



Watertown City Council

Administration Building
149 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472
Phone: 617-972-6470

ORDINANCE # 66

O-2023- 66

AN ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING THE WATERTOWN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

WHEREAS, Section 2-11 of the Home Rule Charter for the City of Watertown, as adopted by the voters on November 2, 2021, indicates that the City of Watertown shall establish a Human Rights Commission by ordinance; and,

WHEREAS, the City Council desires to establish the Human Rights Commission to affirm the City of Watertown is an inclusive community where all individuals can enjoy the free and equal exercise of their human and civil rights and privileges.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED by the City Council of the City of Watertown that the Watertown Code of Ordinances is hereby amended by adding a new Chapter entitled Watertown Human Rights Commission, as attached hereto.

AND FURTHER, that this Ordinance shall take effect upon passage.

Council Member

I hereby certify that at a regular meeting of the City Council for which a quorum was present, the above Order was adopted by a vote of 9 for, 1 against and 2 present on September 26, 2023.

Brendan T. McCarthy, Council Clerk

Mark S. Sideris, Council President

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Mark S. Sideris,
Council President

Caroline Bays,
Councilor At Large

Nicole Gardner,
District A Councilor

Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr.,
Vice President &
District C Councilor

John G. Gannon,
Councilor At Large

Lisa J. Feltner,
District B Councilor

John M. Airasian,
Councilor At Large

Anthony Palomba,
Councilor At Large

Emily Izzo,
District D Councilor

CHAPTER __. WATERTOWN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

§ __.01 Establishment.

In accordance with SECTION 2-11 of the Watertown Home Rule Charter, there shall be in the city a commission known as Watertown Human Rights Commission (“commission”).

§ __.02 Purpose.

The purpose of creating the commission is to affirm that the city of Watertown is an inclusive community that has as one of its core values, freedom from discrimination, disrespect, bigotry, hatred and oppression; and to reaffirm the city’s commitment to uphold and defend the rights of all individuals to enjoy the free and equal exercise of their human and civil rights and privileges.

To that end, the commission shall strive to ensure that all persons enjoy equal opportunity to participate in local affairs, including but not limited to housing, employment, education, public accommodation, access to city services, insurance, credit, banking and health care, regardless of race, color, ancestry, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, citizenship, age, religion, disability, health status, marital or familial status, military or veteran status, socioeconomic status, ex-offender status, genetic and/or “protected class” status. Human rights are universal and inalienable; indivisible; interdependent and interrelated. Whether civil, political, economic, social or cultural in nature, all such rights are inherent to the dignity of every person. Consequently, these rights all have equal status.

§ __.03 Appointment of Commissioners and Term.

(A) Appointment and Tenure of Members, Vacancies. There shall be nine commissioners appointed by the city manager, subject to confirmation by the city council.

- (i) The commissioners shall be residents of Watertown.
- (ii) The city manager shall appoint commissioners to serve three-year terms, subject to confirmation by the city council.
- (iii) The commissioners first appointed shall have staggered terms, with three (3) of the appointed commissioners initially serving a one-year term; three (3) of the appointed commissioners initially serving a two-year term; and the remaining three (3) commissioners serving a three-year

term. Thereafter, all appointments and reappointments, shall be for a period of three (3) years. Commissioners may be reappointed for additional terms.

- (iv) Any vacancy in membership shall be filled for the remainder of the unexpired term in the same manner as the original appointment.
- (v) There shall be liaisons from the Watertown Police Department, the Watertown School Department and the student body. While not commissioners, such liaisons shall participate in the work of the commission by attending monthly sessions to bring issues of concern and ideas to the commission and to help formulate constructive resolutions. Ideally, the chief of police and the superintendent of schools shall be the liaisons, but when not possible they could designate a department member to attend in their place. Student liaisons shall be chosen by the superintendent with recommendations of student services and shall serve for a term of at least one school year.
- (vi) The commission shall always strive to reflect the socioeconomic, age, gender, racial and cultural diversity of the city, and efforts should be directed to recruiting commissioners of historically underrepresented and marginalized groups, including people of color, youth and young adults, immigrants, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

(C) Qualifications. Commissioners appointed by the city manager shall, when possible, have relevant experience in one or more of the following areas: human rights, social justice, law, education, diversity, equity and inclusion, community engagement, municipal government, or advocacy for individuals who are targets of mistreatment or discrimination.

