



Thursday, September 3, 2026
Virtual Public Meeting Minutes

Present: Chairs Olinda Marshall and Samuel Myers and Commissioners Stephen Curran, Sue Mapel, Fiqir Worku, Beverly C. Sealy, Yasmin Padamsee Forbes, Judith Laguerre, and Stefanie Haug.

City Staff: Executive Director Carolina Almonte, Attorney Investigator Vannessa Carr, Program Manager Ester Farah

Members of the Public: None

1. Call to Order

- Chair Myers called the meeting to order at 6:04 pm.

2. Public Comment

- No Public Comment

3. Summer Updates – What's one thing you'll miss the most about this past Summer?

- Commissioners expressed enthusiasm about resuming meetings and shared updates from their summers. They noted that they would miss the warm weather and late sunsets most.

4. Welcome our new Co-Chairs, Sam and Olinda!

- Chair Myers said he was excited about the opportunity. He explained that he and Chair Marshall would alternate facilitating the meetings each week.
- Chair Marshall also expressed excitement about the opportunity.
- Commissioner Sealy welcomed both Chairs.

5. Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

- Chair Myers motioned to approve minutes. Commissioner Padamsee Forbes seconded. All approved.

6. Staff Report

- ED Almonte
 - ED Almonte echoed the welcome to the new Chairs and stated that she looked forward to working with them.
 - ED Almonte reminded Commissioners that the department will be moving to the first floor of 689 Massachusetts Avenue because the Equity and Inclusion Department is switching office space with the Human Resources Department. She noted that the Department of Public Works and the IT Department will assist with the move. Due to the move, the department will pause in-person walk-in intakes and would take intakes by phone and online for one week.
 - ED Almonte also reminded Commissioners that the Commission had transitioned to hybrid meetings. To hold a meeting in the office, at least



three commissioners had to confirm their in-person attendance.

- ED Almonte explained that the City was working to modernize the ordinances governing the Equity and Inclusion Department's Commissions. Some ordinances were outdated or inconsistent, with some having been established earlier than others. The goal was to create greater consistency across the ordinances. She noted that the Commissions would have an opportunity to review and suggest edits. The proposed revisions would then be reviewed by the City Council, with final legal review conducted by the Law Department.
- ED Almonte reported that she contacted HUD to ask how the remaining training funds could be used. Under updated guidance, the remaining funds could only be used for HUD-sponsored trainings.
- ED Almonte reported that she had been planning family-preparedness resources in response to recent changes affecting individuals with Temporary Protected Status, while ensuring that the materials could also support anyone preparing for an emergency related to their immigration status.
- ED Almonte reminded Commissioners to attend Danehy Park Day on September 19. ED Almonte opened the floor for questions.
- Commissioner Mapel asked how often individuals came into the office for HRC intakes. ED Almonte and PM Farah explained that intakes were usually conducted by phone or online, with occasional in-person visits.
- Commissioner Myers asked a follow-up question regarding the HUD grant funds, confirming whether the remaining funds could only be used for HUD-specific trainings. ED Almonte confirmed.
- AI Carr
 - Case Updates
 - 23 New Intakes
 - New Cases (7) - Pending
 - Housing
 - Disability (4)
 - Race, Family Status, Source of Income
 - Race, National Origin
 - Employment
 - National Origin
 - ***Commission Initiated Complaint**
 - Mediation Successes
 - Pre-Determination Settlement Agreement (1)
 - Employment: Disability Discrimination



- C alleged that R's unreasonably denied her reasonable accommodation request to stim in the workplace.
- Respondents agreed to allow C to stim using a fidget spinner, review their reasonable accommodation policy and submit their anti-discrimination training to CHRC for review and approval.

NOTE: We have 18 active cases.

- Commissioner Laguerre asked why the other cases were not accepted. Al Carr explained that, for the Commission to have jurisdiction, the incident must have occurred in Cambridge, within the past six months, and involved discrimination based on a protected class.
- Commissioner Haug asked what resources are available when the Commission cannot accept a case. Al Carr explained that the Commission provides legal referrals and connects individuals with other appropriate resources, such as MCAD.
- Commissioner Mapel asked about the Commission-Initiated Complaint and requested updates.
- Al Carr said she had been in touch with the complainant, who had described the adverse effects of the discrimination.
- Opposing counsel indicated that the Commission-initiated nature of the complaint could become a concern or potential issue once the matter reached mediation. Therefore, Al Carr proposed the possibility of having a Commissioner facilitate the mediation.
- Commissioner Curran asked whether the law firm's concern was that a Commission-Initiated Complaint could create a conflict of interest. Al Carr said that appeared to be the concern; however, the Commission's ordinance was silent on the issue. Al Carr will look into the matter.
- Commissioner Padamsee-Forbes said it would be beneficial to reach a resolution and noted that there would likely be more cases like this moving forward.
- Chair Myers raised the possibility of creating an Executive Session, which would allow the Commission to discuss these types of cases in greater detail.
- ED Almonte responded that she would confirm with the Law Department whether an Executive Session was an option for the Human Rights Commission.
- Commissioner Padamsee-Forbes asked whether the Commission could receive more detailed reporting on these matters and whether a recording could be made available. ED Almonte said staff could look into that but emphasized that, while cases were active, no identifying information could be included in reporting.



