



Equal Opportunities 2026 Annual Retreat

City of Madison Department of Civil Rights
Equal Opportunities Division

Agenda Overview

- Welcome
- Introductions & Icebreaker (Commissioner Klebba)
- State of the DCR (Director Norm Davis)
- Commissioner Role & Responsibilities training
 - Public records, open Meetings, Robert's Rules (City Attorney Haas)
 - EOD overview & Commissioner role overview (EOD Manager Matson)
 - Appeals (Hearing Examiner Ford Blackwell)
- 2026-2027 Work Plan (EOD Staff)

Human-Centered Approach in Equal Opportunities

What Does This Mean?

- A human-centered approach recognizes that individuals engaging with government systems may be navigating discrimination, conflict, trauma, instability, fear, and significant power imbalances. The goal is to create processes that are accessible, understandable, equitable, and procedurally fair while maintaining neutrality and legal integrity

Core Principles

Accessibility and transparency in government processes

Respectful and trauma-informed engagement

Plain-language communication

Procedural fairness and consistency

Reduction of unnecessary barriers to participation

Continuous improvement informed by community experience and operational data

Human-Centered Leadership

Servant Leadership

- Serving others first
- Leader centered, “How do I serve”
- Individual leader sacrifice & selflessness
- Unintentionally blurs boundaries & roles
- Relational & supportive
- Focuses on helping individuals

Human-Centered Leadership



Systems design that support dignity, access, accountability & belonging



Community centered, rooted in shared responsibility, sustainability & equitable change



Relational & structurally responsive



Uses data, trauma informed practices & community input to improve outcomes



Focuses on improving policies, processes, accessibility and trust.

Why Human-Centered Leadership Fits EOC

EOC operates within a legal, policy, and accountability framework that requires balancing:

- Procedural fairness
- Public trust
- Transparency
- Accessibility
- Timely decision making
- Trauma informed engagement
- Equity

Human-Centered Leadership aligns with these responsibilities by emphasizing:

- Systems design over personality driven leadership
- Clear roles & governance
- Community-informed policy development
- Trauma-informed & accessible communication
- Continuous improvement through feedback & data
- Sustainable practices that reduce burnout & increase consistency

What this looks like in Practice

- Clear explanations of process, timelines, and jurisdiction
- Balancing empathy with neutrality & procedural integrity
- Multiple pathways to access services and file complaints
- Language access and accessibility accommodations
- Consistent communication and status updates
- Transparent expectations and procedural steps
- Fair, timely, and consistent case handling
- Accessible and understandable public meetings
- Clear commissioner and staff roles
- Ongoing community engagement and education
- Improving psychological safety for staff, commissioners, complainants, and respondents

