

**Cambridge Human Rights Commission
Thursday, May 7, 2026
Virtual Public Meeting**

Present: Chair Mercedes Evans, and Commissioners Sue Mapel, Stephen Curran, Judith Laguerre, Olinda Marshall, Stefanie Haug, Beverly Sealey, Yasmin Padamsee Forbes, and Sam Myers

City Staff: Executive Director Carolina Almonte, Attorney Investigator Vannessa Carr, and Superintendent Fredrick Cabral.

Members of the Public: Marc Levy

Absent: Commissioner Caroline Palavicino Maggio

1. Call to Order

- Chair Evans called the meeting to order at 6:03pm.

2. Public Comments

- Marc Levy joined the meeting to listen as a member of the public.

3. Welcome, Commissioner Fiqir Worku!

- Commissioners introduced themselves to Fiqir and included a fun fact!
- Commissioner Worku introduced herself and her background.

4. Review and approval of April 2026 Minutes

- The Commission reviewed the minutes from the meeting in April 2026. Commissioner Curran moved to approve the minutes; Commissioner Padamsee Forbes seconded. Commissioner Myers abstained. Commissioner Sealey was absent. Everyone else approved.

5. Staff Reports

- ED Almonte
 - o HRC budget passed.
 - Chair Evans asked if the City will be covering any loss or decrease in HUD funds and if we've been paid for cases already processed? ED Almonte responded that no, the City will not be covering any losses in HUD funds besides AI salary and HRC has some funds left over from prior fiscal years. ED Almonte also states that HUD has not paid HRC for case processes and owes HRC around 40K. ED Almonte stated that the City has on-going litigation involving HUD and remains committed to enforcing our

ordinance, as written.

- o Hiring update: Staff has selected a Program Manager candidate and will make an offer soon.
 - o Employee of the Year Award – Congratulations, Carolina!
- Al Carr
 - o **Outreach/Programming**
 - Fair Housing Month Blog Posts
 - Tabling at CLC
 - Interview with high school students at Community Charter in Kendall Square
 - HousedIn Virtual Drop-in Sessions
 - Upcoming: Community Celebration and Fair Housing Resource Fair – this Saturday!
 - o **Case Updates**
 - 17 New Intakes; 4 new cases
 - Housing/Disability Discrimination: C alleges R's unfairly denied her reasonable accommodation request for a designated handicap accessible parking spot
 - Housing/Disability Discrimination: HUD referred complaint - C alleges that R's unreasonably denied his reasonable accommodation request to transfer units due to impact of rodent droppings on his disability.
 - Housing/Race/National Origin Discrimination: C, an American woman, alleges that R's unfairly denied her husband's, an African man, rental application after requiring he submit a different rental application and background check than she did.
 - Housing/Disability Discrimination: C alleges R's ignored her previously approved reasonable accommodation for additional time to review and submit paperwork related to her lease, and refused to respond to renewed reasonable accommodation requests asking the same.
 - o **Determinations**
 - Lack of Probable Cause Determination in housing discrimination case for Sexual Harassment: C alleged that a maintenance staff member was following her around the subject property and making inappropriate comments. Evidence did not support the fact that C was targeted by a staff member or that the staff member was present during the time some allegations were made. C

was unable to show that the interactions with the staff member rose to the level of severe and pervasive conduct.

o **Mediation Successes**

- Housing/Race Discrimination: C alleged that R's were charging her more in rent than her neighbors for similar units because she is a Black woman. Respondents agreed to release C from her lease without penalty and not to report any negative rental history indicators for C.

6. Old Business

- Fair Housing Month Partnership
 - o Fair Housing Resource Fair and Welcome Event this Saturday - 28 organizations will be present!
 - o Final volunteer chart will be sent out soon. Please let ED Almonte know if you're not able to make it.
- Sexual Orientation definition: added pansexual and omnisexual; ED Almonte hasn't heard back from the law department yet. The Commission will wait to discuss the definition until we hear back from law department.
 - o Commissioner Curran explained the new terms, pansexual and omnisexual.
 - o Chair Evans asked when do terms/ordinances usually get updated? ED Almonte explained that the ordinances are not regularly updated.
- Guidance documents
 - o Questions/Comments from Commissioner Padamsee Forbes:
 - In the second bullet of the staff responsibility section relating to the role of the chief, would we be able to have regular annual updates with chief on EID agenda?
 - ED Almonte stated that she can share the CHRC smart goals with Commissioners.
 - If staff are supposed to advise on realistic operations that align with department priorities, Commissioners should have those expectations shared with them in advance
 - How do Commissioners provide recommendations to City leadership
 - ED Almonte stated that Commissioner should communicate recommendations to her and she will share them with City leadership.
 - In the onboarding and training section, can HRC staff

inform Commissioners if their training is incomplete?

- ED Almonte stated that staff can update Commissioners on their training requirements, i.e., open meeting law training, conflicts of interest training, HRC determination and settlement training, and mediation training.
- In “Tools to Support” section, we should add “speakers” as an option.
- In the Review and Scheduling section of the Guest Speakers Policy, why can the Commission only extend an invite once? What is the difference between Community voices presentations and guest speakers? Guest speakers are subject to more rules than community voices. Can Elected officials be invited as speakers or can they only speak during public comment? What does “equal opportunities for elected officials” mean?
 - ED Almonte stated that Commissioner can invite speakers more than once as long as it’s relevant to the work. ED Almonte explained that “community voices” are residents or tenants council or demographics, and she can edit the guidance to apply the same rules to the “guest speakers” and “community voices.”
 - ED Almonte explained that elected officials can speak at meetings, but it must be voted on by Commissioners in advance, except when they are running for election. Lastly, Commissioners don’t have to invite everyone but must be open to diverse opinions/voices in case others want an opportunity to present/speak with the Commission.
- o Questions/Comments from Commissioner Sealey:
 - Commissioner Sealey would like to invite the City Manager to attend a meeting in September/October 2026.
- o Questions/Comments from Commissioner Curran:
 - Commissioner Curran noted that the guidance is not binding and can change after we try it out.
- o Commissioners agreed to continue the discussion at the next meeting and take a vote.

- Commissioner Retreat: tabled, to discuss at the next meeting
- Training: tabled, to discuss at the next meeting

7. New Business

- FHM Blog Posts – flyer featuring all 4 blog posts to be shared with the Commission soon.
- June agenda - Retreat, welcome new employee, finalize guidance, elect new co-chairs

8. Adjournment

- Commissioner Evans moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:32. Commissioner Mapel seconded.