



CITY OF TOPEKA

Human Relations Commission
City Hall, 215 SE 7th Street
Topeka, KS 66603

Tel: 785-368-3725
www.topeka.org

Upcoming Meeting Information:

Date: Monday, February 13, 2023

Time: 5:30 PM

Location: City Hall, 215 SE 7th Street, Topeka, Kansas and Zoom

Meeting Agenda

- I. Call to Order and Roll Call
 - a. Introductions
- II. Agenda and Prior Meeting Minutes
- III. Old Business
 - a. Election of Chair and Vice Chair
 - b. Rebuilding and Reintroducing the THRC
- IV. New Business
 - a. 2022 HRC Annual Report
- V. Public Comment
- VI. Adjournment

Public Comment Notice: To honor safety mandates surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person public comments will be limited; please contact Brenda Younger, City Clerk, at cclerk@topeka.org regarding meeting attendance or to submit written public comments. Written comments may also be mailed to: 215 SE 7th Street, Room 166, Topeka, Kansas 66603. All attendance requests and comments must be received 2 business days prior to the meeting.

To request an ADA Accommodation, please contact 785-368-3725 between the hours of 8:00am – 5:00pm no later than 3 working days in advance of this meeting.



CITY OF TOPEKA

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES DRAFT

Date: December 5, 2022
Time: 5:30pm
Location: City Hall – 1st Floor Conference Room; 215 SE 7th Street

Call to Order. Commissioner Roberts called the meeting to order at 5:31pm.

Roll Call. Present: Commissioner Luc Bensimon (By Zoom); Commissioner Cynthia Hopp (By Zoom); Commissioner Pamela James (By Zoom); Commissioner Carol Roberts; Commissioner Carmen Romero-Nichols (By Zoom) and Commissioner Alexis Simmons. Absent: Vice Chair Jennifer Goetz; and Commissioner Angelique Brown.

Guests. Mayor Michael Padilla (By Zoom); Mary Kuckelman, Senior City Attorney; and Kaitlyn Willis, Senior Executive Assistant, City Manager's Office.

Adoption of December 5, 2022 Agenda. Commissioner Romero-Nichols moved and Commissioner Simmons seconded a motion to adopt the agenda as written. Motion passed unanimously.

Adoption of November 14, 2022 Minutes. Commissioner Simmons moved and Commissioner Romero-Nichols seconded a motion to adopt the minutes as written. Motion passed unanimously.

Old Business.

- **Rebuilding and Reintroducing the THRC.** Mayor Padilla spoke to the Commission about the following items:
 - **Chief DEI Officer.** Ernestor De La Rosa has been selected to be the Chief DEI Officer. He will begin working for the City of Topeka on January 9, 2023. Mayor Padilla hopes that Mr. De La Rosa will join future HRC meetings and be involved with the Commission.
 - **Independent Police Auditor (IPA) Reports.** The City is hiring an Internal Investigator, and they will conduct internal City investigations in addition to serving as the IPA. Mayor Padilla asked the Commission for their thoughts on the previous IPA Reports, and the consensus was that the Commission benefited from reviewing and approving these reports.
 - **Role of the Commission.** In the past, the Commission was a community advocate and worked with city departments to address certain issues. The Commission also held town halls, but these ended due to low attendance. The Commission discussed holding town halls in conjunction with other meetings to increase attendance. The Commission also discussed the benefits of having a body in place for constituents to share concerns that can be forwarded to city departments or the Governing Body.

- **Onboarding and Trainings.** Mayor Padilla asked if anyone would like to schedule onboarding or receive any trainings. The Commission has a few new members, so the consensus was to schedule onboarding once the vacancies have been filled in 2023. The Commission also discussed potential trainings from the Police Department and Fire Department so they can have the tools and knowledge to serve on the Commission.
- **Attendance.** Mayor Padilla asked Commissioners to prioritize the Commission and attend future meetings. Kaitlyn Willis will send a survey to the Commission to find a new time for 2023 meetings.
- **Election of Chair and Vice Chair.** Commissioner Romero-Nichols moved and Commissioner Simmons seconded a motion to postpone the election until the January HRC Meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment. No public comment.

