City of Milwaukee

200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
53202

Meeting Minutes - Final

EQUAL RIGHTS COMMISSION

TONY SNELL RODRIGUEZ, CHAIR
ELLE HALO, VICE-CHAIR
Jessica Boling, William Crowley, Nathan Guequierre, Jacqueline Cook, Paul Smith, Alexandria Staubach, Alexander Kostal, Denise Manjarrez-Renteria and Madeline Miranda-Navarro

Staffing: Ramona Ramos

Thursday, September 24, 2026 **4:00 PM** **Independence First, 540 S 1st St, Milwaukee, WI 53204**

1. Call to Order

• This meeting was called to order by Commission Chair Snell Rodriguez 4:02 PM

2. Roll Call

Present 8 - Snell Rodriguez, Guequierre, Crowley, Boling, Smith, Halo, Manjarrez-Renteria and Miranda-Navarro

Absent 3 - Cook, Staubach and Kostal

3. Approval of Previous Minutes – July

• The Commission considered the minutes from the July meeting. A motion to approve the minutes was made and seconded
• Action: The July meeting minutes were approved without objection.

4. Welcome Remarks from the Chair

• Chair Snell Rodriguez welcomed attendees and thanked Independence First for hosting the meeting. He recognized Hispanic Heritage Month and noted the Commission's commitment to ensuring that Milwaukee residents are treated with dignity and fairness.
• The Chair explained that the meeting was convened in part to receive information and public input regarding potential changes to the Equal Rights Specialist and ADA Coordinator positions within the Department of Compliance and Engagement (DCE).

5. Equal Rights Specialist & ADA Coordinator Positions

• Overview of Proposed Staffing Changes by the Department of Compliance and Engagement

• Public Comment

• Commissioner Discussion

• Consideration and Vote on Resolution Regarding the Equal Rights Specialist and ADA Coordinator Positions

Department of Compliance and Engagement

• Mary Reed, Director of the Department of Compliance and Engagement, addressed the Commission regarding the ADA Coordinator and Equal Rights Specialist positions. Ramona Ramos, DCE Deputy Director, also present for reporting.

• Accessibility remains a primary responsibility of DCE.

• The ADA Coordinator position remains intact and no changes will be made to that position.

• DCE intends to retain and recruit for open vacant positions.

• Prior internal discussions regarding departmental structure did not result in action to combine, eliminate, or reduce either position.

• DCE is committed to continued collaboration with the Equal Rights Commission and the disability community.

• Commissioners and members of the public discussed concerns created by budget documents and earlier communications that appeared to indicate a possible consolidation of the two positions. DCE representatives stated they would review the proposed budget documentation and address any discrepancy regarding the Equal Rights Specialist position.

• Clarified DCE's position authority, not 23 positions, is actually 12 staff positions. 11 positions are ERC commissioners.

Public Comment

• The Commission received public comment from several individuals, including representatives of the disability and LGBTQ+ communities. The Commission also heard comments supporting ongoing engagement between DCE, the Equal Rights Commission, Independence First, and other community stakeholders including:

o Ritchie T. Martin, Jr., Executive Director of the LGBT Community Center
o Brian Peters, Advocacy and Accessibility Specialist at Independence First
o Becky Rabatin, Previous ADA Coordinator City of Milwaukee
o Patty, Community Member

• The importance of maintaining separate ADA Coordinator and Equal Rights Specialist positions because of their distinct statutory responsibilities, technical knowledge requirements, and workloads.

• The need for the City's budget documents, staffing plans, and public statements to clearly align.

• Concerns that combining the positions could reduce the City's capacity to address accessibility, civil rights, discrimination, and accommodation matters.

• The need for clear accountability by City departments in responding to accessibility barriers and concerns raised by residents and advocacy organizations.

• Individual testimony regarding challenges navigating disability-related services

• The Commission also heard comments supporting ongoing engagement between DCE, the Equal Rights Commission, Independence First, and other community stakeholders.

Commissioner Discussion
• Commissioners discussed the value of a more formal and collaborative working relationship between the Commission and DCE. Participants expressed interest in future joint planning regarding the Commission's role, civil-rights education, complaint intake, community outreach, and departmental coordination.

