



# *Community Relations Board*

City of Kalamazoo  
2006 Annual Report

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# Members

## 2005 – 2006

Thomas Barrett

Stephanie Coulter

Kirsten Enstice, Vice Chairperson

Steven Gerike \*\*

Amanda M. Grove, Chairperson \*\*

Jessica Hermann-Wilmarth \*\*

Maria L. Mercedes \*\*

James N. Rodbard \*\*

Jorge Rodriguez

Maia Justine Storm

Rebecca Westphal

Michael O. Wilson \*\*

Jake Zulewski \*\*

City Staff Commission Liaison: David Anderson

City Staff Liaison: Alfrelynn J. Roberts

*\*\* - Current Membership*

# Mission and Responsibilities of the Community Relations Board

The Mission of the Community Relations Board (CRB) is found in the Sec. 18-7 of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Kalamazoo. “The purpose of the board shall be to increase constructive communication among our citizens across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines and between citizens and public officials thereby promoting harmonious and productive relationship within the community.”<sup>1</sup>

In order to achieve its mission, the CRB has a number of duties and responsibilities. Among these duties is the requirement “to produce, at least annually, factual and analytical reports and recommendations as to corrective or ameliorating actions the board may deem appropriate...”<sup>2</sup> This Annual Report, and appendices, is respectfully presented to the City Commission for 2006.

## Introduction

2006 has been a rebuilding year for the Community Relations Board for the City of Kalamazoo. With the exception of long time member Michael O. Wilson, none of the members of the CRB served at the beginning of 2006. As it has rebuilt itself, the CRB has identified and planned responses to new and old challenges that have arisen or resurfaced here in the city. The CRB has actively recruited quality board members and is facing these issues with renewed energy and inspiration.

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<sup>1</sup> City of Kalamazoo Code of Ordinances, §18-7

<sup>2</sup> City of Kalamazoo Code of Ordinances, §18-8 (b)

# 2006 Initiatives & Ongoing Projects

As the board grew from three members in April and May of 2006, the board took steps to identify a series of priorities from which the CRB could select a starting point. Among the priorities discussed and analyzed was as follows:

1. More CRB visibility and community utilizing community events to interact with citizens in identifying areas where community input is most essential;
2. Continue analysis and discussion about creation of a human rights or ombudsperson position with the City of Kalamazoo;
3. Identify ways to interact with and engage our substantial student population;
4. Develop a community questionnaire in an effort to funnel community comments and concerns back to the city through the CRB;
5. Plan community outreach events geared to provide community members with the opportunity to voice any opinions and concerns they have about city government, its shortcomings, its strengths, and areas for improvement;
6. Determination of the CRB's relationship, if any, with the Community Public Safety Review and Appeal Board (CPSRAB).
7. The development and design of a brochure explaining the CRB and its function to the community as a particularly important outreach item.

In October, the CRB had the opportunity to visit with Mayor McKinney to discuss two initiatives: The National League of Cities-inclusive community project and an evaluation of the Summit on Racism, and how the CRB could become engaged in that process.

This continues to be under review after the CRB examined each initiative in detail at later meetings.

In connection with the Summit on Racism, YWCA Executive Director, Jennifer Shoub and the Summit on Racism Racial Justice Supervisor, Chad Byer met with the CRB to discuss the Summit on Racism and how the CRB's mission fits into that of the Summit on Racism. In the end, the CRB settled on an initiatives and a project for the coming year: Membership development and community building.

### Initiative

#### ***Membership Development & Retention***

2006 has been a rebuilding year for the CRB and continues efforts to enlist members with the ability to add diversity of opinion and provide greater representation of the community on the board. New additions to the board have provided greater expertise in various areas of community organization and development as well as critically and important enthusiasm and interest in doing board work beyond attending the meetings.

### Ongoing Project

#### ***Community Building: Discussions with the Community Story Corp Project***

The board has settled on two new initiatives to engage and direct outreach to the City of Kalamazoo: First, it has embarked on a project of community outreach in the form of community forums with various neighborhood groups. Its initial outreach meeting is in conjunction with a neighborhood watch meeting. Future meetings will be separated from community watch to allow for more open and candid exchange with community members and greater focus on the objective of the forums. The forums will be facilitated meetings with written questions to the board and time for follow up and exchange between the questioner and the board. The ultimate objective is to provide the City

Commission with a broad based report of community concerns and areas for improvement between community expectations and city performance.

As new challenges arise between various communities and the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety, the CRB believes that it is in an excellent position to provide a mediating structure for unvarnished and candid community inputs which may not otherwise be available from direct public safety or administration contact with the community.

Another outreach mechanism in development is a “story corp” styled project. This project is intended to enable members of the Kalamazoo Community to record their experience in the City in an oral, recorded form to be archived and rebroadcast as an oral history of Kalamazoo. It will record Kalamazoo’s collective memory from the standpoint of its struggles, growth and challenges as an inclusive community. Bearing in mind that we have a rich history of civil rights and civil liberty struggles and successes, and the need to remind our community members of where they have been, how far we have come and how far we still need to go. The Kalamazoo Story Corp program can provide a baseline to measure progress and to remind the community of its history as instructive of, and critical to, planning for the future. The Story Corp project will enlist allies who can assist the CRB in bringing the program together, including the Community Access Center, the WMU School of Communication, the North Side Ministerial Alliance, the Summit on Racism, Kalamazoo Alliance for a Equality, the Kalamazoo Public Schools and the YWCA.

## Supporting Materials

### ***CRB Brochure***