Adjournment. Meeting adjourned at 6:08 p.m.

****Next Meeting: TBD****

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**CITY OF TOPEKA
HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION**

**2022
ANNUAL REPORT**

The mission of the Topeka Human Relations Commission (HRC) is to conduct outreach and educational activities that promote justice and cultural understanding, and improve relationships among all people of the City of Topeka.

February 6, 2023

To Mayor Padilla and City Councilmembers,

On behalf of the Topeka Human Relations Commission (HRC), I am submitting our 2022 Annual Report to the governing body as required by City Code.

We welcome you to review the 2022 HRC Annual Report and send us any comments, concerns, and suggestions for 2023. We are dedicated to the HRC mission and look forward to planning outreach and educational events for our community this year.

Our Commission is a diverse and talented group of individuals who volunteer their time to the City of Topeka. Many of the commissioners further their civic engagement by attending monthly meetings, public forums, seminars or other events that address the concerns of our citizenry. We are proud to serve our neighbors, all residents and our city in this capacity.

We appreciate your continued support and look forward to collaborating with the governing body to serve fellow residents of the city.

Best regards,

Carol Roberts

Carol Roberts
Commissioner
Topeka Human Relations Commission

Cc: Stephen Wade, City Manager
City Council Office
City Clerk's Office
Mayor's Office

CITY OF TOPEKA HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Human Relations Commission is to conduct outreach and educational activities that promote justice and cultural understanding, and improve relationships among all people in the City of Topeka.

ROLE OF THE COMMISSION

The Topeka Human Relations Ordinance requires that the Commission be non-partisan. By historical custom, the Commission's composition reflects a varied geographic representation; individuals with disabilities; a diverse gender, racial, religious, and ethnic mix; a variety of professional backgrounds; and, a demonstrated interest in civil rights. The Commissioners shall reside within the corporate limits of the city.

Commissioners are appointed by the Mayor from Council nominations and are confirmed by Topeka City Council for two (2) year terms, or until their successor is appointed.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In 2010 the Commission's role changed from filing and investigating complaints and holding public hearings when the Human Relations Department was abolished in late June 2010.

The Commission supports the efforts to eliminate prejudice and further goodwill among all people of the city and promotes positive relations among our citizens and guests through community outreach. The Commission continues to promote and facilitate Town Hall meetings and public forums on issues of interest and concern; participate in outreach activities and public education; and partner with groups that share similar goals.

2022 HRC ACHIEVEMENTS

- The Topeka Human Relations Commission found itself in a transition period during the year of 2022. With a few changes in City government leadership as well as Commissioner involvement, the focus and purpose of the THRC came under review. As such, no achievements of record can be reported.

MEMBERS OF THE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

By ordinance, the City Manager shall designate staff to assist the Commission. Staff coordinates meetings of the Commission, Committees formed by the Commission, and other requests made by the Commission. Staff is responsible for answering the Commission phone line and assisting in the referral to other supporting agencies. Staff also assists with other Commission outreach into the legal support, assistance, research, and training on an as needed basis.

Chair	Unfilled	
Vice Chair	Unfilled	

Commissioner	Carol Roberts	Term Expires 2/2024
Commissioner	Cynthia Hopp	Term Expires: 3/2024
Commissioner	Carmen Romero-Nichols	Term Expires: 6/2024
Commissioner	Luc Bensimon	Term Expires: 6/2024
Commissioner	Alexis Simmons	Term Expires: 7/2024
Commissioner	Pamela James	Term Expires: 9/2024
Commissioner	Unfilled	

COMMUNITY OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

TROY SCROGGINS AWARD

The City of Topeka's Human Relations Commission hosted the first Troy Scroggins Award Ceremony in 2008. The Troy Scroggins Award recognizes individuals, public and private entities, and youth whose efforts at eliminating discrimination and prejudice and advancing diversity in Topeka are outstanding, singular and noteworthy.