(D) Any commissioner who ceases to be a city resident shall promptly provide written notification of their change in residence to the commission chair and to the city clerk. The commissioner may serve until a successor is appointed.

§__-.04 Meetings and Officers of the Commission.

(A) Meetings. The commission shall meet monthly at a time and place as the chair shall determine. Notice of all meetings shall comply with the provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §§ 18-25. A quorum at any meeting shall be a majority of the total number of commissioners then serving. The commission shall keep a written record of its proceedings.

(B) Officers. At the first meeting of the commission, and annually thereafter, the commissioners shall elect three members to serve respectively as chair, vice-chair

and clerk, and may elect such other officers, adopt procedural rules and regulations, and establish such subcommittees as they deem appropriate. In the chair's absence, the vice-chair shall preside over meetings.

§ __-05 Duties of the Commission.

The commission shall promote human rights in Watertown through outreach, dialogue, and educational forums. The commission shall also have the following charges and responsibilities:

- (A) Promote positive, respectful, and collaborative relationships among all groups and individuals in Watertown.
- (B) Create an Action Plan, to be reviewed and updated as the commission deems necessary, detailing goals and associated activities aligned with the purpose of the commission.
- (C) Advocate for, support, facilitate, and disseminate information about independent equity assessments, and identify calls to action in response to equity audits throughout the city.
- (D) Serve as a resource for residents, employees, those doing business with or in the city, or visitors to make a report about concerns, complaints, or questions of discrimination or unequal treatment of individuals within the city of Watertown, to provide support and information to victims and witnesses, and to city officials who may investigate such reports, concerns, complaints or questions. The commission shall develop procedures for accepting and managing complaints, and for protecting the reputation of all parties involved as appropriate and legally required. The commission may provide resources, referrals and support to any person with a complaint of discrimination. Where all parties agree, the commission may arrange for mediation of the incidents.
- (E) Recommend resolutions, policies, or guidelines for adoption by the city manager, city council, or other departments, boards, and committees within the city.
- (F) Recommend programs, initiatives, and training to promote diversity, inclusion, awareness, and anti-discrimination in the city.
- (G) Promote understanding of the diverse cultures within the city and surrounding areas through education, organization of community events,

conferences, public speaking programs, educational panels, celebrations and other community actions.

(H) Serve as a resource to the city manager and city council with respect to issues that challenge any individual's or group's enjoyment of their basic human rights in the city.

(I) Collaborate with representatives from historically disadvantaged groups to better understand barriers to inclusion, diversity, and equity in the community; develop strategies for ending inequities and eliminating these barriers; and promote mutual understanding and respect for differences.

(J) Annually, and more often if requested or needed, provide a written report to the city manager and city council on the commission's activities and hold a public forum to review and discuss the annual report. The commission may also prepare written or oral reports on racial, religious, ethnic, gender, disability, age, or any marginalized group, and civic initiatives or relationships to cultivate and encourage an atmosphere of mutual understanding and harmonious intergroup relationships in the city, at its own initiative or upon request by city entities, businesses, or residents.

(K) Collaborate with human rights entities in other municipalities to share resources, conduct joint meetings, share best practices, and make joint statements and recommendations as appropriate on issues concerning the communities in the region.

(L) Work with the city's community engagement officer and Administration to encourage attendance at panels, meetings, conferences, celebrations or other educational or community events held by municipal or regional human rights committees, private or public corporations, organizations, schools and universities.

§__-.06 Staffing and Funding.

The Human Rights Commission will recommend staff support and financial resources as needed in its annual report and/or Action Plan in order to support the commission's administrative and programmatic activities.