



Human Rights Commission

The Arlington Human Rights Commission (AHRC) was created by Town Meeting in 1993 to advance issues related to the fair and equal treatment of individuals and to create a mechanism for addressing complaints arising out of these issues. The mission of the AHRC is to work individually and collaboratively with other groups in our community to celebrate the ever-changing tapestry of our Town, and to emphasize, through educational outreach, the danger of intolerance at every level. The Town Manager, School Committee, Select Board, and the Town Moderator have appointing authority for thirteen members of the Commission.

The AHRC met monthly throughout the year. The current co-chairs, Sharon Grossman and Kristen Bauer, were elected in August 2019. In January 2021, new co-chairs will be elected.

During 2020, there was continued discussion within the Town about diversity, racial equity and inclusion. The Black Lives Matter movement encouraged deeper reflection and examination of systemic racism within our Town. Continuing incidents of racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and others demonstrated the continued need for us all to address these issues. The AHRC took many concrete steps to address individual incidents of human rights violations, promote fora for discussion and debate about critical human rights issues in Town, and foster activities to make Arlington a more welcoming and inclusive community.

During 2020, the Communications, Schools and Education, Events, and Outreach Working Groups continued to engage community members to partner with Commissioners, expand the Commission's work and reach, and enable us to develop more programming. Working Groups meet monthly and report back to the full Commission at regular meetings.

Education, Training, and Institution Building

- Drafted a Commissioner role description, adopted a protocol governing police participation in AHRC meetings, and amended Rules and Regulations governing the work of the AHRC to reflect current conditions.
- Trained Commission members on biases with True Story Theatre.
- Held two retreats for AHRC Commissioners to address our governing rules and regulations, community engagement and top goals for the year ahead.

Community Outreach

- Continued to offer a citizen's forum during each monthly meeting to give residents the opportunity to address the Commission on matters relating to equality and

fairness. This year, at least several dozen citizens took advantage of this opportunity. Citizens attended most Commission meetings.

- Continued monthly agenda item to enable Commissioners to discuss issues raised by community members at the previous month's meeting.
- Continued monthly Commissioners' Coffee Chats to enable members of the community to informally meet and share ideas on human rights issues with two Commissioners each month.
- Regularly received information about and participated in Massachusetts Association of Human Rights Commission (MAHRC) meetings.
- Continued cosponsorship of the Town's Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration and began working collaboratively to support its efforts.
- Celebrated Black History Month in February 2020 by sponsoring a series of events including hanging banners along Massachusetts Avenue highlighting Black Massachusetts citizens and a film series, one of which attended by 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment Reenactors.
- Co-Sponsored a series of Community Conversations in 2020 related to racial equity, education, housing, and policing
- Sponsored virtual Black Lives Matter Vigil and Juneteenth Celebration
- Issued statements on the following:
 - Protecting Human Rights During the Covid-19 Pandemic
 - Standing Against Police Brutality and Racial Violence
 - Vandalism of the Black Lives Matter Banner at Arlington High School
 - Social Media Misuse
 - Black Lives Matter Sign Vandalism
 - Ongoing Repression of the Muslim Community in India
 - Back the Blue Rally
 - Upcoming Town Meeting Articles
 - Encouraging voter participation
- Proposed a proclamation in support of Black Lives Matter that included the hanging of a Black Lives Matter banner at Town Hall, which the Select Board adopted
- Hosted a forum on Native Imagery and encouraged celebration of Indigenous People's Day, cosponsored a Native American Heritage Day social media takeover, and drafted a proposed proclamation and warrant article for adoption in 2021.
- Joined the town's effort to encourage businesses to be inclusive and welcoming
- Hosted panel discussions on Covid-19 in Community, Equity and Affordable Housing, and Beyond Banners: From Symbolism to Substance as the keynote for BLM Day.
- Started a regular e-newsletter that reaches over 700 subscribers.
- Posted 180 times on Facebook, with some posts reaching nearly 3000 people.
- Started a Twitter account which currently has 500 followers. We made 110 tweets in 2020, which were seen by approximately 52,000 people.
- Started an Instagram account, that currently has 148 followers, and a YouTube page where all of the recorded events are available for viewing.
- Continued the internship program with Arlington High School that included four AHS students.
- Cooperated with, co-sponsored events with or publicized events with a wide range of community groups and government entities.

- Reached out to the Arlington School Committee to express concerns related to equity and disproportionality of discipline issues within the Arlington Public Schools in hopes of working together.
- Began monthly meetings with a land acknowledgement statement: “We acknowledge that the Town of Arlington is located on the ancestral lands of the Massachusetts Tribe, the tribe of Indigenous peoples from whom the Colony, Province, and Commonwealth have taken their names. We pay our respects to the ancestral bloodline of the Massachusetts Tribe and their descendants who still inhabit historic Massachusetts territories today”.
- Sent a letter to the Arlington School Committee related to the recent superintendent search process.
- Adopted the following tagline, which is now being used by many Town Departments on email and other correspondence: *Arlington values equity, diversity, and inclusion. We are committed to building a community where everyone is heard, respected, and protected*

Incidents and Complaint Response

- Hate incidents continued, with increasing complaints related to BLM signs and protests.
- Collected information regarding hate incidents occurring in Arlington from residents, schools, and the APD, as follows: 48 Cases, 8 of which involved the APS and 29 of which were also referred from or handled by the APD.
- Continued to work closely with the APD and APS to learn of, track and, where necessary, address incidents impacting human and civil rights.
- Continued to work under a Memorandum of Agreement that included the APS, AHRC, and APD that set forward Guidelines for Responding to Hate Incidents in the Arlington Public Schools

AHRC Year and Goals Moving Forward

Our Commission has one new member this year, increasingly reflecting the growing diversity of our town. Our entire Commission is energized to work together with the community to address the challenging human rights issues facing those who live, work, pass through, and visit Arlington.

As we move forward, we are ever mindful of the damage to our community that has yet to be repaired. Regrettably, our town has experienced incidents of hate, intolerance, and inflammatory language stemming from racism, anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant sentiment, homophobia and systemic discrimination. Hateful incidents like these have caused widespread fear. *Arlington can and must do better.*

We recognize that every person in Arlington deserves to be valued, respected, and protected. Thus, even through the Covid-19 pandemic when we needed to pivot to virtual meetings and gatherings, we continue to increase opportunities to be heard through hosting, sponsoring, and partnering with community programs and events to welcome and celebrate diversity and participating in town programs. These include community activities, discussions with police, and outreach to community groups to foster respect, and facilitate training, education and incident reporting with the police, the town and our schools to increase protection for all in Arlington.

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