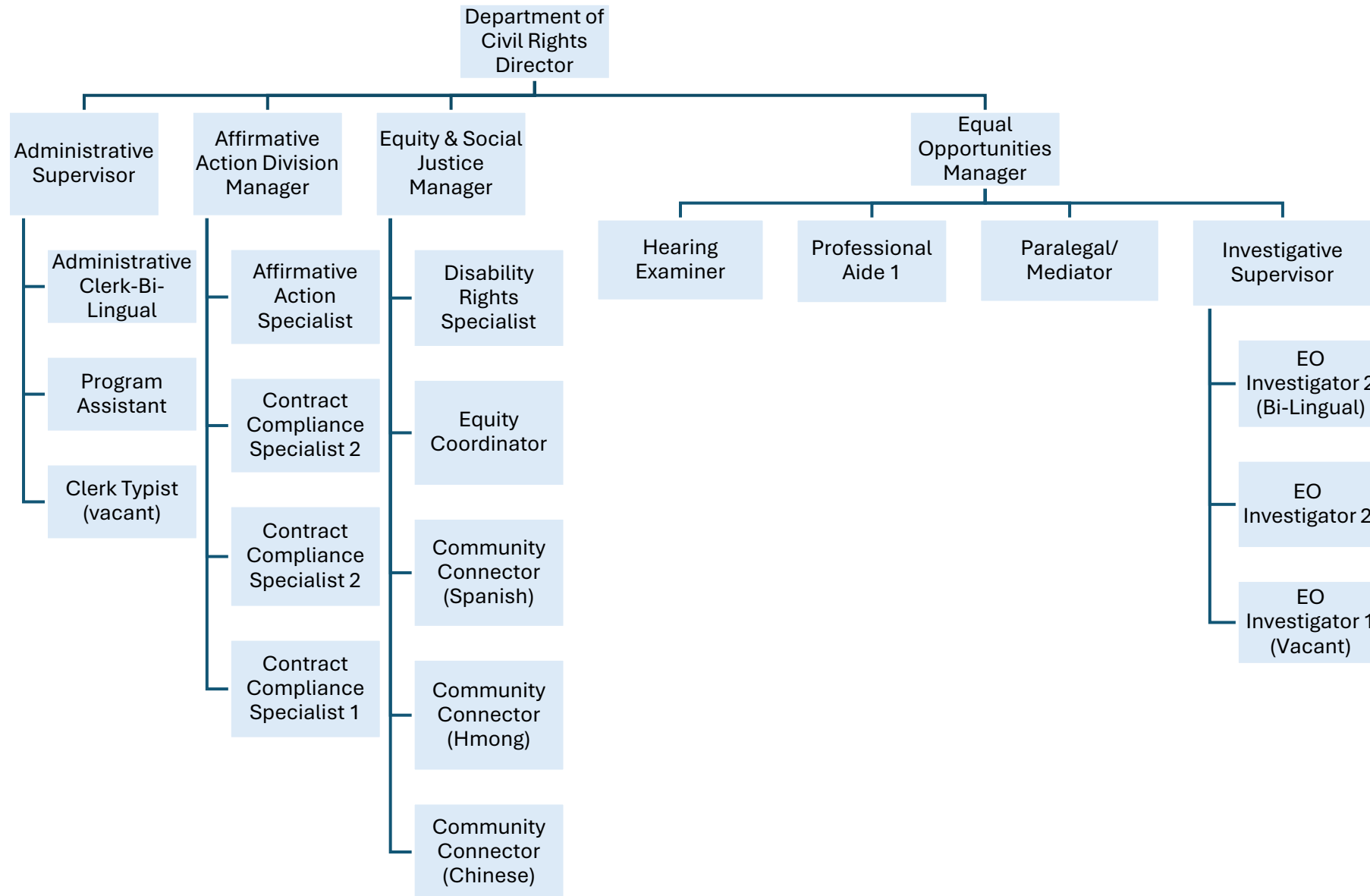
“The Equal Opportunities Commission advances equity through human-centered governance that prioritizes dignity, accessibility, transparency, accountability, and procedural fairness. The commission seeks to design systems and processes that are responsive to community experience while grounded in the legal responsibilities of MGO 39.03.”

