

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE HUMAN RELATIONS COUNCIL
VALPARAISO, INDIANA
July 22, 2025**

The Human Relations Council of the City of Valparaiso, Indiana, met on July 22, 2025 at 6:30 p.m. in at Hilltop Kitchen. Alison Quackenbush called the meeting to order. Debi Sibray took roll call. Present were Elisabeth Cohon, Debi Sibray, Mark Fesenmyer, Patrick Lyp, Mike Hendren, and Jack Tipold. Andrew McIntyre (non-voting member) was also present. Carolyn Rodea and David Muniz were absent. A quorum was established with seven out of nine present.

Acceptance of May 5, 2025 Minutes

MOTION: Mark Fesenmyer moved to approve minutes from the May 5, 2025 meeting. Patrick Lyp seconded the motion and so approved with a unanimous yes vote.

President Comments

Alison Quackenbush – Today she met with an immigrant from India. She was surprised when she was told the person did not expect her needs to be met when she came here. She came for the opportunity.

Alison asked that special recognition be given to Sam Camp. Sam was Patrick Lyp's assistant while he was City Attorney. She is an "unsung hero". Patrick had a great "right hand person" helping him.

There is a new State statute that terms have to be posted with Board member's names. On the new letterhead the terms are listed. There has been some confusion. Some of the members are filling the remainder of a term for members who have resigned. She expressed her gratitude and thanks for Matty Whaling. Patrick Lyp will fill the rest of his term. Bianca Villarruel has moved to Chesterton. Her term will be filled by Carolyn Rodes. By the end of the year three people will be needed to fill spots where people have been termed out.

Cultural Grant Program and Ordinance No. 8, 2025

Mayor Costas – The City Council wants this Council to be their group. His philosophy is to focus on empowering rather than micromanaging. The existing AHRC's collective voice flows through the Chairman to him. The City Council has been putting pressure on the AHRC to do things. He had thought grants were better than events. Communication is difficult working on cultural grants. All people celebrate different things. He decided it would be difficult to use tax money to fund events. The function of the AHRC has been good from his standpoint. He would like to see the AHRC work on what can be done to be ahead of issues. This group has access to the Mayor's office. He is not sure what the City Council will do with the HRC. His job is different than the City Council. They can form any committee they want. He does not want an appointment on the new committee. It is a City Council committee and not a Mayor's committee.

Mark Fesenmyer – He feels it was disingenuous of the Mayor to not go ahead with the grants. That money was set up a long time ago. He asked what was offensive to the Mayor.

Mayor Costas – All people think different and that is why he did not feel taxpayer money should be used.

Mark Fesenmyer - The LGBTQ community was offended by the Mayor's decision.

Mayor Costas – His job is to provide core City services.

Mark Fesenmyer – The last two girls to speak at the last City Council meeting stated they were afraid.

Mayor Costas – He does not know what to say to that.

Alison Quackenbush – She has met with people and they are not willing to help with the AHRC or other suggestions. The LGBTQ community is a growing community.

Mayor Costas – He needs to know what their needs are. His job is to provide core services so all are safe and can live peacefully.

Elisabeth Cohon – She has asked what is needed and she cannot get answers. She could not get the two women who made public comment to speak with her.

Alison Quackenbush – Education on diversity can create an economic development opportunity. She met with past leaders of the HRC to see what they told her the HRC is supposed to do. Their advice was to not shop for problems.

Mayor Costas – He suggested have a leader of an organization come to the meeting. The HRC can ask what the City can do for them.

Debi Sibray – Was there one particular application that caused him to make the decision to not award cultural grants?

Mayor Costas – Just a decision taxpayer dollars should not be involved.

Patrick Lyp – The difference is active support versus financial commitment. He hopes all three can find money and that they will come to the HRC with their events or programs. The difference was the money component of the program. Any of the three groups can talk to the HRC.

Alison Quackenbush – She would like to see this committee support the various programs and events. There is nothing more powerful than education.

Mayor Costas – He wants a City where everyone feels respected and is getting a high level of service. If that is delivered and the service is cost effective, that is success. He needs to stay focused on the services. The issues of the HRC are complex.

Hilltop Mission Kitchen – Alicia Harden, Director

Alison Quackenbush – She introduced Alicia Harden. Jennifer Wright provided background on Alicia. She is a 20-year veteran teacher. She has been with Hilltop for nine years. Alicia runs the food program. She is as dedicated as they come.

Alicia Harden – The kitchen is open one day a week. It is run by volunteer help. Typically, they serve 75-100 people. The food pantry is open on Thursdays.