The 2022 Recipients:

There were no nominations taken, nor awards bestowed.

STEPHANIE MOTT AWARD

The Stephanie Mott Award recognizes people living in Shawnee County who have helped the Topeka Human Relations Commission (THRC) accomplish its mission by exemplifying the work of Stephanie Mott, which is advocating for the disenfranchised and the less fortunate, and giving a voice to the voiceless.

2022 Recipient:

There were no nominations taken, nor award bestowed.

ATTENDED OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

INVITED GUEST SPEAKERS FOR EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

- Ed Collazo-Independent Police Auditor (January-September)
- Ruth Glover, Kansas Human Rights Commission (July)

OTHER MEMBERSHIP COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Cynthia Hopp

Woman's Foundation, Member
Community Action Board
Mosaic Partner Pairs

Luc Bensimon

Equality Kansas Topeka Chapter
Capital City Equality Center (The Mott House)
Black Transmen, Inc

ISSUES WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY

PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS

None.

DRAFT



MEET THE 2023 HRC COMMISSIONERS

COMMISSIONER LUC BENSIMON

I am a 48 year old man of Trans experience born and raised in Topeka, Kansas. I was born with three strikes against me being assigned female at birth, being Afro-American and born with a disability all of which I have been discriminated against in different areas of my life. I have two degrees in Human Services youth and children emphasis and a BA in Criminal Justice. I wear a few different hats when it comes to activism. I am the current president and one of the founding members of Kansas statewide transgender education project (K.S.T.E.P), current chairperson of Equality Kansas Topeka chapter, and the president of Capital city equality center (The Mott House), the president and founder of the Black Transmen Inc. Kansas chapter (BTMI Kansas). Mr. Black Trans Kansas 2019-2020, ward captain and ward 1 precinct 3 precinct committee Man. I am an activist for the LGBT community but my true passion Trans people of color.



COMMISSIONER CAROL ROBERTS

Carol Roberts was born and raised in Topeka. She is a wife, mother to seven children and grandmother to eight grandchildren. Carol attended elementary through high school in the Seaman School District. Upon graduation from high school she attended Washburn University where she graduated in 1988 with a degree in court and conference reporting. Carol has been a freelance court reporter, worked in the Johnson County District Courts as an official reporter and now owns a transcription company that serves law enforcement agencies, courts and a variety of other clients. Carol also owns a health and wellness business dedicated to the science and study of nutrition and genetic expression with regard to the prevention or treatment of disease.

Carol has served in various capacities in city and community groups such as the Law Enforcement Partnership Panel established under Police Chief Ron Miller. She has served also in Kansans for Life as well as



been involved in radio and newspaper ministries. She is active in her church and serves in several roles there. Carol is involved with Trash Mountain Project which serves people living in trash dump communities worldwide. Carol is passionate about her faith and encouraging others. She believes that all lives are precious and every human should be treated with dignity and respect.

COMMISSIONER CYNTHIA HOPP

Cynthia Hopp has been a teacher for the Topeka public school system since 2013 and has been teaching for the last ten years. She recently graduated with a Masters of Educational Leadership at Kansas State University.

Cynthia is a member of the Minority Leadership Academy and a Kagan Cooperative Learning instructional coach. After school hours, she serves at the Woman's Foundation and is also a Human Relations Commissioner for the city of Topeka.

With an evident passion for education and volunteering, Cynthia enjoys helping people achieve their goals.

Cynthia is married to Kevin Hopp and is the mother of two children, Mikaela and Mauricio. In her spare time, she enjoys learning how to play the cello, meditating, and doing yoga.



Not pictured:

COMMISSIONER PAMELA JAMES
COMMISSIONER CARMEN ROMERO-NICHOLS
COMMISSIONER ALEXIS SIMMONS

There are three vacancies as of February 1, 2023

The Commission looks forward to working with the newly appointed Chief DEI Officer Ernestor De La Rosa and Deputy DEI Director Manuel Munoz in partnership to strengthen relationship between City Government and the Topeka Community.