



**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
Regular Meeting
June 20, 2024
City Space, 100 5th Street NE, Charlottesville, VA 22902
6:30 pm**

Click [HERE](#) to access rebroadcasts of past Human Rights Commission meetings on YouTube.

Click [HERE](#) to access an archive of past Human Rights Commission work on the City website.

1. WELCOME

- a. CALL TO ORDER
 - i. Chair, Ernest Chambers called the meeting to order at 6:43 pm
- b. ROLL CALL
 - i. Ernest Chambers
 - ii. Charley Burton
 - iii. Kathryn Laughon
 - iv. Heather Roberson-Gaston
- c. MISSION (recited by all): *Act as a strong advocate to justice and equal opportunity by providing citywide leadership and guidance in the area of civil rights.*

2. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC

- a. PUBLIC COMMENT
 - i. None
- b. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC
 - i. None

3. MINUTES

- a. Meeting minutes approval will occur at next regular meeting due to a lack of quorum

4. BUSINESS MATTERS

- a. Discussion regarding action items
 - i. Chair suggests holding a virtual, public-noticed special meeting for actions items during this meeting
 - 1. Meeting must occur between 6/26/24-6/28/24 due to Director being out of town and Council Ordinance presentation timeline; also must provide notice three days in advance
 - 2. Must get approved Ordinance to HUD before mid-August to allow for acquisition of HUD funding
 - 3. Special meeting may occur after 4:30pm
 - 4. **Todd will confirm with City Attorney that meeting can be held online**
- b. CHAIR UPDATE
 - i. Expresses gratitude for 6/6/24 housing legislative recommendation panel
 - ii. Expresses desire for funding for anti-homelessness infrastructure to be

redirected to initiatives to directly support unhoused populations

c. OHR STAFF REPORT

i. Outreach

1. Filing a discrimination complaint brochure has been translated into six languages; printing is underway
2. Outreach Specialist will send PDFs of brochures to Commissioners
3. Working on a trivia event for Disability Pride month with OHR Investigator-in-Training
4. Dates for large annual festivals are included in the outreach update section in agenda packet
 - a. Let Lily know if able to attend
5. 7/18/24 panel updates
 - a. Confirmation from Katrina Callsen, Creigh Deeds, and Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME)
 - b. In talks with HRCs from Fairfax, Alexandria, and Virginia Beach about them bringing a representative
 - c. Have not heard from Arlington, Richmond, or Prince William

ii. HRC Director

1. Will present Ordinance revisions to Council on 7/15/24, pending approval from the Commission
2. Will soon be advertising for a new OHR Intake Specialist
 - a. Position will be posted 7/1-7/15

iii. OHR Intern

1. Presents research on human rights commissions in the United States
 - a. Slides will be attached to current set of minutes
 - b. Research question: "How does structure institutionally constrain human rights commissions during the process of adapting international conceptions of human rights down to the local level?"
 - c. Commission variation and comparison of different human rights commissions
 - d. Research background and methodology
 - e. Overview of paper
 - f. Human rights commission recommendations
2. Commissioner questions
 - a. Commissioner asks about paper references
 - i. Paper included discussion of philosophical human rights, though it is not the focus of the paper
 - b. Commissioner discusses institutional constraints of HRCs
 - c. Commissioner talks about Commission's experiences in the past with determining what its powers are and navigating burnout
 - d. Commissioner asks about public availability of the paper

- i. There is currently an embargo placed on the paper until May 2025, but Intern can send paper individually if interested
- ii. No current plans to do publication other than the Senior Honors Thesis

