



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, January 8, 2024

Time: 5:30 PM

Location: Zoom

Meeting Agenda

- I. Call to Order and Roll Call
- II. Agenda and Prior Meeting Minutes
- III. New Business
- IV. Old Business
 - a. Election of Chair and Vice Chair
 - b. 2023 HRC Annual Report
 - c. Diversity Entrepreneurship Program, National League of Cities
 - i. Diversity Supplier
 - ii. Reducing Barriers for Hispanic/Latino Businesses
 - d. AARP Age Friendly Initiative
- V. Other Announcements
- VI. Public Comment
- VII. Important Dates/Events
- VIII. 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 785-368-3917 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 11, 2023
Time: 5:30pm
Location: City Hall – 1st Floor Conference Room; 215 SE 7th Street

Call to Order. Chair Roberts called the meeting to order at 5:32 pm.

Roll Call. Present: Chair Carol Roberts; Vice Chair Carmen Romero-Nichols; Commissioner Luc Bensimon; Commissioner Cynthia Hopp; and Commissioner Pamela James. Absent: Commissioner Marisol Marcelo; Commissioner Alexis Simmons; and Commissioner Zachary Surratt.

Guests. Ernestor De La Rosa, Chief Diversity Equity and Inclusion Officer; Zaynah Afada, Diversity Equity and Inclusion Program Coordinator; and Kaitlyn Willis, Executive Assistant to the City Manager.

Adoption of November 20, 2023 Minutes and December 11, 2023 Agenda. Vice Chair Romero-Nichols moved and Chair Roberts seconded a motion to adopt the minutes and agenda as written. Motion passed unanimously.

Old Business.

- **Election of Chair and Vice Chair.** Chair Roberts nominated Vice Chair Romero-Nichols to serve as Chair. Commissioner Hopp nominated Commissioner Bensimon to serve as Vice Chair. Vice Chair Romero-Nichols nominated Chair Roberts to serve as Vice Chair. A vote was held for Vice Chair, which resulted in a tie. Vice Chair Romero-Nichols moved and Chair Roberts seconded a motion to delay the election until the next meeting. Motion passed unanimously.
- **2023 HRC Annual Report.** Ernestor reported that a draft of the 2023 HRC Annual Report will be shared in January.
- **NLC Diversity Entrepreneurship Program.** Ernestor gave background on this program.
- **AARP Presentation - Age Friendly Initiative.** Zaynah is working on the application and the Education and Outreach Subcommittee will review it, and then it will be sent to the Mayor for approval. An updated will be shared at the next meeting.

Other Announcements.

- **Holiday Posada.** Ernestor shared that this event was held on December 6 at 6-8pm at the Governor's Row House. We received positive feedback and the Planning Subcommittee will have a debriefing on the event.
- **Taste of Topeka.** Ernestor stated that we will start planning for this event next month.
- **MEI.** Ernestor shared that the DEI office is preparing for next year's review.

- **Transgender Day of Remembrance.** Commissioner Bensimon shared about this recent event and encouraged Commissioners to be involved in 2024.

Public Comment. No public comment.

Important Dates/Events. Ernestor noted the date and event below.

- Human Rights Day – Sunday, December 10, 2023

Adjournment. Meeting adjourned at 5:56p.m.

****Next Meeting: January 8, 2024****

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**CITY OF TOPEKA
HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION**

**2023
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 __, 2024

To Mayor Padilla and City Councilmembers,

On behalf of the Topeka Human Relations Commission (HRC), I am submitting our 2023 Annual Report to the governing body as required by City Code.

We welcome you to review the 2023 HRC Annual Report and send us any comments, concerns, and suggestions for 2024. 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,

Chair
Topeka Human Relations Commission

Cc: Richard U. Nienstedt, Interim 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.

2023 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	Carol Roberts	Term Expires 2/2024
Vice Chair	Carmen Romero-Nichols	Term Expires: 6/2024
Commissioner	Cynthia Hopp	Term Expires: 3/2024

Commissioner	Luc Bensimon	Term Expires: 6/2024
Commissioner	Alexis Simmons	Term Expires: 7/2024
Commissioner	Pamela James	Term Expires: 9/2024
Commissioner	Marisol Marcelo	Term Expires 2/2025
Commissioner	Zachary Surritt	Term Expires 2/2025
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 2023 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.

2023 Recipient: *There were no nominations taken, nor award bestowed.*

ATTENDED OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

INVITED GUEST SPEAKERS FOR EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

Andi Bozarth-AARP Representative (October)
 Kristin Hammer, YWCA Representative (November)

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.



MEET THE 2024 HRC COMMISSIONERS

CHAIR 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.

