



# **2015 - 2016 ANNUAL REPORT**

**AMES HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION**

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### STRATEGIC PLAN

To be completed by June 30, 2017

#### CITY OF AMES MUNICIPAL CODE, CHAPTER 14

The purpose of this chapter is to implement the provision of the Iowa Civil Rights Act and to further provide for the general welfare of persons in the City of Ames, Iowa, by prohibiting certain discriminatory practices, and to establish a commission for the investigation of complaints of discrimination; and, **to undertake projects of education to prevent discrimination**; and, to establish procedures for the conciliation of such complaints; and to enforce the provisions hereof.

*Powers and Duties under Code: To issues such publications and reports of investigations and research as in the judgment of the commission shall tend to promote good will among the various racial, religious, and ethnic groups of the state and which shall tend to minimize or eliminate discrimination in public accommodations, employment, apprenticeship and on-the-job training programs, vocational schools, or housing because of race, creed, color, sex, national origin, religion, ancestry, disability or sexual orientation.*

The Human Relations Commission commits to undertake activities in the following areas:

#### Receive, investigate, and determine the merits of discrimination complaints

- Twice per year, meet with investigators to obtain a summary of complaints and discuss educational opportunities for the community.
- One to two times per year, request data from the Iowa Civil Rights Commission regarding complaints filed from the Ames area.

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- Study information obtained from investigators and the Iowa Civil Rights Commission and develop actions to respond to areas of concern.

Study the existence, character, causes, and extent of discriminatory practices in the community; make legislative proposals to the City Council when deemed necessary.

- Identify individuals or groups who are willing to share experiences or unreported complaints related to:
  - Housing
  - Employment
  - Public Accommodation
  - Race or ethnic minority
  - Disabilities
  - Gender identity
- Use the information gained from the Commission's findings to plan educational and promotion efforts for the community.
- Attend conferences and symposiums and share with the Commission any information gained regarding state and national civil rights or discriminatory trends.

Issue reports, conduct educational activities, and participate in and/or sponsor community events which promote good will among various racial, religious, ethnic, disabled, age-oriented, or affectional orientated groups; minimize or eliminate discriminatory practices.

- Develop an annual calendar outlining the Commission's events, activities, and topics, including seminars, existing activities undertaken by the Commission, and activities taken on by partnering organizations.
- Develop a standard to recognize those in the community who have championed non-discrimination in the areas the Commission has chosen to focus its efforts (Housing, employment, public accommodation)
- Promote the Commission as a resource to the community through:
  - Maintaining a public presence (website, literature, events, speaking engagements)
  - Outreach via media outlets
  - Activities with community partners (organizations and individuals with aligned interests)
- Present findings of the commission's self-education efforts to the public.
- Develop materials and resources that educate the community about the Commission's efforts, resources, and topics of importance to accomplishing the Commission's charge.
- Develop a list of organizations and individuals that could partner with the Commission to accomplish its charge or that may find value in being apprised of the Commission's activities.

Prepare and submit an annual report to the Mayor and City Council describing its proceedings, investigations, hearings, studies, educational efforts, and other activities.

- Issue an annual report to the City Council in accordance with the requirements of the Commission ordinance.

## **AMES CIVIL RIGHTS BASIS OF COMPLAINTS 2015-2016**

As part of the Commission's Strategic Planning activities, the Commission reviewed locally reported complaints. It was reported that the majority of complaints are made or referred to the Iowa Civil Rights Commission. Attempts were made to identify Ames related complaints made to the Iowa Civil Rights Commission, however at this time no response has been provided. Future efforts will continue to elicit this information. Locally the areas of discrimination reported concerned housing (7), public accommodation and employment, each at 4. The basis of discrimination was predominantly retaliation, race, physical disability, and sex. The majority of complaints were not found significant enough to forward with but were cross-filed with the Iowa Civil Rights Commission. No complaints were identified as having probable cause. Education was identified in relation to the nature of discrimination related to housing, public accommodation and employment.