2026-27 Work Plan, Commission Purpose

How we operate

Equal Opportunities Division

Department of Civil Rights**



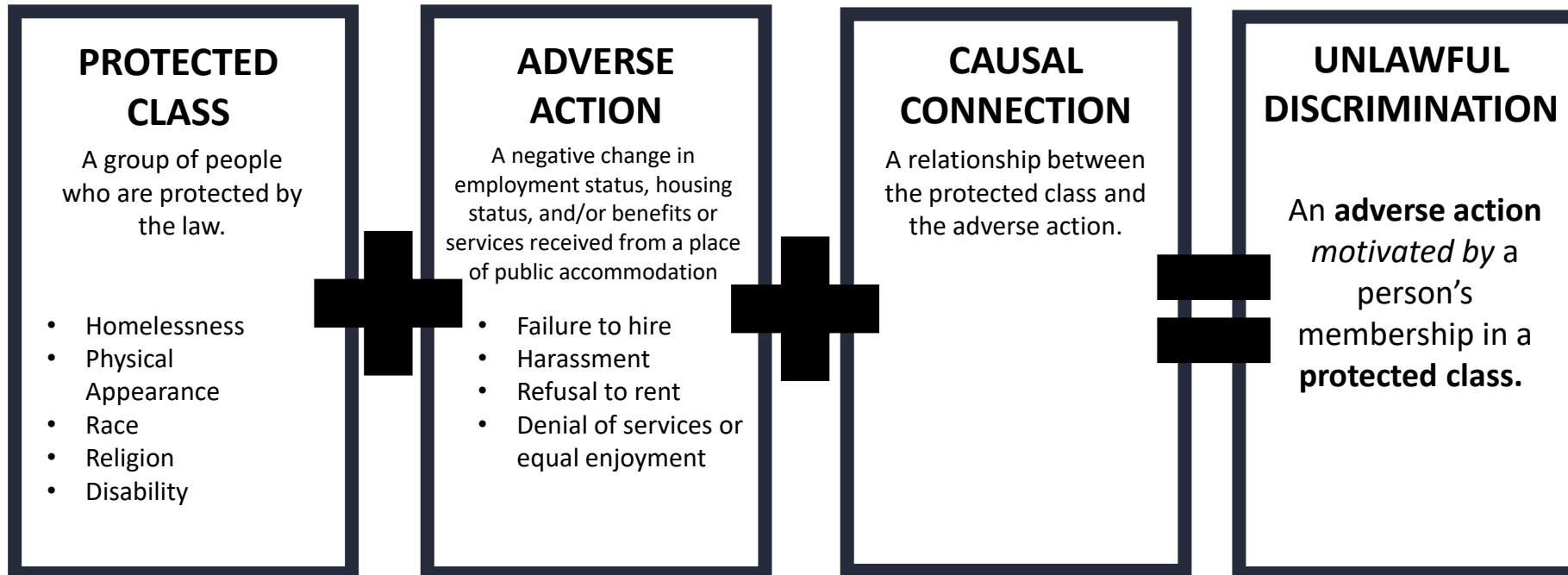


City of Madison Protected Classes (30)

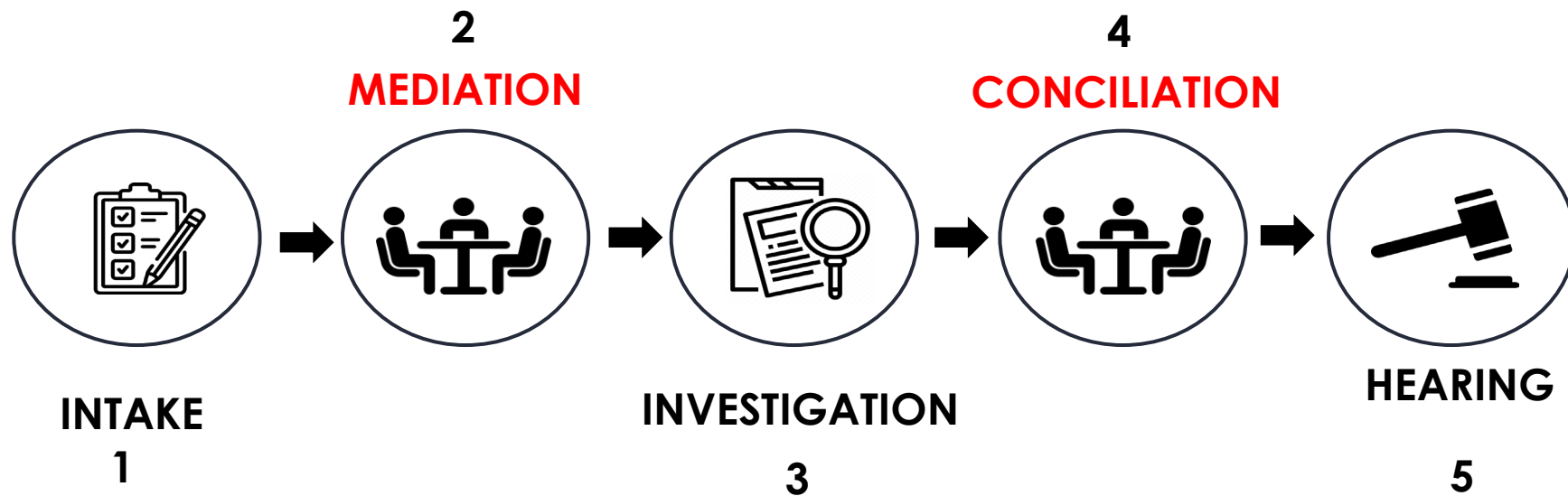
Age	Conviction Record	Gender Identity	National Origin/Ancestry	Receipt of Rental Assistance	Social Security Number Disclosure
Arrest Record	Credit History	Genetic Identity	Non-Religion	Religion	Source of Income
Building Code Complainant	Disability	Homelessness	Physical Appearance	Retaliation	Student
Citizenship Status	Domestic Partners	Less than Honorable Discharge from Military	Political Beliefs	Sex	Unemployment
Color	Familial Status	Marital Status	Race / Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Victim of Domestic Abuse, Sexual Assault, and/or Stalking



Discrimination is an **adverse action**
motivated by a person's membership
in a **protected class**.



WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A COMPLAINT IS SUBMITTED?



EOD Challenges

Challenges

- Identified a quarter of cases in abeyance (25) complaints did not meet statutory requirements to EOD staff to investigate.
- Following Early Meditation, complaints moved into abeyance stage.
- Staffing issues and case complexity has led to long wait periods, up to 12 months before a case is assigned to Investigative staff.

Works in progress...

- Abeyance review ✓
 - Cases outside of jurisdiction dismissed (4 appeals in progress)
 - Providing status updates on all abeyance cases (in progress)
- Filling Vacant EO 1 Investigator, assessing need for additional staff:
 - Investigative position (1)
 - Dedicated intake position (1)-proposal completed
- Exploring changes to Intake Process (in progress):
 - Better education & support to complainants
 - Additional complainant vetting & review (Addtl. training)
- Explore changes to Investigative Process
- Explore changes to EOD Rules/EOD procedures
- Explore changes to IT system for better access

Awards to our Complainants – Investigating discrimination Rights

2020 = \$232,912, **2021** = \$119,107, **2022** = \$354,118 , **2023** = \$234,135
2024= \$228, 217, **2025**= \$172,775





Equal Opportunities Commission

How you all serve the
City of Madison

Looking at The EOC Role – Per Madison General Ordinance 39.03

- Support the work and actions of the Equal Opportunities Division Process:
 - Intake
 - Early Mediation
 - Investigation
 - Conciliation
 - Hearing
 - Hearing Examiner Appeals to EOC
 - Education, Training and Outreach (currently limited due to staff capacity and backlog needs)
- EOC Recommends MGO 39.03 updates and changes by working with the OCA to draft language for review to the current ordinance.

Role, Responsibility and Charge of the Commission (1-9)

Per MGO 39.03 (10) (b): The EOC has the following powers and duties:

1. To study the existence, character, causes and extent of the denial of equal opportunity because of biases, prejudices, either social or institutionalized, passive and active forms of discrimination or harassment that occurs either in favor of or to the detriment of any protected class or other unfair classification in the greater Madison community.
2. To informally recommend solutions to individual problems that may arise which involve the denial of equal opportunities because of protected class or other class memberships.
3. To disseminate information and provide technical assistance, consultation, training programs and other techniques to educate the people of the City of Madison and to aid both private and public agencies to use their resources to promote equal opportunities for all persons.

Role, Responsibility and Charge of the Commission

4. To receive and initiate complaints alleging violation of this ordinance and to attempt to eliminate or remedy any violation by means of conciliation, persuasion, education, litigation, or any other means, to make the complainant whole again.
5. To test and investigate for establishing violations of Section 39.03 of these ordinances and, if appropriate, to make, sign, and file complaints alleging violations.
6. To render from time to time, but not less than once a year, a written report of its activities and recommendations to the Mayor and the Common Council (***Clarifying this includes a workplan, which does not have to be separate document***).

Role, Responsibility and Charge of the Commission

7. To adopt such rules and regulations as it may be necessary to carry out the purpose and provisions of this ordinance. *(Rules of the EOC)*

8. As to policy oversight and development, EOC may issue subpoenas pursuant to Wis. Stat. §885.01 to assist in the execution of its duties. ***(If needed, this is something that can be done through our Hearing Examiner or at that level)***

