

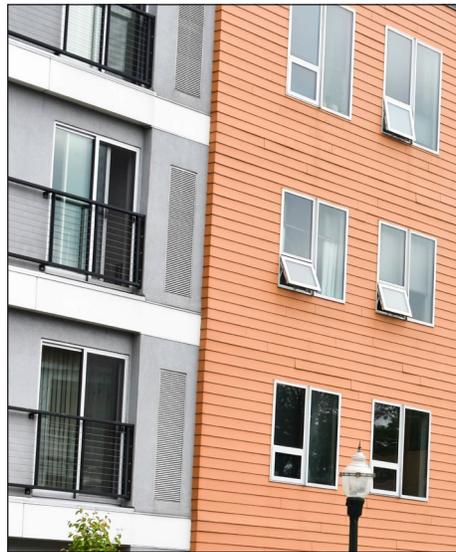
Teams Collaborate, Residents Benefit

by Donna Collingwood

“We (Department of Civil Rights) were really excited when a work sharing agreement with Building Inspection was reached. This was a huge win for residents,” according to Byron Bishop, Equal Opportunities Division (EOD) Manager.

Neighborhood Resource Teams (NRTs) and the Equal Opportunities Commission heard from residents for years about problems with housing including: lack of affordable housing, unsafe and unsanitary conditions, and displacement. “For too long residents had to deal with Building Inspection, Civil Rights, and the Attorneys Office. The Neighborhood Resource Teams were able to coordinate efforts between Building Inspection and Civil Rights, streamlining the process for residents,” said Kristy Kumar, Equity and Social Justice Division Manager.

People who live in rental property in Madison are entitled to safe, well-kept housing. When there are problems that can’t be resolved between tenant and property owner, tenants have the option to file a complaint with Building Inspection (BI). A building inspector will inspect the apartment for violations. If they find any, the apartment owner will get an official notice to bring those violations up to code.



Process wasn’t always working

Sometimes the process worked as it should. Repairs were made, situations improved.

But that wasn’t always the outcome. In worst-case scenarios, residents could lose housing. Property owners can’t legally terminate a lease solely because the tenant notified BI of unsafe or unsanitary housing conditions. That is considered retaliation and is not legal, but it does happen.

Other types of retaliation may include raising the rent, decreasing the services to the tenant, filing an eviction, or threatening to do any of these things.

Save the Dates

Juneteenth Madison

June 17, Penn Park

Madison Disability Summit

July 27-28, 2023 virtual

Disability Pride Festival

July 29, 2023 Warner Park

Parks Alive Dates

June 20 - August 17

Work-sharing agreement created

In April of 2022, the Department of Civil Rights (DCR) and BI created a work sharing agreement that allowed BI to use DCR’s investigative process.

“Once DCR started doing the investigations, a flaw in the law became apparent,” according to Alyssa Riphon, an Investigator with DCR. If there was a finding of retaliation, the Building Inspection Ordinance allowed for a fine of up to \$900 per action. The fine was payable to the City, so did nothing to alleviate the tenant’s situation. “A \$900 fine was not much of a deterrent in itself, it could be cheaper to pay

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Welcome Community Connectors

Community Connectors Strengthen Ties Within Their Communities

The City now has a full team of Community Connectors, staff working specifically to bridge language access issues with the most widely spoken languages in Madison, after English.



Ze Yang, Hmong Community Connector, joins Holly Chen, Chinese Community Connector and Enoch Melgarejo, Spanish Community Connector, within the Equity and Social Justice Division of DCR. Ze joined the team in May, Holly and Enoch have been in their roles since February, 2023.

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June is LGBTQIA+ Pride Month

Madison's First Disability Summit!

by Rebecca Hoyt

Join us virtually July 27-28, 2023 from 5:00-8:00 p.m. for Madison's first Disability Summit: A Community-Led Movement for Disability Justice. The summit is a platform for visioning and developing a city-wide agenda that will direct the work of the Department of Civil Rights – Division of Equity and Social Justice, Disability Rights and Services Program, and ensure all City programs include the voices and needs of the disability community. Our objective is to:

1. Identify the priorities of our community,
2. Develop decision-making principles for the City that ensure people with disabilities have a seat at the table, and
3. Explore ways to better connect diverse Disabled residents with City staff, policy makers, and each other.



July is Disability Pride Month

This information will help us to develop an agenda and access plan for the City of Madison. The plan will guide City processes and inform our work in the immediate future and in the coming years.

City agencies and staff are encouraged to participate. Ways to get involved:

1. Host a breakout room.
Breakout rooms will center language and identity and topics—Live, Learn, Play, Work, Travel, and Thrive. If you are interested in hosting a breakout room, please contact RHoyt@cityofmadison.com
2. Host a table at the annual Disability Pride Madison Festival—www.disabilitypridemadison.org/festival-2023
3. Volunteer—<https://support.google.com/drive/answer/6283888>
4. Take the stage—If you are or an organization you work with is interested in performing at the Festival, email disabilitypridemadison@gmail.com. Priority will given to LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and Disabled artists and performers.



New Metro Routes Start June 11, 2011

www.cityofmadison.com/metro/routes-schedules/transit-network-redesign ■■

Mark your calendar. Registration coming soon. ■■

NEWS & VIEWS

Thanks for reading! We hope you enjoyed this content and we want to hear your feedback for future issues.