## **FOCUS GROUPS**

To achieve the charge to "study the existence, character, causes, and extent of discriminatory practices in the community" it was deemed that the Ames Human Relations Commission should implement greater outreach to the community. Focus groups were identified as a tool to improve the opportunity to identify discrimination, perceptions of discrimination and areas for community action and education.

Based upon prior complaints, housing was the first topic addressed. Three focus groups were attempted to be held on April 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> in locations that were deemed to be accessible to those who may rent. They were the Library, ISU campus, and Food at First. While individuals did not gather to participate in a true focus group, each session provided an opportunity to create awareness to people of the Commission, to distribute bookmarks and brochures identifying what discrimination is and the role of the Commission as a resource. The ISU session evolved as an outreach session where over 100 brochures were passed out.

At the Food at First event five individuals asked in-depth questions about the Commission and three indicated they may pursue further action; however it was noted that none was taken. Two individuals were willing to discuss concerns related to prior evictions, access, and possible release of protected information. Referrals to the City and Story County Legal Aid were made. While these first sessions did not produce the desired group discussion, they were an opportunity to increase awareness and community interaction. Strategies to further identify discriminatory practices will be investigated in the future.

## **A HOME FOR EVERYONE AWARD**

The Commission discussed different ways to recognize individuals and organizations who have made a significant impact in Ames by having a strong commitment towards providing safe and equitable housing opportunities for the residents.

"A Home for Everyone" award was formed by the Commission to recognize such individuals and groups with the recipient being awarded a plaque during the month of April, which is also Fair Housing Month.





For the 2015-2016 year, Jennifer Ellis was selected by the Commission to receive the award for her extraordinary work in providing fair and equal housing opportunities for residents with disabilities and maintaining affordable housing units among other things. She has worked closely with adults with intellectual disabilities and recently completed and opened a new home for them to use as well.

For all of these reasons, Jennifer was unanimously voted by the Commission to be recognized as the recipient of the “A Home for Everyone Award”.

Overall the Commission will look into ways to reach out to different demographics and encourage many more nominations because the Commission wants to truly recognize each and everyone who is making a considerable impact in the community.

## **THIRD ANNUAL CIVIL RIGHTS SYMPOSIUM**

On November 6, 2015 two members of the Ames Human Relations Commission attended the Third Annual Iowa Civil Rights Commission Symposium. The scope of the symposium was broad, covering issues of employment discrimination, housing discrimination, and discrimination in a variety of government and privately owned public accommodations.

First there was instruction on the mechanisms for receiving complaints and the process for resolution through investigation, mediation, and conciliation, with a public contested case hearing if a settlement is not achieved. This was followed by presentations on substantive issues of civil rights protection. Recent state and federal cases were summarized and discussed. There was a panel discussion on school bullying that compared the Iowa anti-bullying law (Iowa Code §280.28 Harassment and Bullying Prohibited) with the civil rights law (Iowa Code §216.1, “*Iowa Civil Rights Act of 1965*”).

Three separate presentations were made pertaining to housing discrimination and the investigation of housing complaints. It was noted that housing discrimination persists as an issue fifty years after passage of laws to address the problem.

An inspiring presentation traced the history of civil rights protection in Iowa through ten milestone cases. The first of these was the case of a slave woman who ran off a riverboat at Burlington in 1837. She was protected against the efforts of her “owner” to reclaim his “property” by the intervention of the Burlington County Sheriff and a territorial court judge.

The Iowa Civil Rights Commission and its professional staff provide a reliable tool kit of information and assistance in the work of the Ames Human Relations Commission.

## **AMES HUMAN RELATIONS HUMANITARIAN AWARD**

The Commission selected Dale Vander Schaaf as the recipient of the 2016 Ames Human Relations Commission Humanitarian Award. Among his other contributions to the community, his work on behalf of the Story County Community Housing Commission, Food at First, Habitat for Humanity, and several volunteer roles were cited as having a positive impact on the Ames community, including fair housing.



Dale was recognized at the January 18, 2016 Ames celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day at the Ames Middle School. The award recognizes an individual whose contributions promote diversity, fairness, and equality in our community. The most recent award recipients' contributions range from grass-roots community relation efforts to accessibility.