



**Bismarck Human Relations
Committee Annual Report**



**January 2020 to
December 2020**

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MISSION OF COMMITTEE

The mission of the Bismarck Human Relations Committee is to create an atmosphere of inclusion, equality and accessibility through education and outreach to recognize the value of a diverse community.

GOALS OF COMMITTEE

The Bismarck Human Relations Committee has the following goals and objectives as defined in its strategic plan:

1. To exhibit leadership in the areas of civil and human rights:
 - a. The committee will be comprised of individuals that represent and are knowledgeable of diverse populations.
 - b. The committee members will practice and model actions that exemplify nondiscrimination, acceptance and respect of diversity.
2. To educate the public about civil and human rights:
 - a. The committee will implement a public education plan to identify and address issues.
 - b. The committee will actively plan, sponsor and participate in events that promote and celebrate diversity.
3. To identify issues of principle concern in the area of civil and human rights:
 - a. The committee will provide access for public input.
 - b. The committee will prioritize issues based on input received.
4. To recommend priorities and objectives about issues of community concern to the City Commission:
 - a. The committee will serve as a liaison in issues of civil and human rights between the community and the City Commissioners.
5. To advocate for compliance with federal and state laws regarding civil and human rights, including North Dakota Century Code Chapters 14-02.4 (Human Rights) and 14-02.5 (Housing):
 - a. The committee will provide information about current laws through multiple formats.
 - b. The committee will maintain data regarding civil and human rights issues.

ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEE

Bismarck Ordinance 5208 created the Bismarck Human Relations Committee and received final passage on October 8th, 2002. The committee's purpose is to promote acceptance and respect for diversity through educational programs and activities and to discourage all forms of discrimination including protected class discrimination, ADA violations or other statutory or constitutional violations (Chapter 2-11).

APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEE

The committee consists of nine members who serve without pay. Member appointment is by the President of the Board of City Commissioners and is subject to confirmation by the Board of City Commissioners. Appointees serve three-year terms.

COMMITTEE MEETING TIMES AND LOCATION

The Bismarck Human Relations Committee meets on the third Monday of each month (except on holidays) at 5:15 p.m. in the First Floor Conference Room 221 of the City/County Office Building, North 5th Street in downtown Bismarck. Meetings are open to the public and accept public comment.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND CURRENT TERMS

- Chair - Krista Rausch (term expires Jan. 2022)
- Vice Chair - Shae Helling (term expires Jan. 2023)
- Annette Martel (term expires Jan. 2023)
- Brandi Jude (term expires Jan. 2022)
- Darcy Andahl (term expires Jan. 2021)
- Hannah Vanorny (term expires Jan. 2021)
- Kollie Flomo (term expires Jan. 2022)
- Manisha Sawhney (term expires Jan. 2021)
- Trevor Vannett (term expires Jan. 2023)

PUBLICATIONS AND OTHER INFORMATION

A copy of the Human Relations Committee Ordinance, Strategic Plan, Annual Report, complaint filing forms and other information may be accessed online at www.bismarcknd.gov or by mailing:

Bismarck Human Relations Committee
City of Bismarck
PO Box 5503
221 N 5th Street
Bismarck, ND 58506-5503

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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SPEAKING TO SERVICE CLUBS/COMMITTEES

—Winter/Spring 2020—

As one of its annual goals in 2020, the Human Relations Committee committed itself to making more members of the public aware of the Committee and what it does in the Bismarck community. To that end, committee member Hannah Vanorny gave three talks to different local service groups before the pandemic broke out. She spoke to the Bismarck Optimist Club on January 14th, to a Bismarck Lions group on March 2nd, and to a second Lions group on March 5th. During these talks, Vanorny shared information about the Human Relations Committee, showed pictures of committee activities, took questions, and encouraged suggestions about future plans for the committee. The presentations were received well.



Committee member Hannah Vanorny speaks to the Bismarck Optimist Club at the China Star restaurant

STUDENT LIAISON PROGRAM

—Ongoing 2020-2021—

A second goal for 2020 was to create a student liaison program for Bismarck high school students; the students will be encouraged to attend Human Relations Committee meetings and complete projects benefitting their local communities. Committee member Manisha Sawhney took the lead on this project and developed a proposal to be sent to schools. The project has been tabled until fall 2021 when hopefully in-person school attendance will be more stable. The proposal sent to area high schools will include words such as these:

The Human Relations Committee is seeking to have two student liaisons as part of its committee meetings. Nominated by their high school principals, each student liaison will serve a six-month period.

