

FAQ re: Becoming a Human Rights City

**What is the benefit or value of becoming a Human Rights City?
Can the goal be achieved in other ways (i.e. through public service)?**

1) A Human Rights City resolution will guide city policies and institutionalize a human rights framework.

Public service and volunteer work should definitely be encouraged, but such activities by private citizens should not substitute the adoption of a human rights framework that guides official city policies. The human rights framework helps institutionalize an official bottom line that ensures no member of the community is discriminated against or left behind. By declaring itself a human rights city, Mountain View can inform its citizens about the basic principles they are following when deciding to implement policy/programs. Additionally, a human rights framework would help the city proactively identify potential problem areas and prevent future complications, such as lawsuits. The framework would enhance the city's responsiveness to community concerns. This approach makes the government actions more visible to the community.

2) By adopting a Human Rights City resolution, Mountain View will be connected to a nationwide network of resources and opportunities to share best practices.¹

Making Mountain View a Human Rights City provides an opportunity to collaborate with other Human Rights Cities and discuss best practices. Human Rights Cities meet on a regular basis in conferences throughout the nation to discuss ways to address local problems through a human rights lens. Mountain View can share its own best practices and discuss the steps it took to become one of the first cities in the U.S. to ensure its citizens a living wage.

3) A Human Rights City resolution enhances the city's reputation.

Mountain View would get recognized for its leadership on issues like raising the minimum wage, addressing homelessness and affordable housing, and protecting the environment. This is Silicon Valley; we are known for innovation. By becoming a Human Rights City, Mountain View would be joining a growing movement in which you would have a unique opportunity to innovate and lead, for example, by partnering with the private sector to improve the quality of lives in your community.

¹ See e.g. <http://www.humanrightscity.com/history.html>

Would becoming a Human Rights City create any new obligations for the U.S. under international law?

No. A local non-binding resolution does not create any new obligations for the U.S., nor does it conflict with existing domestic or local law.² The U.S. Constitution already recognizes international treaties to be the “supreme law of the land,” and the U.S. has ratified several international human rights treaties like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention Against Torture. These, and other international human rights norms, are already part of our law. A local Human Rights City resolution would only be an expression of local support for these basic human rights principles that would guide local policy.

What is the process of becoming a human rights city? What does it look like?

There is not one right single way to become a Human Rights City.³

Mountain View can decide which process fits best to become a Human Rights City. Some cities have passed binding ordinances, while other cities have adopted resolutions.

One possible way to become a Human Rights City would be as follows:

1. Adopt resolution
2. Define priority areas
3. Define desired outcomes (what do you want to accomplish?)
4. Develop an assessment tool to ensure that policy initiatives promote the desired goal and do not have a negative effect on the enjoyment of basic human rights. Each city department would be responsible for using the tool when deciding whether to implement proposed policy.
5. Establish a point person within each city department that ensures implementation of the tool.
6. Implement policy based on outcomes of assessment tool.
7. Each department reports to the Human Relations Commission, who then reports to the City Council on an annual basis.

² <https://www.asil.org/insights/volume/2/issue/5/international-agreements-and-us-law>

³ <https://web.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/human-rights-institute/files/Bringing%20Human%20Rights%20Home.pdf>

What are we agreeing to do when declaring Mountain View a Human Rights City?

By becoming a Human Rights City, Mountain View would essentially agree to do two things: (1) not adopt policies or practices that would have a negative effect on the enjoyment of basic human rights in the community (this is a negative obligation), and (2) adopt policies and practices that would have a positive effect on the enjoyment of basic human rights in the community (this is a positive obligation). For example, if Mountain View decides that a living wage is a human right, then the city should not take measures aimed at weakening this right, but should take progressive measures to strengthen it. If Mountain View considers affordable housing to be a human right, then it should adopt measures aimed at providing more affordable housing.

The way Mountain View would ensure it meet its own human rights standards is by developing some sort of action plan or assessment tool. Such plans or tools would communicate to city officials in all departments know the city's human rights priorities and establish a mechanism to analyze the positive or negative impacts a proposed initiative would have on those human rights priorities. Implementing a Human Rights Assessment tool or a human right action plan, ensures that human rights, especially the one's Mountain View wants to focus on, are being considered with every decision made in the city in a long-term perspective.

What are the financial implications of becoming a Human Rights City? Isn't this expensive?

Becoming a Human Rights City does not have to be expensive. The resolution itself merely provides guiding principles for all city departments. The implementation tools can be drafted to require as little or as many resources as the city wants. There is no affirmative obligation to invest a particular amount of money every year - this entirely depends on the emphasis of the city. Mountain View is free to decide the issue areas on which to focus, what programs to implement, and on the monitoring mechanisms.⁴

Don't cities only declare themselves "Human Rights Cities" after they have done something terribly wrong?

No. Cities have different reasons for becoming Human Rights Cities.⁵ Although some may use a tragic event as a springboard to address previously existing problems, others

⁴ <http://www.pdhre.org/projects/hrcommun.html>

⁵ <http://pgh-humanrightscity.wikispaces.com/file/view/The+Human+Rights+Cities+Movement+Introduction.pdf>

use the human rights framework to develop proactive policies that will actually prevent violations before they occur.⁶

Does becoming a human rights city divide the community in different branches because of the many groups that are being identified (i.e. women, children, homeless) instead of bringing people together?

The opposite is true. **Human Rights Cities ensure that people are not discriminated against for any reason.** A Human Rights City resolution tells the community that discrimination in any form will not be tolerated.

⁶ <http://www.afsc.org/story/pittsburgh-declared-5th-human-rights-city-us>;
<http://www.pdhre.org/projects/hrcommun.html>; <http://www.humanrightscity.com/>;
<http://richmondconfidential.org/2009/12/01/richmond-becomes-human-rights-city/>