5. WORK SESSION

- a. Review of proposed amendments to the Charlottesville Human Rights Ordinance
 - i. Director presents proposed amendments (presentation slides attached in agenda packet)
 - ii. Is amending the Ordinance to meet requirements to enter a Fair Housing Assistance Program (FHAP) workshare with HUD, as well as make general document revisions for clarity and conciseness
 - iii. Commissioner asks about reason for the more self-contained process
 - 1. Complainants may appeal to the HRC; HUD has recommended a more self-contained process that does not include the Deputy City Manager for Social Equity in all decisions
 - iv. The new Ordinance has changed the Commission's role in appeals to be a review of record instead of a public hearing to simplify their role and prevent parties from having a potentially traumatic experience
 - 1. HUD recommended not giving respondents the option to appeal findings of reasonable cause since the Commission can already vote to review a finding of reasonable cause
 - a. Complainants may appeal a finding of no reasonable cause, and the Commission may vote to review a finding of reasonable cause
 - 2. For review of record, there would just be a review of existing documented information (no new evidence, no cross examination, no testimony, etc.)
 - a. The Commission still renders an opinion and recommendations for further action
 - v. Commissioner confirms with Director that under the current Ordinance, there are contradictory statements about complainant confidentiality and public hearing participation processes
 - vi. Commission cannot vote on these revisions tonight because of a lack of quorum, but there will be a special meeting to vote on these revisions
- b. Discussion of questions regarding CPD involvement on 5/4/24
 - i. Commissioners review questions previously compiled (document is in agenda packet)
 - ii. Commissioner would like to request all documents listed
 - iii. Commissioner would like to know about costs associated with CPD involvement (contained in a couple existing questions)
 - iv. Commissioner suggests including just a few questions with document and cost requests, then inviting the Chief to come speak to the Commission
 - v. Chair will meet with OHR staff on 6/21/24 to finalize questions to send to the City
- c. Annual Work Plan check-in
 - i. Need to vote to adopt proposed Ordinance amendments during a

special meeting

1. Will set up a poll to determine time of the special meeting
- ii. No word on VAHR conference
- iii. July
 1. No work session on 7/4/24
 2. Focus Area Legislative Priorities expert panel
 - a. Commissioner asks about doing more publicity to the public to call attention to the meeting
 - b. Outreach Specialist will ask Communications team about doing a TV spot to advertise the panel
- iv. August
 1. Work session 8/1/24: draft legislative recommendations
 2. Regular meeting 8/15/24: (tentative) adopt legislative recommendations
- d. Commission confirms that they will *not* hold work session on 7/4/24 due to holiday
- e. New business
 - i. None

6. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC

- a. PUBLIC COMMENT
 - i. None
- b. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC
 - i. None

7. COMMISSIONER UPDATES

- a. Kathryn
 - i. Certain identities/populations are more impacted by homelessness
 - ii. Director says there was a presentation on homelessness and current housing needs, as well as the need for outreach, at the previous City Council work session
 - iii. Another Commissioner asks about possibility of HRC conveying more information to the public
 1. Outreach Specialist has a newsletter; can include more details from presentation there
 2. Commission can further develop a dialogue with Council
 3. Chair could send a letter to Council elevating voices in the community working in housing

8. NEXT STEPS

- a. Todd
 - i. Confirm that special meeting can be held online with City Attorney
- b. Lily
 - i. Ask Communications about July panel advertisement
 - ii. Send out poll for special meeting
- c. Upcoming meetings:
 - i. TBD: special meeting to vote on Ordinance revisions
 - ii. 7/18/24: regular meeting for legislative panel
 - iii. 8/1/24: work session to draft legislative recommendations
 - iv. 8/15/24: regular meeting to vote on legislative recommendations

