

Subject

Presentation of the Human Rights Commission Annual Report

Department

Department of the City Manager - Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Mayor and Council receive the Annual Report of the Rockville Human Rights Commission.

Discussion

The Rockville Human Rights Commission is pleased to present our annual presentation to the Mayor and Council. The HRC annual report includes our achievements in 2024 and our initiatives for 2025 and beyond.

The HRC is an 11-member group of volunteers charged with minimizing the effects of conflict and promoting an appreciation of diversity within the City. To meet these goals, the HRC provides services and educational and cultural programs that promote global thinking, encourage civic awareness, and reflect the rich diversity found in the City. The HRC also advises the Mayor and Council on human rights issues that affects residents and community members.

The HRC held eight out of its 12 monthly meetings in 2024 due to vacancies on the commission, as well as meetings for various subcommittees, task forces, and event planning groups. The HRC accepted five city proclamations and celebrated the city's accomplishment of earning a perfect score from the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index, an annual assessment of cities throughout the U.S. and their commitment to inclusivity and equality for LGBTQ+ people who live and work there. The HRC proudly introduced recommendations for two proclamations that were added to the city's calendar: LGBTQ+ History Month and National Service Dog Month.

In 2025, the HRC supported the planning and execution of two major events. The HRC led the city's planning for the 53rd Rockville MLK Day Celebration, held each January to remember the life and legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The HRC planned an event that included speakers, cultural performances, information booths, and opportunities for community service projects. Although the event was postponed this year due to inclement weather, the HRC supported a gathering of community faith leaders at a later date. This year, the panel uplifted a theme of unity and honored King's commitment to justice, equality, and environmental stewardship.

Since 2017, the HRC has funded, organized, promoted, and operated Rockville Pride,

an annual festival that celebrates Rockville's LGBTQ+ community. The celebration features live performances, information booths, intimate dialogue, participation from local businesses and nonprofits, and children's activities such as crafts, face-painting, airbrush tattooing, and a moon bounce. This year's Pride Celebration will take place on Sunday, June 1, 2025, 2pm–5pm, in Rockville Town Square. We are thrilled to be continuing the partnerships we established in 2024 with CAC Artists in Residence and Montgomery County Public Library who will be featured at the event this summer. We also have a record number of sponsors this year— something critical to the success of the event given the limited funding provided by the city for this event and given that it is the HRC's largest event by far. We encourage the Mayor and Council and all Rockville residents to attend this year's Pride event.

In addition to these two events, the HRC has implemented the Student Ambassador Program (SAP) since 2019. The SAP is an annual leadership opportunity for students (sophomores, juniors, and/or seniors) who live in or attend high school in Rockville to serve as Student Ambassadors for a nine-month term. The SAP goals are to educate participants about human rights and the HRC, provide them opportunities to develop leadership skills as they aid the HRC in planning and executing its programs, establish and maintain an ongoing relationship between the HRC and the youth it serves, and improve the reach and effectiveness of the HRC programs and initiatives. This year, we have 5 active Student Ambassadors. The Student Ambassadors have helped with the efforts of several subcommittees throughout the year, especially the Pride event planning and Gender-Affirming Care subcommittees. This year, the Student Ambassadors are planning and leading their own program scheduled for June 6th at Rockville Memorial Library.

Since 2019, the HRC has also recognized Human Rights Day, December 10th, the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and has celebrated the day by creating online web pages or running social media campaigns to educate about and promote human rights. For example, in 2021, the HRC's student ambassadors created a series of social media slides about Human Rights Day. The HRC continues to take steps towards making the City of Rockville a Human Rights City, which has evolved into the Public Policy subcommittee. The HRC plans to present findings and recommendations to the Mayor and Council regarding the desirability and feasibility of Rockville becoming a Human Rights City, as well as associated initiatives, "Cities of CEDAW (Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women)" and "Child-Friendly Cities."

In 2024, the HRC also launched the Gender-Affirming Healthcare subcommittee to advise the City on efforts to protect practitioners and beneficiaries of gender-affirming care in Rockville. The Subcommittee has worked closely with the City Manager's Office and the City Attorney to draw attention to these concerns. The Commission looks forward to seeing a meaningful response from the City and continuing these efforts under the newly formed Public Policy Subcommittee.

In addition to our own programming, the HRC liaisons with and supports other boards and commissions throughout the City. It also engages in or has engaged in collaborative projects with boards, commissions, of both the City and Montgomery County.

- The Montgomery County Commission on Remembrance and Reconciliation - This year, the HRC continued its collaboration with the Montgomery County Commission on Remembrance and Reconciliation. The HRC liaison to the Commission represented the HRC during the Montgomery County Council's adoption of proclamation recognizing November as Remembrance and Reconciliation Month and led efforts to beautify the commemoration site of a lynching that occurred in Rockville.
- Human Services - This year, the HRC bolstered its collaboration with the Human Services Commission (HSC) by establishing a liaison position and inviting a member of the HSC to present at an HRC meeting. We also provide support to the HSC by reviewing applications to the City's caregiver grant program, amounting to \$750,000 each year.

Similarly, the HRC also participates in community events to connect with Rockville residents, promote HRC initiatives, and recruit volunteers. Some of these events have included National Night Out, Rocktoberfest, and Hometown Holidays. The HRC is also responsive to our community partners and members. Through outreach, we also empower community members to engage civically, including helping Rockville residents and community members to speak at Community Forum.

Through consultation with the CMO and direct feedback to the Mayor and Council, the HRC supports the City's opportunities to promote justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. In 2024, the HRC, advocated for more inclusive and accurate language in City resolutions, provided feedback to the Advisor to City Manager for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion on the drafted equity toolkit, mission, vision, and shared definitions, and provided comments to the Mayor and Council re: the Charter Review Commission Recommendations.

In addition to the programming detailed above, the HRC's current affairs subcommittee monitors media, Mayor and Council meeting agendas, and other sources to identify current affairs pertaining to human rights that would impact Rockville residents. This subcommittee leads the HRC's responses to current affairs, including advocating with/providing resources to victims of hate, advocating directly to the mayor and council, and distributing information re: opportunities to advocate to affected communities.

Looking ahead, the HRC is excited to continue developing meaningful programs to celebrate our city's diversity, promote civic engagement, and advocate for human rights protections. We are excited to dive deeper into Civic Education and Engagement, including continued engagement with the Mayor and Council as well as partnership with other organizations/institutions to provide educational opportunities for community members to better understand not only how local civic institutions operate but also how human rights affects local matters. For example, we are excited to be connecting with the Education Commission to identify opportunities to collaborate on human rights issues affecting students. We are also looking at opportunities for collaboration with other city commissions and committees. The HRC also looks forward to developing more intentional and specific programming on disability rights and disability issues in the Rockville community through our newly formed Disability Justice Subcommittee. Lastly, in partnership with the Mayor and Council and the City Manager's Department, the HRC

looks forward to supporting City initiatives to develop an interfaith conversation that will foster community engagement, invite meaningful conversations, and promote opportunities to connect across differences.

Mayor and Council History

The Mayor and Council have been presented a report by the Rockville Human Rights Commission annually in the interests of informing the Mayor and Council of HRC activities and raising awareness of their role in advising and uplifting human rights in Rockville.

Boards and Commissions Review

On September 24, 2025, the Rockville Human Rights Commission members reviewed and approved the Annual Report.