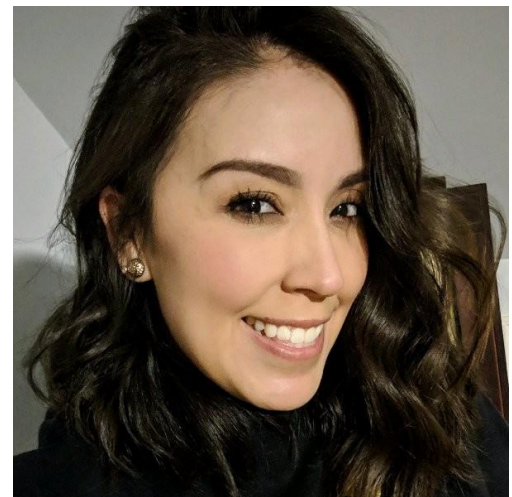


VICE CHAIR CARMEN ROMERO-NICHOLS

Carmen Romero-Nichols joined the Human Resource Commission in May 2022. She is originally from Mexico City, though Topeka has been her home for the majority of her life.

Carmen moved to Kansas with her family over 20 years ago. She graduated from Topeka High School, received her undergrad from Washburn University, and an MBA from Baker University.

The City of Topeka as well as the State of Kansas hold a special meaning to Carmen. She understands the importance of being involved in the community and decided to get involved in being a part of shaping our community for her two daughters.



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 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.



COMMISSIONER PAMELA JAMES

Pamela James first moved to Topeka in 2010. She was born and raised in a small town about 4 hours from Topeka, Hutchinson, Kansas. She graduated from University of Phoenix in 2021 with a Bachelor of Science in Business and General Management.

Pamela has been a State of Kansas employee for several years and is passionate about helping people and her community become the best that it can be. She is an active member of the National Society of Leadership and Success and has become a member of the Human Relations Committee in her pursuit to continue helping others.



COMMISSIONER MARISOL MARCELLO

Marisol Estrella Marcelo is a distinguished professional dedicated to making a difference in her beloved Topeka community. Though not native to Topeka, she has embraced it as her home and actively contributes to its vibrancy. Marisol's educational journey has been diverse, spanning studies in Music Education, Mortuary Science, and culminating in her recent graduation in Marketing and Business Administration.



Marisol's involvement in community-building extends to various organizations, including her role as a graduate of the Leadership Greater Topeka Class of 2023. She also serves as a mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters and is an engaged member of Mana De Topeka. Her dedication is further exemplified through her active participation in the Kansas Funeral Director Association, her volunteer work with Hospice, and her commitment to Fiesta Topeka. Additionally, Marisol is engaged in her church community.

She is an advocate for supporting local businesses and charities, reflecting her unwavering commitment to the betterment of her community. In her role as Director of Marketing, Public Relations, and Preplanning Specialist at Brennan-Mathena Funeral Home, Marisol's compassion and dedication shine through as she guides and supports families during their most challenging moments, helping them honor and celebrate the lives of their loved ones. Her mission is deeply rooted in her faith and a commitment to personal growth, striving daily to be the best version of herself and making a positive impact in her community.

COMMISSIONER ALEXIS SIMMONS

Alexis Simmons is a graduate of Washburn University (Go Bods!) where she majored in political science and served as student body president. After graduating from Washburn, she obtained a masters degree in American politics and government from American University's School of Public Affairs in Washington, D.C.

While in D.C. Alexis helped train women to run for office and wrote a weekly newsletter about women in politics for the Women & Politics Institute. After joining a boutique consulting firm, Alexis and a small team advised Fortune 500 companies on creation and implementation of forward-thinking, socially responsible policies.

After moving back to Topeka in 2020, Alexis returned to work where her love for public service started: the Kansas Legislature. She serves as the Communications Director for Vic Miller, Kansas House Minority Leader, and the Kansas House Democrats. As a former intern, her favorite part of the job is helping coordinate the internship program for the House of Representatives.



Alexis is a graduate of the 2021-2022 Kansas Chamber of Commerce's Emerging Leaders program, Democratic precinct committeewoman, EMILY's List Ignite Change Fellow, National Organization of Women (NOW) scholarship recipient, Bryce Harlow Foundation honoree, and adjunct professor in Washburn University's political science department.

COMMISSIONER ZACHARY SURRITT

Zachary Surritt is a native of the Greater Topeka area. Born in Topeka, raised in Meriden, and has lived in the Capitol City since he started his college career in 2015. Zachary graduated from Washburn University with his Bachelor's Degree in Public Administration in 2020. While at Washburn, he served as a leader in a number of student organizations, including a term as the Student Body President in 2018-2019. Zachary has also served as a City Council member for the City of Meriden and is the current Chair-Elect of Forge Young Talent where he is dedicated to making Topeka and Shawnee County a place where young people want to live, work, play, and belong. Zachary is also the Business Development and Marketing Director for R&S Maintenance Services, of which he is part of the third generation of family leadership. Zachary has a passion for public service and looks forward to working with our community to create an environment for positive change.



There is one vacancy as of January 3, 2024.