9. ADJOURN

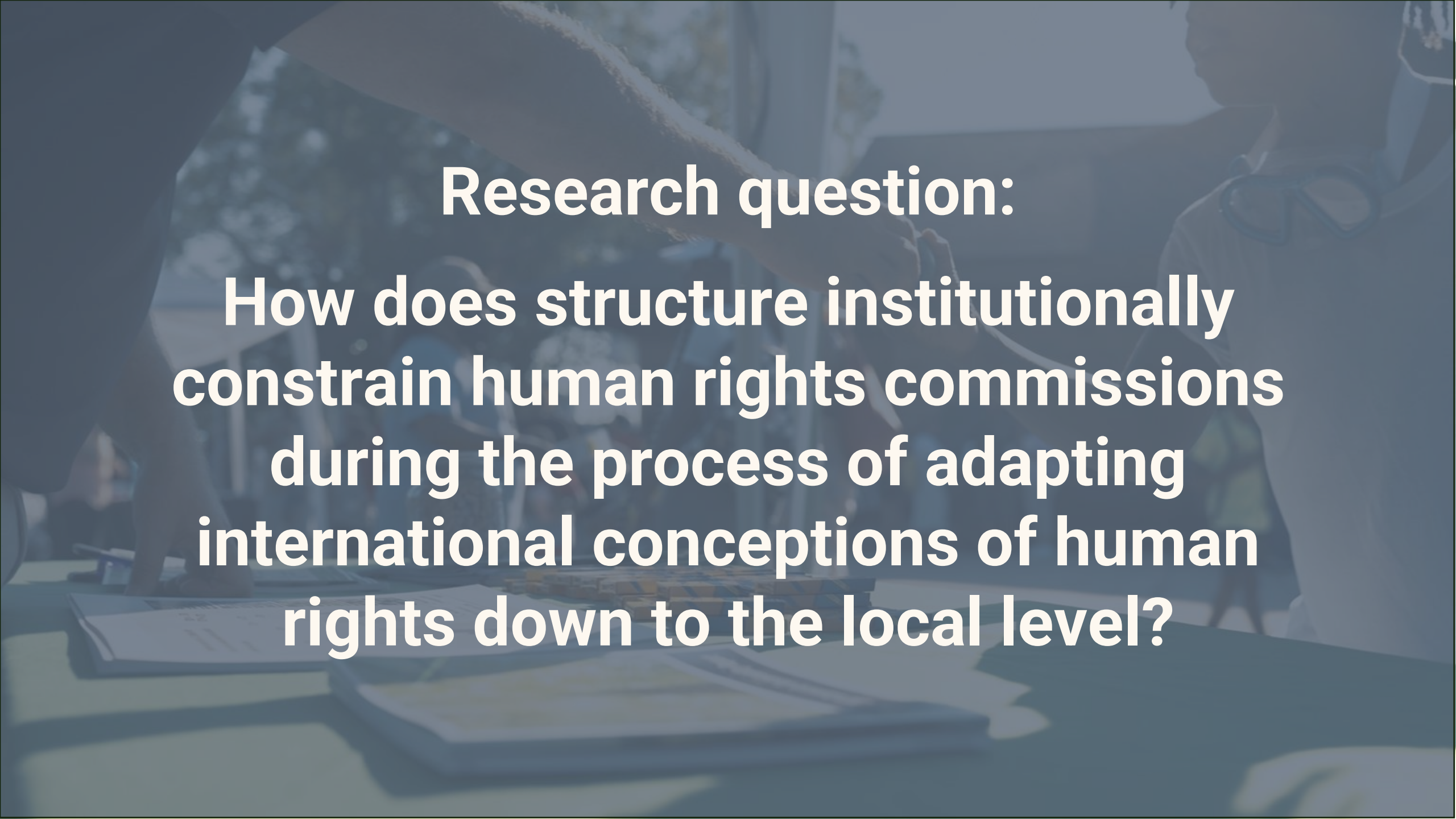
- a. Meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm



"Act as a strong advocate...": An anthropological analysis of HRCs in the United States

**Ginny Helmandollar, OHR Intern
Senior Honors Thesis**

June 20, 2024

The background image is a blurred photograph of a group of people, likely students or professionals, gathered around a table. They appear to be in a collaborative work environment, with papers, a laptop, and other items on the table. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

Research question:

**How does structure institutionally
constrain human rights commissions
during the process of adapting
international conceptions of human
rights down to the local level?**



Overview

- 1. HRC variation*
- 2. Research methodology*
- 3. Paper sections overview*
- 4. Recommendations*
- 5. Conclusion & questions*