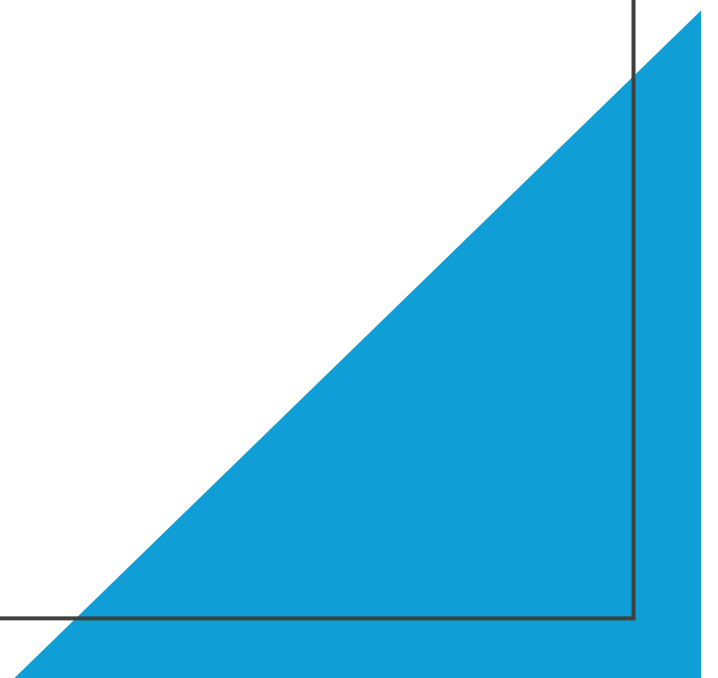
9. The Commission may from time to time, designate other Commissioners and/or Equal Opportunities Division staff to carry out its duties.

Important Initiatives & Committees within EOC

- Annual Reverend James C. Wright Human Rights Award (Full Commission)
 - Outreach
 - Review and updates to nomination process
 - Review nominees and award selected winner/s
- EOC Appeals Committee might need to review a case(s) where the Hearing Examiner Decisions are appealed.
 - Comprised of (3) commissioners with (1) alternate Commissioner
 - (1) Assistant City Atty is assigned as a part of the review process and acts on behalf of the EOC defending the City and the Commission.
 - The Asst. City Atty assigned is responsible for drafting the decision of the EOC Appeals Cmte

Equal Opportunities Commission

2026-2027 Work Plan



Changes to Work Plan Structure

- Reinvigorate function as a governmental body
- Commissioner retention through improved structure
- Focus on setting more **SMARTIE** goals (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, **T**ime-limited, **I**nclusive, and **E**quitable)
- Better utilization of commission meeting time, staff time and capacity
- More alignment with other BCCs and clarity for Mayor & Common Council
- Keep EOC accountable to MGO 39.03 as written report of activities and recommendations to Mayor & Common Council

What Happened in 2025-2026

What We Learned

- Education on City Initiatives
 - OCA-Property tax issues
 - Assessor's Office-property tax exemptions
 - CDD-Fair Housing Choice Report
 - Common Council-Recommendations for Adoption of Code of Ethics
- Commissioner training on BCC Rules & Legislative Process from OCA
- Common Council requested recommendations to adopting updated Code of Ethical
- Education on Emergent Immigration& Deportation issues in Madison from Hmong Institute & Dane County
- Education on Unhoused population, including barriers to new shelter and increased criminalization of the unhoused in Madison

What We Did

- 2025 Reverend James C. Wright Award – Edward Murray, Jr.
- EOC Employment Issues Listening Session – June 11, 2025
- EOC Election Rules Updates (2026)
- EOC Executive Committee Rules Updates (2026)

Commission Purpose & Objectives

The role of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is to provide oversight, guidance, and quasi-judicial review related to the enforcement and advancement of the City of Madison Equal Opportunities Ordinance (MGO 39.03). The Commission advises the Mayor, Common Council, and Department of Civil Rights regarding policies, practices, and strategies that promote equal opportunity, procedural fairness, accessibility, and equitable treatment for all residents.

Within the context of the Commission's legal authority and responsibilities under MGO 39.03, the EOC supports efforts to identify and reduce systemic barriers impacting protected classes in housing, employment, public accommodations, and City services. The Commission also promotes community education, transparency, accountability, and culturally responsive engagement to strengthen public trust and access to civil rights protections.

Key Focus Areas

Housing Equity and Accessibility – Efforts that promote fair housing practices, accessible housing opportunities, equitable treatment of tenants and homeowners, and reduction of barriers impacting protected classes.

Employment Equity and Workforce Access – Policies, practices, and community partnerships that support equitable hiring, workplace accessibility, nondiscrimination, and economic opportunity.

Accessibility and Disability Inclusion – Strategies that improve access to City programs, services, facilities, communications, and complaint processes for individuals with disabilities.

