

# 2021 BROOKINGS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OVERVIEW

## Mission Statement:

The mission of the Brookings Human Rights Commission (BHRC) is to improve human relations in the Brookings area by fighting discrimination through education and a complaint resolution procedure. The Commission seeks to protect the rights of and prevent and eliminate bias and discrimination against individuals or groups because of their sex, race, color, creed, religion, ancestry, disability, familial status, national origin, age, marital status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or political affiliation, with respect to employment, labor union membership, housing accommodations, property rights, education, public accommodations or public services. The Commission promotes educational activities to make Brookings an inclusive and welcoming community.

## Overview:

Commission members were: Matt Rhodes (Chair; Jan-May), Jason Meusburger (Vice Chair; Jan – June), Nieema Thasing (Chair; elected July), Dianne Nagy (Vice Chair; appointed Aug), Lawrence Novotny (recorder), Meagan Irvine-Miller (city rep), Dan Berg (city rep), Chisimdi Iheme (SDSU student rep), Erinn Thomas (city rep), Erica Moore (city rep), Joel Gindo (city rep; appointed in Aug), Charlie Ward (county rep; appointed July), Marilyn Hildreth (Jan – April), Zahr Najl (Jan – April), Mikaela Neubauer (Brookings Public Library Liaison), Jennifer McLaughlin (Sustainability Committee Liaison), Kas Williams (SDSU Liaison; Jan – July) Alex Wood (SDSU liaison; appointed Nov), Michelle VandeWeerd (Brookings School District Liaison), Marci Gebers (BPD Liaison; Jan – September), Keith Theroux (BPD Liaison), and Marty Stanwick (BCS Liaison).

Budget of \$7000 for operations and Community Common Read.

## Key Projects/Activities:

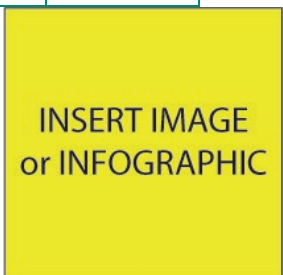
|   | Description   | Status  |
|---|---|---------|
| 1 | <b>COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS</b> – Continued community listening sessions with the goal to hear directly from Brookings community members to better understand local issues, needs, and ideas for change. Conducted 2 community listening sessions with LGBTQ+ community members and people with disabilities. | Ongoing |
| 2 | <b>COMMUNITY EVENTS</b> – Lead community events including the Juneteenth event.   | 100%    |

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|---|---|------|
| 3 | <b>MEI SCORECARD</b> – Received a perfect score of 100 and released a public announcement.  | 100% |
| 4 | <b>HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS</b> – Kas Williams was awarded the 2021 Butler Award for her positive impact on advancing human rights in the Brookings Community including working with the BHRC, providing diversity training, work as the Director of Office of Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, and Access at SDSU, and Director of SDSU’ Multicultural Affairs Center. Emily McColley was awarded the 2021 Youth Award for her work in the design of a multi-lingual information magnet. | 100% |
| 5 | <b>COMMON READ</b> – The selected book was <i>What the Eyes Don’t See</i> by Monda Hanna-Attisha. In coordination with the Sustainability Committee, the BHRC hosted a Panel Discussion on the science and governance of our drinking water.  | 100% |
|   | <b>LEGISLATION</b> – The Chair submitted testimony in opposition to HB 1076 which required transgender individuals to show identity documents which would not match who they are (killed in House). The Chair also submitted testimony on SB 89, SB 90, HB 1217, HB 1247, SB 190, and SB 166.   | 100% |
|   | <b>MLK CONTEST</b> – The BHRC did not host the annual poster contest due to COVID-19 concerns. The annual essay contest was hosted and expanded to include essays on Martin Luther King, Jr or Black History Month. Twenty essays were submitted and four prizes were awarded.  | 100% |
|   | <b>DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT PROCESS</b> – The Commission is working to update the Discrimination Complaint process. Once updated, the Commission will train Commission members on proper procedures for handling a discrimination complaint.  | 25%  |
|   | <b>SIGNS</b> – The Commission created new Diversity signs to help citizens publicly display their commitment to making Brookings a welcoming and inclusive community. Signs were completed in 2022.   | 100% |

**Successes:**

- Brookings had been awarded a perfect MEI score of 100 for the 4<sup>th</sup> year in a row
- The BHRC has positive feedback on the new Diversity Signs. The Sioux Falls HRC inquired into the design and Keloland did a story on the sign in 2022.

- Fellow state Human Rights Commissions have reached out to the BHRC for guidance and mentoring.
- The BHRC established and will continue to build a strong relationship with the Brookings Public Library.



- The BHRC created an orientation process to train new Commission members.

## Challenges:

- The Commission had higher than normal member turnover.
- COVID – 19 hindered the BHRC's ability to host and sponsor annual meetings such as the Griffith Lecture and the Diversity Potluck.
- The BHRC was late to distribute MLK event information to the public due to member changes.
- The political climate within the nation and state created barriers for the BHRC. Specifically, the political climate has caused active community members to take a dormant role in promoting BHRC initiatives.

## Looking Ahead / Goals

### FOCUS ON NEEDS OF THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY

The BHRC will focus on addressing needs of the Hispanic Community by translating HRC material into Spanish, improving the human rights abuses that occur in the ag industry by connecting with ag industry owners that employ large migrant population, and addressing vehicle registration barriers that exist for the migrant population.

### FOCUS ON NEEDS OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

The BHRC will focus on addressing needs of the LGBTQ+ community by identifying and highlighting LGBTQ+ friendly businesses and health providers interested/open to working the LGBTQ+ community.

### SAFE ZONE TRAINING

The BHRC will look to provide Safe Zone Training for businesses, city/county offices, and the public library. The BHRC will look to partner with other organizations, such as SDSU, for funding and organizing efforts.

### ASSESS BHRC EFFECTIVENESS

The BHRC will develop metrics to determine how effective the BHRC is in realizing its mission. Once benchmarks are established, the BHRC will collect data from the Brookings community to measure progress.

### DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS

The BHRC will continue to develop the Discrimination Complaint process by updating procedures, training staff, and promoting the service to the Brookings community.

### LISTENING SESSIONS

The BHRC will continue to host Listening Sessions for minority groups in Brookings. Future community groups include the Native American community.

### OUTREACH

The BHRC looks to develop greater relationships with different organizations and populations by sharing ideas, collaborating on projects, and offering liaison positions to the BHRC. These

organizations include but are not limited to the Brookings Inclusive Community and fellow state Human Rights Commissions.

### MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS AND PRESENCE

The BHRC looks to grow its media effectiveness and presence by using social media to highlight events, group members, how the BHRC is a resource to the Brookings community.