

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, November 4, 2019

5:00 PM

**Booras Room,
Keene Public Library**

Members Present:

William Hay, Chair
Mohammed Saleh
Janis Manwaring, Councilor
Nancy Salwen
Dottie Morris
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos

Staff Present:

Andrew Bohannon, PRF Director

Members Not Present:

Pam Knight
Jennifer Carroll

1) Call Meeting to Order and Roll Call

Chair Hay called the meeting to order at 5:07 PM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of October 7, 2019 Minutes

Councilor Manwaring made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of October 7, 2019. Ms. Salwen seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon stated that the budget has not changed much from last time. He continued that he has not put expenses in because they are still finalizing the Keene International Festival (KIF) expenses. That is a different line item anyway. The HRC will see it next time. He is waiting for some reimbursements to go through; he knew they would not be through before he was able to get the packet together for tonight. Everything is good.

Councilor Manwaring made a motion to accept the Finance Report. Ms. Morris seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos arrived at 5:09 PM.

4) Committee Discussion
a. MLK Breakfast

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she found contact information for the progressive prosecutor out of Boston, who is no longer with Suffolk County because he started the Prosecutor Impact organization. She continued that the organization educates other prosecutors. She emailed him to ask about the availability and cost of a speaker, but did not hear back.

Ms. Salwen stated that she talked with Annie Patterson; she and Peter Blood are singers/performers and the authors of Rise Up Singing. She continued that she inquired if Ms. Patterson and Mr. Blood would be available to perform at the MLK breakfast. Ms. Patterson replied that she recommends the HRC find a keynote speaker who is not white, but she was willing to consider performing, and her questions for the group are: how many people would be in attendance, and who would they be? What would the pay be? How long would she and Mr. Blood perform for?

Ms. Salwen gave more information about Ms. Patterson's and Mr. Blood's work and history, and asked if anyone has seen them perform and what they think. Chair Hay replied that he thinks they are the wrong color for a MLK event, but they do have roots with Pete Seeger. Mr. Saleh stated that he was very moved by their performance, and thinks they do a good job, and they have his vote.

Ms. Salwen stated that Ms. Patterson is going to talk with Mr. Blood about whether the date works for them. Mr. Bohannon asked if Ms. Salwen has any idea how much payment they would require. Discussion ensued about costs. Mr. Bohannon gave information about the money the City gives to the HRC yearly for programming.

Ms. Salwen asked how long they would play for, and if they should have another/other speakers, and what the format of the event should be. Discussion ensued, and the group recalled that they had decided on roughly 10 AM to 12 PM. Councilor Manwaring stated that there should be another speaker. Ms. Morris stated that a speaker would need to do a welcome/introduction/overview. Discussion ensued about who that person should or could be. Ms. Salwen stated that Ms. Morris is an amazing speaker. Ms. Morris stated that she could either be the speaker or find someone from the college. Mr. Bohannon stated that a 15-minute overview would be good, and the program can say "Reflection on the Day" so they are not nailing down a speaker. He continued that that could be from about 10:15 to 10:30, and then the performers could go from 10:30 to 11:30.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they should determine how many people they are expecting, to determine the food. Ms. Salwen added, and for marketing/advertising. Mr. Bohannon replied that advertising will be easy and effective, done through the City's social media platforms. He continued that that has been successful in the past and he estimates the group would get about 50 or 60 people, and Heberton Hall can accommodate up to 200 people. Discussion continued about how to get people to come

and track how many are coming. Mr. Bohannon stated that any leftover food could be donated to the Community Kitchen.

Chair Hay asked if they should charge, or not, since the event has been done both ways in the past. The group agreed to not charge, but to accept donations. Mr. Bohannon stated that the community wants more events like this, and by not charging, it will grow organically.

Councilor Manwaring asked if they can have a theme. She continued that sometimes nationally there is a theme for MLK Day. Ms. Morris replied that that is a good point, and she will look into that. Brief discussion ensued, and ideas for a theme included somehow including Jonathan Daniels, promoting Indigenous People's Day, LGBTQ issues, or volunteering with Friends of the Library.

Mr. Bohannon summarized that Ms. Salwen will confirm with Ms. Patterson and Mr. Blood about performing, and Ms. Morris will find the theme (from The King Center), and confirm those through him. He will work out an event invitation to get it out before Thanksgiving.

