Carter and Sokol provided status update.

11. Narrative⁴

Tabled.

12. LGBTQIA Prison Data

Tabled.

13. Structural Racism in Prison

Tabled.

14. Salem Human Rights Award

Tabled.

15. AAPI Month

Motion: Commissioner Mackey proposed issuing statement condemning Japanese Internment and tying it to the present.

- Second: Commissioner Best
- Result: Approved

Follow-up: Motion withdrawn due to lack of communication channels.

Motion: Commissioner Sokol moved to empower Promotion of City Diversity Committee to develop communication channels.

- Second: Commissioner Best
- Result: Approved unanimously

16. Carnaval Tabling

Motion: To table at Carnaval.

- Result: Failed unanimously

Discussion: Commissioners agreed to prepare materials to be ready for future events.

17. Adjournment

Motion: Commissioner Mackey

Second: Commissioner Bonham-Carter

Meeting adjourned.

Actions & Motions

Motions

- Adopt changes to Organizational Structure and Procedures → Passed unanimously.
- Hold Ageism Event on October 5 → Passed unanimously (budget approval postponed).
- Invite Liz Eldridge (SSEPAC) to speak → Passed unanimously.
- AAPI Month statement condemning Japanese Internment → Approved, later withdrawn.
- Empower Promotion of City Diversity Committee to develop communication channels → Passed unanimously.
- Table at Carnaval → Failed unanimously.

Action Items

- RSJ to investigate non-Commissioner participation in subcommittees.
- Committees to begin work per assignments.
- Promotion of City Diversity Committee to develop communication channels.
- Prepare materials for future public tabling opportunities.