The student liaisons will be expected to attend the monthly meetings, bring together high school students from the Bismarck area, and formulate/lead activities along with their peers to empower human relations in the community. Students who participate will receive certificates of achievement at the end of their service periods. The purpose is to include and mobilize the next generation of human relations individuals on the most pressing human rights issues of the day, mentor students in leadership skills and, foster confidence and maturity among students, enabling them to become effective voices for change and social justice within their communities.

**student Liaison
Program**

HUMAN RIGHTS ESSAY CONTEST:
4TH-8TH GRADE

—April 2020—

Each year, in order to heighten awareness of human rights among students in the Bismarck community, the Human Relations Committee holds an essay contest for students in the fourth through eighth grades. Students write essays describing people or ideas that foster respect for human rights. In 2020, the first place award was given to fourth grader Asher Nodland for his essay on Leann Bertsch, former head of North Dakota's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The winner is usually honored with a pizza party attended by his/her class, the mayor, and members of the Human Relations Committee. Because of the pandemic, Asher's pizza party has been postponed.

Asher Nodland's essay:

Ms. Leann Bertsch

One late night, Leann Bertsch, head of North Dakota's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, met up with Karianne Jackson, one of her partners for a drink in a hotel bar in Oslo, Norway. They had spent their day touring a top high security prison, Halden, known by Time, as "the world's most humane prison".

Halden is located in a forest of birch and pine trees. This prison is surrounded by but one wall. It has no barbed wire, guard tower nor electric fences. Prisoners stay in private rooms with fancy restrooms and can cook with stainless steel necessities for dining. Guards and inmates adventure freely, eating and whatnot. Violence is rare and both prisoner and guard live together peacefully.

In seeing this, Leann Bertsch decided to change her way of doing things. Let's use the Missouri River Correctional Center as an example. The inmates have their own comfy dorm looking cell instead of the cage-like cell they had previously. They all go by first names. The inmates wander freely throughout the grounds. Guards play baseball against the inmates and have tons of fun. They have better educational services now. They can graduate in prison. I did NOT know that! It has impacted the way of life for their residents.

Coming back from Norway, the prisons are giving more rehabilitation services. Residents now have more freedom like a citizen. They now give more rehabilitation than punishment and I find that better than a punishment for something they did wrong.

Think of it as being a child. Being a child is like living in a prison, but with fewer people. Your parents want to teach you right from wrong. If you were a child right now, would you get the belt every time you do something wrong? No. You would want to be taught not to do it. If you were a prisoner, would you like to get a punishment for every wrong thing you do? No again. You would want to learn the way society reacted so you could be a better citizen when you came out so you wouldn't have to go to jail/prison again.

The way Leann came back and changed how she is doing things must have been a hard decision, but I think what she did was right because how she changed things benefits the prisoners and how they leave the prison system. She should encourage more people to change the way other states and countries run their prisons.

CULTURAL COOKING CLUB

—December 2020 and beyond—

For the past several years, the Human Relations Committee has sponsored a cultural meal for the public in conjunction with the culinary arts program at Legacy High School in Bismarck. Since the meal was not possible this year because of the coronavirus pandemic, the committee came up with a new cultural culinary project as part of the committee's Diversity University series. The Cultural Cooking Club, under the direction of committee members Hannah Vanorny and Manisha Sawhney, launched its first video in December 2020. The idea behind the project is to film different community members making dishes that are special to their respective cultural holidays. As they cook, the participants share information and stories from their cultural backgrounds. Ben Smith, from Dakota Media Access, and Kristine Kostuck, Administrative Technician for the City of Bismarck, are assisting with this project. The videos will be shown on the City's YouTube and Facebook pages, and will air on Dakota Media Access. The committee hopes to shoot four or five videos as part of the Cultural Cooking Club series. The first presenter/cook was Manisha Sawhney, a member of the Human Relations Committee. She cooked butter chicken, a recipe from her Indian background. The link for the video is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IU1MF0tt8CY>



Committee member Manisha Sawhney films her cooking segment for the Cultural Cooking Club, with Kristine Kostuck and Ben Smith assisting



MORE COMMITTEE HAPPENINGS DURING THIS PANDEMIC YEAR

-In January, the Bismarck Human Relations Committee recognized Dr. Robert Roswick with the Humanitarian Award. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee has not been able to present the award to Dr. Roswick. A committee member will deliver the award as soon as it is safe to do so.

-One of the 2020 goals was to have a full nine-member committee. This was accomplished in April with the additions of Annette Martel and Kollie Flomo.

-The committee has been in talks with Bismarck Global Neighbors director Leah Hargrove regarding an Immigrant Advisory Committee, which would assist the city in being more welcoming to new people coming into our community.

-Committee member Brandi Jude has been working to improve racial equity in Bismarck. She and the committee have looked at different strategies around this topic and are considering attending a cultural awareness and sensitivity training early in the new year.