Community Engagement and Public Education – Opportunities to increase awareness of civil rights protections, improve access to information, strengthen community trust, and engage historically marginalized communities in meaningful dialogue and policy development.

Goal: Governance & Role Clarity

Action Steps	Timeline	Lead/Support	Expected Outcomes
Update and adopt revised EOC Rules for commission governance, including departmental policies and procedures.	May 2026; Late 2026	EOD manager, OCA	Improved transparency, clarity, and alignment with City of Madison BCC best practices and alignment with EOD operations.
Establish standardized meeting structures, work planning processes, and decision-making protocols to improve efficiency and accountability.	June 2026	EOD staff leads, EOC Chair	Improved meeting effectiveness and clearer operational processes.

Goal: Commissioner Capacity & Training

Action Steps	Timeline	Lead/Support	Expected Outcome/s
Coordinate annual commissioner training on Open Meetings Law, Robert's Rules of Order, Equal Opportunities Ordinance requirements, and appeals procedures.	May 2026	OCA, EOD Staff	100% commissioner completion of annual trainings.
Develop onboarding and reference materials to support commissioner orientation and ongoing learning.	Ongoing	EOD Staff	Increased commissioner preparedness and consistency in Commission operations. Retention of appointed commissioners for quorum.

Goal: Operational Effectiveness

Action Steps	Timeline	Lead/Support	Expected Outcomes
Review Commission administrative processes and collaboration with staff to identify opportunities for improved workflow, agenda management, and tracking systems.	May/June 2026	EOC Chair	Reduction in administrative burden and improved operational coordination.
Utilize time-limited workgroups or subcommittees to address specific policy or operational priorities.	Ongoing	EOC	Increased capacity to complete strategic initiatives and policy work.

Goal: Community Engagement & Education

Action Steps	Timeline		Expected Outcomes
Conduct (1) community education session, and (1) outreach/forum inviting property management companies.	By end of 2027	EOC, EOD staff	Increased public awareness and engagement with more diverse pool of identified community stakeholders.
Collaborate with community organizations and stakeholders to improve accessibility of educational materials and outreach efforts.	Ongoing	EOC	Expanded access to information and improved community trust.

Goal: Core Functions Excellence

Action Steps	Timeline	Lead/Support	Expected Outcomes
Maintain timely administration of appeals, annual reporting requirements, commissioner onboarding, and the Reverend James C. Wright Human Rights Award process.	Ongoing	Appeals committee, OCA, EOD Admin	95% on-time completion of core Commission responsibilities.

Goal: Policy & Systems Influence

Action Steps	Timeline	Lead/Support	Expected Outcomes
Review MGO 39.03 and for changes and updates on non-discrimination, protected classes.	Annually	EOC, OCA	At least two (2) policy recommendations* are provided annually to the Mayor and Common Council.
Engage with City departments and community stakeholders regarding equity impacts of policies and operational practices.	Ongoing	EOD staff, EOC Chair	Increased cross-department collaboration and equity-focused policy development. Hear from at least two 2 City depts quarterly doing relevant work to EOC.

Evaluation & Progress Monitoring

Key Metrics for Success

- Completion of annual strategic priorities and action items (Work Plan)
- Strengthening Commissioner participation, knowledge, and skill in MGO 39.03 and commission responsibilities
- Timeliness of appeals review
- Community participation and stakeholder engagement levels
- Policy recommendations developed and presented
- Community & stakeholder feedback regarding accessibility, transparency, and effectiveness

Monitoring & Feedback

- Identify emerging equal opportunities and equity concerns impacting residents
- Review trends and barriers identified through outreach and engagement
- Recommend operational and policy improvements
- Assess progress toward strategic goals and community impact priorities

Discussion/Questions



Recommendations to Mayor & Common Council*

- Continue supporting adequate staffing and operational resources for Equal Opportunities Division functions.
- Encourage continued equity-focused review and implementation of policies across City government, including timely review of policy changes from commission.
- Support community engagement and education initiatives that increase awareness of equal opportunity protections and complaint processes.
- Promote cross-department collaboration to identify and reduce systemic barriers impacting most marginalized communities.
- Continue investing in accessibility, language access, and culturally responsive communication efforts across City services.

Workplan Review & Reflection

- Review, reflection, finalize