Discussion ensued about how people will be eating while they are sitting at tables and watching the performance. Mr. Bohannon suggested light fare like bagels, muffins, and fruit salad. Others requested more substantial food, and/or food that works for people with differing dietary needs. Mr. Bohannon clarified that the event will be marketed not as a breakfast or brunch, but they can say "refreshments will be served." Discussion ensued and the group decided to call it "Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration" instead of "breakfast." Suggestions for refreshments included cheese, nuts, fruit, hard-boiled eggs, and granola. Mr. Bohannon stated that he will work on a possible menu and bring that to the next HRC meeting.

b. Future Events

Mr. Bohannon stated that he put this on here as a talking point because he was not sure what else to have on the agenda. He asked if anyone has thoughts.

Ms. Morris stated that she is hoping to be able to rent a local movie theater for a showing of the film Harriet, and have an educational piece about it. She continued that she, through Keene State College (KSC), has done this in the past at the Colonial – the theatre works out a deal with them for reduced rate tickets or a bulk rate, and they show the film and a faculty member gives a talk before or after the film. These have been well-attended. They did this for Beasts of the Southern Wild, Selma, and two others. The HRC could co-sponsor an event like this. Discussion ensued about the theaters, logistics, costs, and so on and so forth. HRC members expressed interest. Mr. Bohannon stated that Cohen Hall, here at the library, is another possible location, and has a projector. Ms. Morris shared more information about film screenings and the logistics of hosting them, and the differing costs.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he does not know what other types of events the HRC wants to do. Councilor Manwaring stated that regarding Indigenous People's Day, she met with Jed Crook and his supervisor from KSC. She thinks they are going to put forward a request to have Keene change the holiday. She asked what the HRC can do to support this.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos suggested the HRC write a letter to submit with Mr. Crook and others' presentation to the City Council. Mr. Saleh replied that the HRC had a verbal approval, but a formal letter would be more powerful. Some people are ready to push against it. Ms. Morris agreed that it would be good to have a letter. Mr. Bohannon stated that just a majority vote (of the City Council) counts; it does not have to be unanimous. Chair Hay stated that there was a town in Maine where they were going to change Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day and the Mayor overturned it with an executive move. He continued that there will be pushback no matter what.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he was surprised Mr. Crook and Ms. Roumimper came to the HRC meeting when they did; he thought they would have done this proposal before this year's holiday. Ms. Morris replied that they wanted approval from the College City Commission but there was no quorum on the meeting date they attended. She continued that the Mayor was there at the non-meeting and they just talked informally. The Mayor suggested a proclamation for the time being. There was just not enough time. It did not pan out this year. Mr. Bohannon asked if there was a proclamation this year. Ms. Morris replied yes, and the Mayor read it at KSC on October 14.

Chair Hay stated that they now have 11 months to get the process/proposal done properly. Councilor Manwaring stated that there was a resolution all set up, and she reminded Mr. Crook to not be married to it because it could be changed multiple times before it gets through, if it gets through. She continued that she also told Mr. Crook to bring lots of people to the City Council meeting, because Councilors listen when lots of people show up. Ms. Morris spoke about the students involved in advocating for Indigenous People's Day, and the great work they have been doing. Mr. Bohannon stated that Ms. Morris should encourage the students to move forward with their proposal to the City Council, so they do not lose it.

Mr. Bohannon asked if there is anything the HRC wants to do in February, which they should start thinking about now.

Ms. Morris stated that she has just received a reply email from one of her former students from SIT, Umra Omar, who is Kenyan and was recently honored by CNN Heroes for her work in Kenya, providing medical supplies to women and children in remote villages. She continued that Ms. Omar is coming to KSC in January or February to talk about her work and inspire others. Ms. Morris continued that she will send Mr. Bohannon a link to Ms. Omar's website and to the production that CNN did.

