

# **City Council Agenda Item Memo**

**From:** Brookings Human Rights Commission  
Casey Bell, Staff Liaison

**Council Meeting:** July 8, 2025 / July 22, 2025

**Subject:** Ordinance 25-022: Brookings Human Rights Commission

**Presenter:** Casey Bell, Staff Liaison

## **Summary and Recommended Action:**

The Brookings Human Rights Commission (BHRC) recommends approving the revised City Code Sections 2-154 through 2-167, which update the Commission's process for managing and addressing discrimination complaints. Staff recommends approval.

## **Item Details:**

The Brookings Human Rights Commission (BHRC) was granted the authority to investigate complaints of discrimination approximately 10 years ago, expanding its original role. However, it has become clear that the current ordinance is difficult to apply and sustain. The Commission lacks the necessary infrastructure, such as time, funding, formal training, and confidentiality safeguards, to properly investigate, arbitrate, or enforce complaints. These limitations have raised significant concerns regarding liability, due process, and the responsible handling of sensitive matters.

In response to these challenges, the BHRC formed a working group to reimagine a more practical and impactful role for the Commission in supporting community members who believe they have experienced discrimination. Over the course of nearly three years, this group conducted extensive research, including conversations with peer communities of similar size, to explore how other municipalities address these important issues.

The revised ordinance proposes to remove the BHRC's authority to investigate, arbitrate, or enforce complaints of discrimination. Instead, the Commission will serve as a knowledgeable and accessible resource for individuals seeking help. The BHRC will guide residents to the appropriate agencies, organizations, or legal channels that are better equipped to handle formal discrimination concerns.

This shift will allow the BHRC to focus on what it can do best, providing education, outreach, and support to the community. By serving as a connector rather than an enforcer, the Commission will be better positioned to assist individuals in finding meaningful resolution while continuing to advance human rights in Brookings.

The proposed ordinance revision received unanimous support from the Brookings Human Rights Commission.

**Legal Consideration:**

City Attorney has reviewed the revised Ordinance.

**Strategic Plan Consideration:**

- Fiscal Responsibility – The City of Brookings will responsibly manage resources through transparency, efficiency, equity, and exceptional customer service.
- Safe, Inclusive, Connected Community – The City of Brookings will create an environment for inclusive programs, gathering places, and events where the community can safely live, work and come together to participate in opportunities for learning, recreation and enjoyment.

**Financial Consideration:**

None

**Supporting Documentation:**

Ordinance - clean

Ordinance - marked