Resolution Regarding Positions
• Note: Commissioner Paul Smith left the meeting prior to the vote and, therefore, could not be counted as present for the vote. The departure time was recorded as 4:41 p.m. during public testimony.
• The Commission considered a resolution expressing opposition to the reduction or consolidation of the Equal Rights Specialist and ADA Coordinator positions.
• Motion: A motion was made to adopt the resolution opposing the reduction or consolidation of the Equal Rights Specialist and ADA Coordinator positions.
• Vote: The motion passed with a roll call vote with 7 ERC Commissioners present: Snell Rodriguez, Guequierre, Crowley, Miranda-Navarro, Manjarrez-Renteria, Boling, Halo
• Action: The Equal Rights Commission adopted the resolution opposing consolidation of the Equal Rights Specialist and ADA Coordinator positions.

Present 8 - Snell Rodriguez, Guequierre, Crowley, Boling, Smith, Halo, Manjarrez-Renteria and Miranda-Navarro

Absent 3 - Cook, Staubach and Kostal

6. LRB Memo Update

• The Commission received an update regarding the Legislative Reference Bureau memorandum concerning the Commission's authority to expand housing-discrimination complaint jurisdiction to additional protected classes.
• The City Attorney's Office advised that expanding jurisdiction may present significant legal challenges under current Wisconsin law.
• The Commission discussed the City of Madison's practices and the possibility of obtaining additional information regarding its legal interpretation and procedures.
• Assistant City Attorney Andrea Fowler reported that she had attempted to contact counterparts in Madison but had not yet been able to schedule a discussion.
• Attorney Fowler indicated that her legal analysis had not changed and that expansion of jurisdiction would be difficult under existing law.
• The Commission indicated that it would continue to seek clarification and explore options, including possible future legislative changes.
• No action was taken.

7. Housing Update

Housing-related matters as it relates to Chapter 109 and ERC Jurisdiction, were addressed as part of the LRB memorandum discussion. No separate action was taken.

8. Department of Compliance and Engagement / Staff Update

• Complaints Update

Complaints Update
• Staff reported that approximately 40 complaints were currently active or under review.
• Staff provided an update on the ERC web-based complaint application, which was recently implemented. The updated system is intended to improve complaint intake, case documentation, communication, and reporting.

Items discussed:
• Online submission of complaints.
• Alerts to the ERC complaints inbox when a complaint is submitted.
• Documentation of complaint interviews, case notes, phone calls, emails, and other contacts.
• The ability to generate reports and data related to complaints.
• Continued availability of multiple methods for submitting complaints, including telephone and online intake, to promote accessibility.
• ERC Suggest Common Council Lunch and Learns regarding the complaints app. Staff indicated that future outreach to the Common Council offices on the Admin side of the application may be conducted.
• No action was taken.

9. Communication from Committees

• Governance Committee

• LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee

• Ad Hoc Housing Committee

• International Human Rights Day Event Planning Committee

Governance Committee
• The Governance Committee reported that, following completion of the Commission's handbook and 2026, it is moving forward with planning and training activities. The Committee intends to support commissioner training and consider future educational and outreach efforts.

LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee
• No separate report was recorded.

Ad Hoc Housing
• No separate report was recorded.

Ad Hoc International Human Rights Day Planning Committee
• Commissioner Boling reported that planning remains underway for the International Human Rights Day event at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center (MYAC). The committee is working on an open call for artists and will provide further updates by email.

10. Upcoming Events

• Chair Snell Rodriguez noted that Hispanic Heritage Month events were occurring throughout the community and encouraged attendance and participation.

11. Community Announcements

Vice-Chair Elle Halo

• Vice-Chair Halo announced that she would be stepping down from the Commission for personal reasons. She expressed appreciation for the Commission, City staff, fellow commissioners, community partners, and the opportunity to serve.

• Vice-Chair Halo stated that she intends to continue her advocacy for Black transgender communities, including work related to anti-violence, housing instability, and support for transgender community members. She also expressed interest in continuing to participate in LGBTQ+ advisory work and future Commission activities as able.

• Commission members thanked Vice-Chair Halo for her service, advocacy, and contributions to the City and the Equal Rights Commission.

Neighborhood Camera Program

• An announcement was made regarding a City neighborhood camera program with an application deadline at the close of business on the following day.

12. Adjournment

• A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. There were no objections.

• Action: The meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:26 p.m.