Commission Variation

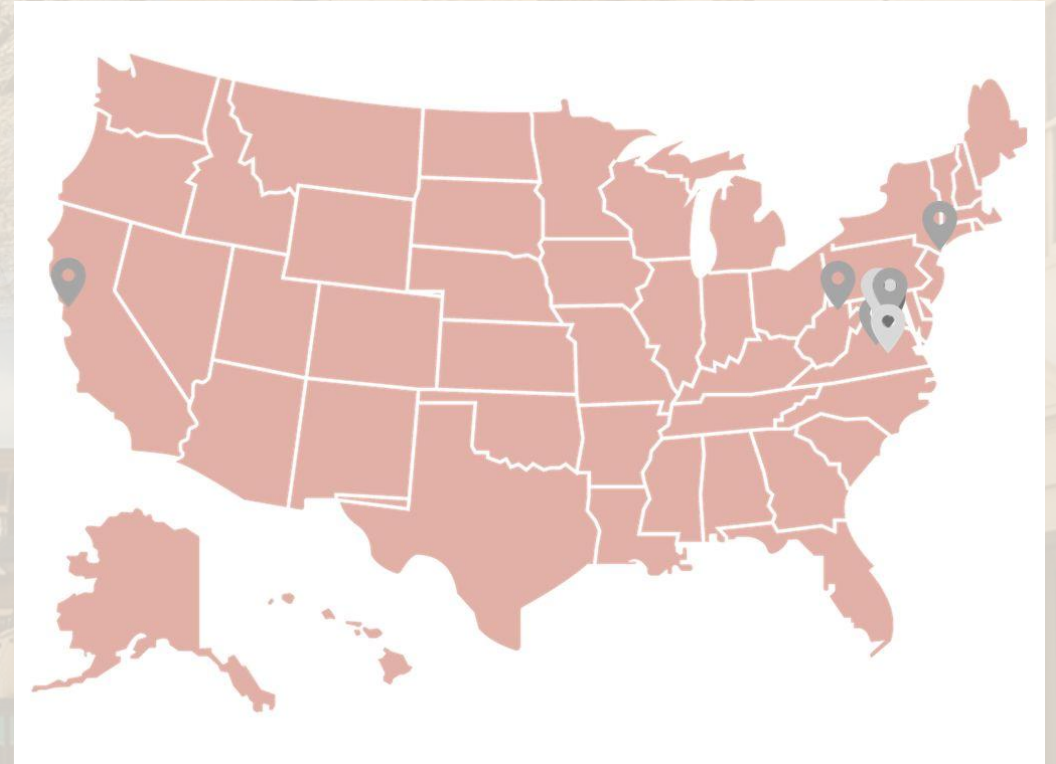
- What is a human rights commission?
 - A board composed of people appointed by their locality's government who are charged with defending human rights in their communities
- Vary in terms of:
 - Labels
 - Size
 - Capacities
 - Strategies



City of San Francisco (pop. 808,000)	Prince William County (pop. 487,000)	City of Charlottesville (pop. 45,000)
Est. 1964	Est. 1991	Est. 2013
11 Commissioners appointed by Mayor	9 Commissioners appointed by Board of Supervisors (no term limits)	9 Commissioners appointed by City Council
~40+ staff members	6 staff members	~4 staff members
Multiple staffed divisions (Civil Rights, non-staffed advisory committees, Office of Racial Equity, etc.)	Single staffed division	Single staffed division
Commissioners oversee staff	Commission maintains most active contact with County government	Staff maintains most active contact with City government

Methodology

- Ethnographic research centered on Charlottesville and personal experience
- Sociolinguistic Zoom interviews with 14 participants from HRCs in VA and beyond
- Participant meeting observations
- Analyses of public documents, including discourse analysis