Debi Sibray – The VCS partner with Hilltop. They provide meals for students to take home with them.

Alison Quackenbush – Food insecurity is a big issue in this community.

Alicia Harden – To get food from the food pantry the person must show they are a Valparaiso resident. They can come in once a month and receive food.

Mayor Costas – The HRC might want to look at the homeless issue.

Alison Quackenbush – Hilltop is celebrating their 30th Birthday with a gala. More information will be available about that.

Mayor Costas – The old health clinic currently houses 10-12 ladies that would otherwise be homeless. The health clinic was started by Walt and Lois Reiner.

AHRC Position on Social Media

Alison Quackenbush – City Councilmembers have been discussing affordable housing. They were on social media. Then there was a shooting in town and that took over. She would like to know what the Council's response is to offensive social media.

Patrick Lyp – No matter what a person does there will be a response. This group is not a social media group. They advise the Mayor.

Mark Fesenmyer – He agrees. If someone wants a response, tell them to ask the Mayor.

Debi Sibray – That is what makes this group different.

Mayor Costas – He does not post at all. He believes people should listen and not talk. If someone needs to post they should be positive.

Elisabeth Cohon – If posting, it should be about the community. Leadership posting adds to the climate of where we are.

Mayor Costas - His advice to leaders is to keep it to themselves so it does not affect the community they are representing,

Elisabeth Cohon – How can two committees come together if the leaders are posting negatively.

Ordinance No. 8, 2025

Alison Quackenbush – Tomorrow she has a meeting with Councilmembers Hunt and Kapitan. This is the first time they have agreed to meet. Other HRC members will join her.

Mark Fesenmyer - The Mayor has his committee to advise him. The two groups should not necessarily come together. If the City Council wants their own committee that is ok.

Mayor Costas – He agrees. His job is different from theirs. This group's voice is heard. It makes him a better Mayor. Having conversations is good.

Debi Sibray – The proposed ordinance sounds like the Council wants just their committee.

Mark Fesenmyer – Does Ordinance No. 8 negate the previous ordinance that created the HRC.

Patrick Lyp – Yes. It gets rid of the current HRC.

Jack Tipold – Can they still talk to the Mayor?

Patrick Lyp – Yes.

Mayor Costas – Their voice is amplified by coming to him. The Council can do their committee but this existing group functions for him.

Alison Quackenbush – She asked what the response was when he asked to have his appointments removed from the proposed ordinance.

Mayor Costas – It was not a clear response.

Debi Sibray – She finds the Council's actions to be offensive. They have their opinions but they have never come to this HRC meeting.

Elisabeth Cohon – And they try to throw it all back on the AHRC.

Investigational and Reconciliation Committee

Alison Quackenbush – Fifteen years ago the AHRC became a formal group. An offshoot is the IRC. This group investigates and tries to get to reconciliation.

Patrick Lyp – This group began under Governor Pence. In Valparaiso they had community meetings and passed the Human Rights Ordinance. Part of that was the IRC. The goal was to help people who felt aggrieved. Since its formation in 2016 no complaints have gotten to the IRC level. If a person were to come to him with a complaint that had merit, he would probably advise them to hire an attorney. If they go through the City all the person will get is public acknowledgement of the problem and a fine. Since 2016 there have been three complaints: 1 – Was actually for Portage; 2 – Was a non-issue; and 3 – had to do with a business and it was resolved.

Jack Tipold – One idea of the IRC was to put QR codes throughout the City so citizens had access. September 11th is their next meeting. Rob Cotton feels the Committee is not being utilized. The Committee decided that they should not create a problem. If there is a problem, the IRC is there for them. There was no leader at the meeting. Rob Cotton took minutes.

Patrick Lyp – He suggested the IRC should meet in the Council Chambers where the meetings can be on video.

Announcements

Debi Sibray – August 1st is Turkeypalooza. The AHRC should invite people to their meetings. Members of the group should be present at events. People will be more receptive if the group goes to them instead of them coming to the group.

Jack Tipold – Just go to the events and listen.

Alison Quackenbush – Is there a group this group can learn from?

Chief McIntyre - The VDP's social worker would be a good person to listen to.

Jack Tipold – He suggested a list be put together listing events and dates and distributed to members.

Alison Quackenbush – Can this group send group emails.

Patrick Lyp- Emails are ok according to the Open Door Law. A majority of the members cannot meet without

proper Notice.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Jim Ferguson – The AHRC should consider going to the Valpo International Center. This month's talk is about Macedonia.

The next meeting is September 23, 2025 at 6:30 in City Hall.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:23 p.m.