- PM Farah - Meet your Neighbor Month/ Stories That Stay with Us! Sunday, September 20, at the Cambridge Upper School Auditorium from 11:30am – 3:30pm.
 - The Cambridge Peace Commission, Human Rights Commission, and Commission on Immigrant Rights and Citizenship hosted a community screening of *A Man Called Otto* during Meet Your Neighbor Month. Attendees enjoyed food, connected with fellow residents, and took part in conversation and community-building. A Welcome Wall was available for attendees to write a response to the prompt, “What does being a good neighbor mean to you?”
 - Volunteer Opportunity for Stories that stay with us
 - **Shift 1: Setup and Welcome**
Time: 10:00 AM–12:30PM
Responsibilities included setting up chairs, tables, and food; helping prepare registration materials; greeting guests; distributing materials; and helping attendees get settled before the film screening.
 - **Shift 2: Screening Support and Cleanup**
Time: 12:30 PM–3:00 PM
Responsibilities included welcoming late-arriving guests, directing attendees to seats, being available for attendee needs during the screening, assisting with the closing transition, cleaning up food and materials, and helping break down chairs and tables.
 - Human Rights Commission in Person Gathering
 - What would be ideal for in person gathering? Once a quarter, location, how much notice? Ideal months for gathering?
 - Commissioner Mapel suggested committing to an in-person meeting date during the Commission meeting. The Commission agreed that its November 5, 2026, meeting would be held in person. PM Farah said she would remind commissioners and offer different dinner options.

7. Old Business

- Training Request: Lawyers for Civil Rights
 - ED Almonte still waiting to hear back and would update the Commissioners once more information became available.

8. New Business

- Establishing the Commission’s goals for FY27
 - ED Almonte noted that the partnership grant the Commission usually received was not available due to funding changes. However, there were still several activities the Commission could pursue. She invited



Commissioners to share ideas.

- o Commissioner Padamsee- Forbes suggested partnering with CIRC to offer a “Know Your Rights” program focused on mixed-status families. She also recommended that the Human Rights Commission explore safe reporting options, including more anonymous and third-party reporting mechanisms, using the Commission Initiated Complaint as an example.
- o ED Almonte said she could reach out to MIRA about a “Know Your Rights” program specifically focused on mixed-status families.
- o Commissioner Mapel emphasized the importance of conducting a community needs assessment to better understand and respond to the community’s needs.
- o Commissioner Laguerre asked whether another mediation training could be offered, emphasizing its importance. She suggested providing the training either as a group session or on an individual basis. ED Almonte said she needs to determine whether the training would qualify for use under HUD funding.
- o Commissioner Worku expressed interest in collaborating with CIRC on issues affecting tenants who were forced to break their leases or leave their homes suddenly because of deportation. She suggested exploring what protections, resources, and support might be available in those circumstances. ED Almonte said she would look into data and reporting related to detentions.
- o Chair Marshall suggested an alternative for people who might be afraid to attend an in-person event: using a sign-up process instead of just a live event. Interested individuals could register to receive information about the date and other relevant details.
- o Regarding family preparedness, Commissioner Haug noted that every school had a liaison and hosted school events or meetings. She suggested partnering with school liaisons and attending those events to connect with families and share information.
- o Chair Myers said he would like a clearer understanding of the City’s broader efforts to protect immigrant communities, beyond the work of CIRC. He noted that this information could help the Human Rights Commission hold the City accountable. He also suggested inviting a representative from the City to speak with the Commission in greater depth about available actions and resources.
- o ED Almonte said that CIRC Chairs, along with the Community Engagement Team’s Haitian Community Outreach Worker, could be good starting points for this effort.
- o ED Almonte noted that United Way was able to provide discounted MBTA passes for Temporary Protected Status holders who had lost their status.



- Commissioner Sealy asked whether a City Council representative could attend and HRC meeting. ED Almonte said she would check and noted that she was helping the City launch a Civic Assembly.
- Commissioner Haug asked whether there was a central resource for tracking when other commissions were meeting. ED Almonte agreed that this was a great idea and suggested creating a monthly newsletter.
- ED Almonte also said she could provide periodic updates to the Human Rights Commission as items arose through CIRC.

9. Adjournment

- Chair Myers moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Curran seconded the motion, and all commissioners voted in favor.