We'd like to hear from you regarding racial equity and social justice in your work or your department.

Contact newsletter editor Donna Collingwood at dcollingwood@cityofmadison.com



Racial Equity & Social Justice Initiative

RESJI Equity in the Loop

Equity in the Loop (formerly Core Team) is a space for everyone who has any connection to the initiative to meet and connect.

The next Equity in the Loop Meeting is September, 2023. Contact RESJI@cityofmadison.com for more information. Hope to see you there.

Join us!

May Day, May 1

May Day commemorates the historic struggles and gains made by workers and the labour movement, observed in many countries on May 1.

In 1889 an international federation of socialist groups and trade unions designated May 1 as a day in support of workers, in commemoration of the Haymarket Riot in Chicago (1886). ■■

the fine than to make repairs on the property,” according to Alyssa.

Equal Opportunities Ordinance amended

In October of 2022, the Common Council passed an amendment to the Equal Opportunities Ordinance that created a companion protection in discrimination laws—the building code complainant protected class. It contains much of the same language as the BI ordinance, but it makes retaliation for reporting unsafe or unsanitary housing conditions unlawful discrimination, **so the tenant can go through a hearing and have damages awarded directly to them. Those damages could include moving expenses, use of a vacant unit, or other remedies.**

“This idea (for the amendment) came from the community listening sessions held by the Equal Opportunities Commission,” said Byron. “Conversations stalled but regained interest during Covid. When communication on this resumed, there was a large collaborative effort of many groups within the City including the Alders in 2022 that made the Housing Retaliation provision possible.”

The EOD staff have seen an increase in cases since the work sharing agreement. Seventeen complaints came through the EOD process last year, and four so far this year.

The opportunity to mediate

Mediation was added in April 2022 as part of the work sharing agreement. All complainants are offered mediation. It is voluntary and either party can choose not to

mediate. If that choice is made, the case proceeds to investigation. Of those parties who choose to mediate, the majority will come to agreement, according to Rebecca Below, Paralegal Mediator with the Department of Civil Rights.

All cases are initially sent to Rebecca for mediation. Rebecca has been assigned 19 mediations since the beginning of the work sharing agreement with BI. At mediation, both parties have the opportunity to share their perspectives. At the end of the mediation they come back together either to review the agreement or discuss next steps in the process.

The mediator does not have the authority to make a decision on whether discrimination or retaliation occurred in the case. Discussions that happen at mediation are confidential and do not become a part of the case record.

The process is not only helping community members. Following a housing complaint mediation, a landlord expressed gratitude for the resources provided and the opportunity to successfully mediate the complaint. DCR is a resource for everyone.

Getting the word out

The EOD team has done outreach in the form of trainings, which has contributed to an increase in cases. It is important for community members to understand their rights. “Residents have 365 days from the time of the adverse action to file with us,” According to Julie Austin, who does initial work on the cases. Timing is critical. ■■

Community Connectors (continued)

Ze is a mother of six children, an educator, and a small business owner. She earned a B.S. in Education from Edgewood College and has built her career in a variety of roles and atmospheres mostly related to serving the underprivileged and underrepresented communities. She has over 15 years of experience providing interpreting/translating services in a variety of settings including school districts and public health. She often finds herself serving as a gatekeeper, mentor, advisor, cultural bridge, and a community leader. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, gardening, cooking, and reading. She was born in Laos and came to the United States as a refugee with her family when she was seven. In search of a better life, her family moved from California to Madison, Wisconsin in 1997.



Holly was born in China and moved to Madison with her family when she was eight. She holds a B.A. from UW-Whitewater. She joined the Department of Civil Rights in early March 2020 and was responsible for the majority of the Chinese translations for the City of Madison. Holly finds it very fulfilling to help those with language barriers to communicate clearly. She is excited to pivot into the Bilingual Community Connector role, and to be able to continue to serve her communities. In her spare time, she is usually running around town playing Ultimate Frisbee, searching for the next best foodie spot, or vegging around the house with her dog.



Enoch is a native of Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico and a graduate of Universidad Veracruzana. He is a passionate advocate for adult basic education and has developed expertise in working with diverse and underrepresented adult learners in various academic settings. He explores Mexican culture, art, and gastronomy with his fiancée at Pueblitos Mágicos in Mexico. He is also a film lover, a chess player, and a foodie who loves pets.

Ze, Holly, and Enoch are part of the City's Language Access Program, www.cityofmadison.com/employeeenet/civil-rights/language-access-program. Community Connectors work to elevate underrepresented voices, using culturally-relevant and affirming communication practices. *The majority of interpretation and translation services for all languages will continue to be provided through lap@cityofmadison.com.*

Neighborhood Resource Teams



Parks Alive! A Great First Year, Gearing up for 2023

Neighborhood Resource Teams' (NRTs) mission is to promote racial equity and improve the quality of life for Madison residents by understanding and elevating the needs, issues, and priorities of people living in areas with NRTs. This manifests in many ways. Most recently the NRTs have helped shape and give rise to the Parks Alive effort that is taking place in parks throughout areas with NRTs.

Parks Alive had a great first year, we were in eight City parks and saw hundreds of residents, painted hundreds of faces, and mingled with folks all over the City. We will continue to support Parks Alive but it will be shaped and will grow with guidance from community members.



www.cityofmadison.com/parks/events/parksAlive.cfm