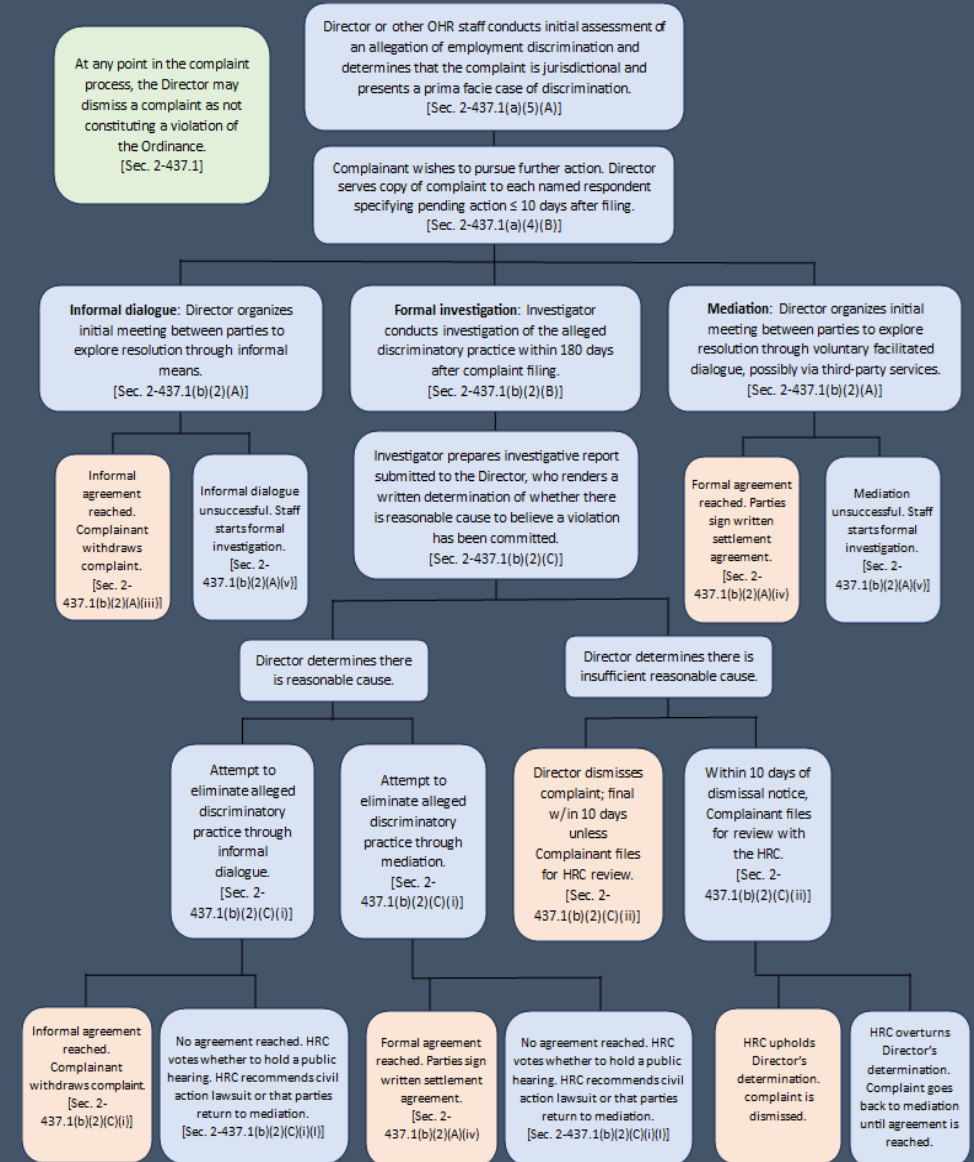
Section 1: The Question of Human Rights

- Human rights internationally
- Human rights locally
- Human rights personally



Section 2: Structure as a Constraint for HRCs

- There is structure ingrained in HRCs and their investigative agencies
- Structure as a constraint
 - Subjecting people to the system
 - Can leave Commissioners unclear about goals
 - Can put pressure on staff to guide



Section 3: The Role of HRCs in Activism

- Burnout in social justice
- Expectations vs. reality
- Grassroots vs. systemic advocacy