Ms. Salwen asked if the HRC ever talks about the topic of homelessness, which is part of human rights. Ms. Morris replied that that is a good topic. Chair Hay stated that it

should be within the HRC's purview, and it is something they have not taken on. Mr. Bohannon asked for them to say more about how it is part of their purview. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that housing is a human right. Mr. Bohannon replied that they need to define the HRC's scope and boundaries. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked, what would be an appropriate remit for this commission? She continued that they could maybe make recommendations to the City for the best ways to address homelessness, by first learning more. Discussion ensued about the agencies in the city that deal with homelessness. Mr. Bohannon stated that the HRC could not make recommendations about any one agency, but they could certainly learn more about homelessness in the city.

Mr. Bohannon stated that for the past year and a half he has participated in a conversation about homelessness in parks, with other Parks & Recreation directors, which started in 2018 at the national conference. The conversation began because they were all having issues with homelessness in city parks. He continued that they began looking at ways to engage with the homeless population, find out what other communities are doing to advocate for homeless people or help them transition, offer them shelter, meals, and that sort of thing. The only reason he is hesitant to have the HRC take this on is because the City of Keene, outside of the Human Services Department's assistance to people looking for services, does not have funding in the Parks, Recreation, and Facilities (PRF) Department to create any type of outreach. As the PRF Director, he is required to tell homeless people on City property that they have to leave City property within 48 hours, but he does offer resources and outreach from Human Services, who will work with people to get them into a shelter. He tries to help both sides – he does his best to connect homeless people with services, but they do not always accept it. If a tent is seen in the park, he will receive several phone calls from community members asking him to get rid of it. He has to find the balance, which is tricky. Discussion ensued.

Ms. Morris stated that Theresa Siebert in KSC's Sociology Department, and her students, have done some work around town. She continued that maybe Ms. Siebert could come talk with the HRC. Mr. Bohannon replied that there are positive things happening in KSC and KHS communities, regarding the creation of food banks and clothing banks. He continued that there is an opportunity there. The HRC could help generate awareness for those organizations. Discussion ensued about community food banks, including a multicultural one and one for KSC students.

Ms. Salwen asked if it is correct that there are no public restrooms in Keene. Mr. Bohannon replied that is correct. Ms. Morris stated that she heard about a conference for librarians, at which there was a presentation about cities where public libraries are installing showers in the basement. She continued that homeless people can use them, and those libraries have reported that it has been a good thing. There is also a restaurant in Washington, D.C. where the owner feeds anyone who needs food – he negotiates prices and accepts whatever people can pay, and it works well. Discussion continued.

Chair Hay stated that Ms. Salwen brought up one word and it inspired a whole conversation. He continued that they have to do their homework here and learn more about homelessness in the community. Discussion continued about the local

organizations. Chair Hay suggested they invite someone from a shelter in to talk with the HRC. Mr. Bohannon suggested they invite some folks from the homeless community in to a meeting and have a conversation. HRC members agreed.

Mr. Bohannon stated that there are great programs that he would love to try, but just does not have the resources for. For example, there is a program to offer homeless people jobs for the day, helping out in a park – you tell people what time to show up if they are interested, and what the work will be like that day, and then they get paid for the work they do that day and can show up the next day, or every day, if they want, or only do it that one time. That is an example of a program that would be great for the City to run. It is a matter of funding and logistics.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she was thinking about what event they could have in April or May. She asked when Pride is. Ms. Morris replied June. She continued that she knows people are trying to do something in March for the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage. She continued that the HRC could find out more about that. Councilor Manwaring replied that it would be great if they could get all of these events onto a calendar on the website, so everything is in one place, a listing of events going on around the city. Mr. Saleh asked if such a thing exists already. Mr. Bohannon replied that the Keene Sentinel had an events calendar for a while, but it is all dependent on people submitting information. Ms. Salwen asked if the City has a Facebook page. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, but it is not used for outside organizations. Ms. Salwen asked if the HRC could have a Facebook page. Mr. Bohannon replied that that would be allowed, but it would be up to him to administer it, and where would the content come from. Discussion continued. Mr. Bohannon stated that he would look into ways for the HRC to be more visible.

5) New Business

6) Adjourn – Next meeting is Monday, December 2, 2019

Chair Hay stated that meeting on Mondays is not working for him. He continued that meeting on Wednesdays was not working for Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos. When should they meet? Discussion ensued. The group agreed to keep their next meeting scheduled for Monday, December 2, and then discuss the schedule again.

The meeting adjourned at 6:14 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker