

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday, October 7, 2019**

**5:00 PM**

**Booras Rm., Keene Public Library**

**Members Present:**

William Hay, Chair  
Councilor Janis Manwaring  
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos  
Nancy Salwen  
Jennifer Carroll

**Staff Present:**

Andrew Bohannon, Parks, Recreation, and  
Facilities Director  
Steve Russo, Police Chief

**Members Not Present:**

Pam Knight  
Dottie Morris

**1) Call Meeting to Order & Roll Call**

Chair Hay called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM. Roll call was conducted.

**2) Approval of September 4, 2019 Meeting Minutes**

Councilor Manwaring made a motion to accept the minutes of September 4, 2019. Chair Hay seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

**3) Finance Report**

Mr. Bohannon stated that the finance report is on the last page of the agenda packet. He continued that he picked up the City's contribution. What you see is two different lines - \$5,074 is where the committee stands. The second line is for the Keene International Festival (KIF) because it is in the same account code now but it is two different accounts. When he brought it to the City Council it went into the KIF fund, not the HRC. There is an A and a B fund. They raised \$6,347 for their event. Their expenses will be done for the next meeting. He can share those. He will probably do that as one lump. There were multiple expenses. They used to do it this way when they had money from the Kingsbury Fund, in the 1990s, for the other event. They had split it off. So that is why he did it like that again.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos made a motion to approve the Finance Report. Councilor Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

#### **4) Committee Discussion**

##### **a. Keene Police Department**

Chair Hay welcomed Police Chief Steve Russo to speak to the HRC about hate crimes.

Mr. Russo stated that to begin, it is important to talk about what is and is not a hate crime. He continued that while most or all of the incidents that happen in Keene are deplorable to most people, barely any (between 2017 and the present) rose to the level of being criminal behavior, which is required to constitute a hate crime. Most were committed by juveniles, some as young as 8 years old.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked what he means by “criminal behavior” – a misdemeanor. Mr. Russo replied that it could be that or disorderly conduct.

Mr. Russo read the FBI’s definition of a hate crime – “a committed criminal offense motivated in whole or in part by the offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity.” He continued that the worst cases of intolerance and racism reported to the KPD involved verbal remarks against a race. However, not all offensive remarks against a race meet the legal requirement to be “disorderly conduct.” Suspects can only be prosecuted for using words that are likely to provoke a violent reaction on the part of an ordinary citizen. The KPD tracks and investigates these incidences even when they are not crimes, but they have legal lines they cannot go over. Some people choose not to talk to the KPD, but the KPD does what they can. Most incidents are reported through the School Resource Officer (SRO) and College Liaison Officer (CLO). Since 2017, there have been about 17 incidents reported that have involved drawings, posters, videos, and about four incidents of verbal racism. All were investigated and none were prosecuted. In the worst of the verbal cases the suspect was tracked via license plate, interviewed, and counseled but it did not reach prosecutable level. He appeared to have mental health issues that contributed to his actions.

Mr. Russo continued that in many/most of the incidences of racism or other intolerance in schools, the schools discipline identified suspects, and sometimes the schools involve the SRO participating in class discussions on tolerance and diversity. All reported incidents are documented and investigated as much as possible, even when the incidents are not criminal. The KPD sees it as their duty to track these as best as possible to see if trends are arising. They do not see a trend of increasing incidents. Most are committed by juveniles and addressed by the schools and SROs. The CLO at the college is also heavily involved. These matters are usually settled by school discipline process, parent involvement, and education.

Mr. Russo stated that the KPD does what they legally can about these alleged crimes/incidents. They have some ideas about how to address the larger issues within the city. There are people from other places who come to work, shop, eat, or go to school here. He tracks the incidents by hand, because the report management system is only as good as what the officers put in. He gave an example of how on one report, “anti-Hawaiian” was checked by accident. Supervisors do not always catch these things and it can confuse the reporting. He went through by hand to correct such things.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the KPD publishes the information anywhere about these incidences they have been tracking. Mr. Russo replied no, because how would they decide which type of crime to report on? He continued that they do not specifically say, for example, "We had 12 burglaries this year," either. They do send numbers to the State and FBI and the FBI collects the information. They are very big on hate crimes.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she wonders how comfortable people are reporting incidences that might be hate crimes. Mr. Russo replied that that question has come up in conversations. The college did a climate study in 2017 and they held something at the Rec Center. He thinks the results were a little skewed due to the way they did statistics. There is clearly an issue of intolerance in the area. How do we address it? Some college students were having problems with a store assuming that because they were of a certain race they were going to steal; in that situation, the KPD could go talk with the store. They SROs ad hoc talks with the kids, especially if there has been an incident. The focus is education. When people grow up in an area without much diversity and then diversity grows, there will be a small group of people who will not change.

Councilor Manwaring stated that the SROs would not catch incidents that happen to people who are adults and not in the school system. Would they report being harassed? She does not know. Ms. Salwen replied yes, sometimes people do not report because they feel grateful that it was not worse. Discussion continued.

Ms. Carroll asked what age students are more likely to be involved in these incidents. Mr. Russo replied that there are not enough incidents to draw a conclusion like that. He gave a couple examples of anti-Black incidents that happened in schools and were reported to the SRO recently, which were documented.

Ms. Salwen asked how the parents respond when they find out their child did or said something intolerant. Mr. Russo replied that he has never read a report saying the parents supported the child's expression of intolerance, but, the children must be getting it from somewhere. Ms. Salwen stated that a parent might say they are horrified by their child's words or behavior, but really not be.

Mr. Russo stated that one of his goals is to get, before he retires, one or two more SROs. It would be great to actually have follow-ups with families, and to make sure these students are getting help. The schools are very good. They have assessment processes they go through for if a kid makes a threat. Discussion continued. Ms. Carroll and Ms. Salwen expressed appreciation that Mr. Russo is tracking these issues and trends. Mr. Russo replied that they are not tracking these in a sophisticated way; there are not enough cases to track. Ms. Carroll asked if there is a system regionally to track it. Mr. Russo replied no. He continued that they could probably get the state data, but not everyone contributes. Contributing to that program was not a requirement until about two years ago. It is important because statistics are what lead to funding.

Ms. Salwen asked, if someone hears about an unreported story (about an alleged hate crime), should they tell Mr. Russo? Mr. Russo replied that they can, but there is no guarantee about what can be done, if it is not a crime and the information is not coming firsthand. He likes to have all incidents documented if possible. He gave further examples of incidents that have been reported that did not meet the definition of hate crimes. Discussion continued.

The group thanked Mr. Russo, and he left at 5:22 PM.

Chair Hay shared a story of anti-Semitism that was experienced by a friend of his, committed by a person who clearly had never met a Jewish person and was ignorant about Judaism. Mr. Bohannon stated that his takeaway from Mr. Russo's comments is that the more educating they can do, the better. Chair Hay replied yes, the community is getting more and more diverse.

Ms. Carroll asked how intolerance is handled in the workplace. The response in schools sounds great. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that if an incident does not rise to the level of a crime, how to handle it is up to each individual employer/company. She continued that maybe they could work on educating employers. Ms. Carroll replied yes, similar to how Healthy Monadnock 2020 is promoting healthy environments, it could be an initiative like "What are you doing in your workplace to promote a healthy cultural environment?" Mr. Bohannon replied that the hospital might have something coming, regarding diversity in the workplace. He continued that they are looking to be that voice.

### **b. International Festival**

Mr. Bohannon stated that the KIF was successful. He continued that there were a lot of people there; it was an unbelievable day. Ms. Carroll thanked Mr. Bohannon and the committee for their work on this event. She continued that the organizers were thrilled to have it at the Rec Center.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the only hiccup this year was parking, but they have a solution for that for next year. He continued that next year the KIF will be the same weekend as the Clarence De Mar Marathon, but not the same day. The marathon this year had 46 states represented, so clearly people come from all over that weekend and will likely stay in the area overnight, eat at local restaurants, and so on and so forth.

Mr. Bohannon continued that he has a great story from the KIF: he sat down at a picnic table for lunch, and a woman sat down across from him and said that she had just moved to Keene yesterday. She told him, "We don't have anything like this where I moved from. If this is what Keene's all about, I'm so pleased to have moved here." Keene made a great first impression.

Mr. Bohannon continued that there were consistently about 500 people at the KIF the whole time with a peak of around 1,000 around the lunch hour. The food trucks did well, and the performances went well. It was his first time and it was fantastic.

Ms. Salwen stated that the circular set up was really nice. Ms. Carroll stated that the crafters were thrilled to be able to see the performances instead of being away from them. Brief discussion ensued about table set up, sun/heat, and tents, and small issues to fix.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he does not know what the feedback is in the suggestion box. Brief discussion ensued. Ms. Salwen asked if the list of people who expressed interest in being on the committee has been gone through. Others replied that they did not know. Someone suggested that maybe Mr. Saleh, who is not here tonight, has that information.

Ms. Salwen stated that she likes that the event was in a short time frame – it is great to have it concentrated, because it gets people there at the same time. Ms. Carroll replied that she would like it to be longer. Mr. Bohannon replied that they will probably expand

it by an hour next year. He continued that the food vendors wanted another hour. Discussion ensued.

Ms. Salwen suggested that next year they have more signs. Discussion ensued. Mr. Bohannon stated that the City has two that they register and maintain, at the Post Office and Rec Center. Councilor Manwaring stated that there is a \$15 fee and the sign is up for two weeks, but it needs to have liability insurance. Mr. Bohannon replied that they took care of that because it is a City event. There was no fee because of that.

Ms. Salwen asked about having a smaller, indoor, secondary event, since the KIF is only once a year. Ms. Carroll replied that on April 18 there will be the fourth annual Holi Fest at the Rec Center, hosted by the Historical Society. She continued that in the past it has been at the college, and they were hoping to draw in more college students but there were more community members than students. Mr. Bohannon replied that it is a short event in the spring that is a way to provide more events to the community. He continued that the neighborhood is very diverse to begin with and people can walk there. It is a great opportunity for the City to partner with the Historical Society.

### **c. MLK Breakfast**

Mr. Bohannon stated that he reached out to Jaffrey, regarding their conversation about having an event with Climbing Poetree. He continued that he watched the video of Climbing Poetree and they are amazing. He got excited about the fact that they were coming to Keene, but when he called Jaffrey he learned that Climbing Poetree were not able to make it. So that collaboration is out the door.

Mr. Bohannon continued that Keene is on its own for a MLK event. Jaffrey gave him a name that he does not have with him today, but it is the Dean of Boston University Cultural Diversity, who is very good friends with a man who was behind the scenes with MLK. It would be good to collaborate with Jaffrey next year, now that he has made contact with the group and they know the HRC is interested in working together. But this year they have to move fast to get someone in the books and plan an activity and location.

Ms. Carroll asked where the event typically is. Chair Hay replied that it has been all over, such as the Catholic Church on Arch Street and the Unitarian Universalist Church. Mr. Bohannon replied that it has been at the Rec Center, First Baptist Church, St. George's and Greek Orthodox Church. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked, how about at the library? Mr. Bohannon replied yes, Heberton Hall would work to have a speaker and tables with a breakfast or brunch.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he thinks they still have time to plan this, market it, and pull it off. Discussion ensued, regarding whether to have a musician or speaker or both, the budget, the day and time, and the intended audience. The group agreed that they would like the event to be from about 9:30 to 11 AM on January 20.

Discussion ensued about possible speakers or performers. Ms. Salwen suggested the authors of Rise Up Singing, who are activists through music, and encourage audience participation. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos suggested an African-American prosecutor in the Boston area who is becoming known for his progressive prosecution and the effect on race. Mr. Bohannon asked if Ms. Salwen and Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos could find out more information about and contact those potential speakers/performers to see if they would be available, and then to let him know. He will look into the man from BU.

Ms. Salwen asked if it is a problem if the presenters are white, as the Rise Up Singing people are. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she feels like it rings a little hollow. Ms. Salwen stated that the prosecutor Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos was talking about would be good together with the Rise Up Singing people. Discussion continued. Mr. Bohannon stated that he understands Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos's perspective. He continued that during the first years of this event, some of the speakers were just local clergy members talking, and they did not resonate at all. Ms. Salwen suggested Dottie Morris, who is a fabulous speaker. Mr. Bohannon replied that he has been having a hard time contacting her but will try again.

#### **d. Indigenous People's Day**

Mr. Bohannon stated that they invited last months' guests back, Kya Roumimper and Jedidiah Crook. He asked what kind of action the group wants to take.

Chair Hay stated that he tried to connect with Ms. Roumimper and Mr. Crook but it did not work this time. Ms. Carroll asked if they are asking the HRC to do something, and if they came to the HRC before going to the City Council. Councilor Manwaring replied that they have not spoken at the City Council. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if this is in support of changing Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day. Others replied yes. Mr. Bohannon stated that maybe Ms. Roumimper and Mr. Crook are not ready to go to City Council. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied, so they are the ones carrying this ball. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, but it is up to the HRC if they want to pick up the ball. Chair Hay replied that it is a little late in the year now. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that they could work on this for next year.

#### **e. Movie Screening, "The Public"**

Ms. Carroll stated that the Historical Society and the Keene Public Library (KPL) will be showing the film "The Public" on December 12. She continued that the HRC could choose to co-sponsor it. Chair Hay and Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked for more information about the film. Ms. Carroll replied that it is set in a library on the coldest night of the year; it is the story of what happens when homeless people in a library refuse to leave.

Mr. Bohannon asked what it would mean if the committee co-sponsored it. Ms. Carroll replied that there is no money involved; it would be the committee's name on the flyer. Per the HRC's request, she spoke briefly about the other films being shown as part of this film series. She continued that they are all films with library connections, and/or library characters, set in libraries, to celebrate the KPL's renovations. Discussion ensued. Committee members asked if it was possible to co-sponsor just "The Public," and not the entire film series. Ms. Carroll replied no, it would be too much work to do a separate flyer and press release for the one film. Committee members decided they would not co-sponsor the film series. Mr. Bohannon stated that they can promote The Public.

#### **5) New Business**

Mr. Bohannon stated that there are several groups that meet for coffee and conversation about diversity in Keene, such as one at the Chamber of Commerce. He continued that last week a group met, including himself, the Mayor, the local YMCA Director, and Shawn LaFrance from Cheshire Medical who lives in Concord, was the Director of Foundation For Healthy Communities. Mr. LaFrance's son created a group at his high

school, called “Diversity Leadership.” At lunch, students talk about diversity in their school. Mr. Bohannon continued that he and Mr. LaFrance will meet with the KHS Principal to talk about whether something like this exists at KHS and to begin the conversation about creating something. He can pass the information about other coffee groups along. Ms. Salwen asked if these meetings have people of color. Mr. Bohannon replied yes. Ms. Salwen asked if the meetings are open to anyone. Mr. Bohannon replied that he does not know if it is invitation only. He will keep everyone up to date. The conversations are out there and they will start to see more conversation being created.

Ms. Carroll stated that there is a project in the works, if anyone is interested in helping: the Historical Society of Cheshire County and the Monadnock Center For History and Culture in Peterborough will be working with the New Hampshire Black Heritage Trail to document African American history up to the Civil War. She continued that they want to make it a crowd-sourcing effort. It probably will happen in the spring of 2020. They would love to get more people involved, especially students. She gave more information. Members expressed interest and discussion ensued.

**6) Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, November 4, 2019**

The meeting adjourned at 6:01 PM.

Respectfully submitted by  
Britta Reida, Minute-taker

Edited by Kristy Morrison, Admin Assistant  
KPRD on 10/29/19 at 9am (resent in email)