1. Adapt to a hybrid form of activism that uses both grassroots and systemic advocacy.

- Know the characteristics/benefits and drawbacks of each
- Leveraging authority while staying grounded
- Ex. Community panels
- Ex. OHR's tracking system

2. Engage young people.

- Younger generations may be interested in different forms of advocacy
- Younger people could have more time to commit
- Prepares young people for careers in human rights
- Ex. UVA student program (Resolution A18-2)
- Ex. PWHRC's Student Leadership Council

3. Be mindful of the needs and size of a community.

- Trying to take on more than would be realistic can result in burnout
- Seek creative solutions despite systemic restraints
- Ex. Some HRCs focus on community outreach over investigations
- Ex. Current Ordinance revisions

4. Ensure that leaders are passionate, committed, and empathetic.

- Elect leaders who are willing to go above and beyond and seek growth
- Many OHR/HRC leaders I talked to highlighted the importance of commitment
- Ex. VAHR

5. Build networks within and across HRCs and their related agencies.

- Make efforts to know each other's working styles and find methods that work best
- Look into other strategies that work for other localities (especially ones with similar sizes/systems)
- Ex. Maintaining relationships with other Commissions/Commissioners
- Ex. VAHR

In Conclusion...

- This advocacy comes with its challenges, but luckily, there are people willing to do the work!
- This research attempts to answer complicated questions, but it also brings up countless more
- Real-life applications and opportunity for real-world change

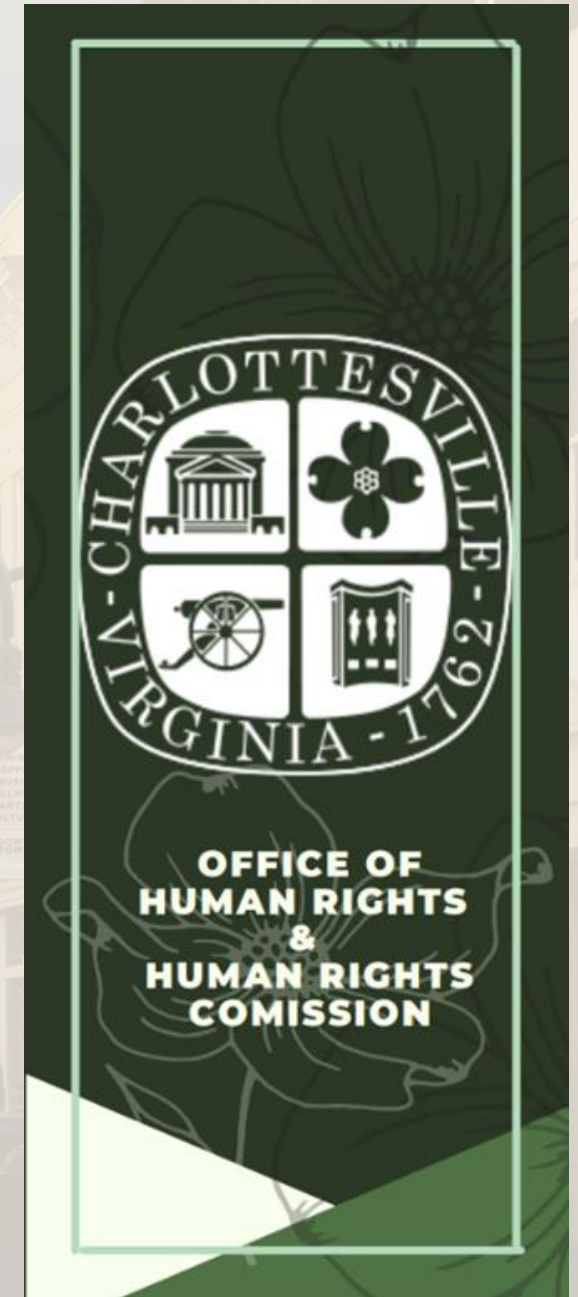


Image References

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Presentation template and other images provided courtesy of the City of Charlottesville.

Thank you!

Questions?

