

City of Keene  
New Hampshire

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

**Monday, December 16, 2019**

**5:00 PM**

**Keene Public Library,  
Booras Room**

**Members Present:**

Bill Hay, Chair  
Jennifer Carroll  
Dottie Morris (Arrived at 5:06 PM)  
Janis Manwaring, Councilor  
Mohammed Saleh  
Nancy Salwen

**Staff Present:**

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation &  
Facilities Director

**Members Not Present:**

Pamela Knight  
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos

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

Chair Hay called the meeting to order at 5:02 PM and roll call was conducted.

**2) Approval of November 4, 2019 meeting minutes**

Councilor Manwaring made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of November 4, 2019. Mr. Saleh seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

**3) Finance Report**

Mr. Bohannon stated that he added the second column for the Keene International Festival (KIF) and their current financial status. He continued that he did not break down the KIF's expenses; he did not think that was necessary for this group. The HRC was the fiscal agent. This shows where they are at. They did well this year and will do good things again next year. Chair Hay replied that it looks pretty straightforward.

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

**4) Committee Discussion**

**a. Homelessness in Keene**

Chair Hay asked Rob Waters to speak. Mr. Waters introduced himself, stating that he works for Southwest Community Services (SCS). He continued that his role is Coordinated Entry Manager and Homeless Outreach. He covers Cheshire and Sullivan Counties, and makes contact with anyone displaced due to homelessness, eviction, or similar circumstances. He works with the community partners and homeless people, the Parks and Recreation Department, City welfare, and any department that might come into contact with people experiencing homelessness. Working with partners such as Hundred Nights, he works to make sure people are getting the services they need, understanding what services people need, and making referrals. Coordinated entry is the process by which people can access services faster. His role is to try and understand all of the programs available to people experiencing homelessness. SCS has a lot of housing programs, which can help with a security deposit or first month's rent. There are supporting housing programs specifically for people who have been displaced or are in shelter.

Dottie Morris arrived at 5:06 PM.

Mr. Waters continued that if someone is staying on a friend's couch or paying for a hotel they might not qualify for certain programs, but SCS has gap fillers like assistance with first month's rent or a security deposit. Also, in his role, he has to know what community partners such as the Monadnock Center for Violence Prevention (MCVP) have available for survivors of domestic violence, or what the Division for Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) has in terms of housing reunification vouchers, which work similarly to a Section 8 voucher. He needs to know all the ins and outs of these resources, because funds are finite. They cannot just pour everyone into one bucket and use up all the funds, instead of matching people with the right resources given at the right time, because A) people might repeat and end up homeless again if they did not get the right supports, or B) a funding source could run out, when they could have used other funds from other places. He has to "card catalogue" all the programs, so if someone tells him what their situation is he can plug and play where they should go and what referrals to do. The outreach piece is twofold – 1) people walk into his office or schedule appointments to talk about services, and 2) he walks in the woods and looks for campsites. Mr. Bohannon lets him know when he sees things. Usually it is a one-off, like someone camping in or near Robin Hook Park or in a cemetery, where people do not usually go, and if they do, he needs to know. He lets them know they cannot stay there but talks about where they can go.

Mr. Waters continued that another component is helping people find shelters. Shelters are full right now. Thankfully, St. James opened an overflow shelter to alleviate some pressure Hundred Nights had already, before they even open for the season. They are grateful for that. That fills a gap till the United Church of Christ (UCC) opens their shelter the first of the year. That drastically reduces the number of people in the woods, but there are still 2 or 3 people that have places in the woods. He goes to see them once or twice a week, reminds them how cold it is, and they sometimes do not like to hear it. He has been doing this job over four years, and one of those men who is camping has been camping even longer than that. Mr. Waters shared a bit of this man's story,

regarding how his tent and belongings were damaged when the person he asked to watch his belongings while he was at work failed to do so. This experience, during a blizzard, got the man to finally accept shelter on that occasion and fill out a housing application despite his doubts. He continued that this man has a part-time job but does not think housing would be worth it because he would not have enough money left over once rent is paid. The situation is different for every person. Not every “mom with two kids” is processed the same way. Everyone “has different stuff in their briefcase, so to speak.” Everyone comes from different places and circumstances.

Mr. Waters continued that a two-year study showed that out of approximately 355 people that SCS housed, there was a retention rate of 85%. There is a lot of public misconception about people experiencing homelessness, such as the myth that it is the same people “doing the same things” and in a constant cycle of homelessness, brief housing, and more homelessness, and it is not the case. There are a few people who do not want services or maybe do not understand services available, and that is where his role comes in. He tells people about their options, including information about their right to appeal, say, a denial for income-based housing. Sometimes people think that if they got in trouble with the law as a teenager, they should not bother to apply for housing years later, but that is not true, so he educates them. He also does education for inmates in Cheshire and Sullivan County, regarding housing resources they will be eligible for. A lot of his work is education, referrals, and re-housing and case management.

Mr. Waters asked if anyone had questions or comments.

Councilor Manwaring stated that this Thursday is the National Homelessness Vigil. She continued that at UCC, there is an open house from 4:30 to 5:30 PM, then a gathering outside with candles and a brief service and saying the names of people who have died.

Mr. Waters replied that he is part of that every year. He continued that usually it is on December 21, which is the longest night of the year. This year he will be out of town during the event. The full schedule is: resource sharing from 4:30 to 5:30 PM, then in the kitchen area, there will be songs, poems, the Governor’s Proclamation read, and then they will encourage everyone to go outside, light a candle, and walk to the gazebo, where the names will be read. Taps will be played for deceased Veterans. He spoke about how some people were saying it was too cold to have an outdoor event, and this year it was changed to mostly indoors to encourage more people to come. Ms. Salwen replied that feeling the cold is part of the point of the event. Dr. Morris replied yes, there are even overnight, outdoor events in support of homelessness awareness. Mr. Waters replied that Keene having that type of event could be a couple years down the road.

Ms. Carroll asked where the main centers for help are outside of Keene. Mr. Waters replied that a lot of the resources are in Keene. He continued that every town has a Human Services Department that is supposed to jump in and help, but you do not hear so much about services in Walpole, Charlestown, Unity, and so on and so forth, because those towns are so small. If someone walked in to the Human Services Department in a small town like that, saying “Mr. so-and-so is my landlord and he’s about to evict me for

non-payment, please help,” the person behind the desk would most likely reply with something like, “Oh, I’ve known Mr. so-and-so since he was three! He will not evict you; I’ll talk with him.” There is that small town feel. With bigger cities, there are multiple landlords, doing what they do, and the City will jump in and try to help. Many of the resources are centralized in larger cities, like Keene, Claremont, Newport, and Hinsdale. If people come from neighboring towns it is because the shelters are here, and mental health and recovery services are here, and are not available in small towns. Keene is the hub for Cheshire County.

Ms. Carroll asked if he has noticed a change with housing availability and landlords being more willing to work with organizations such as SCS. Mr. Waters replied yes, there has been a lot of work done in educating landlords and trying to reduce stigma. He continued that some landlords believe that people with section 8 housing are “dirty,” or on drugs, or prone to wreck apartments. Landlords cannot legally say no to potential tenants because of Section 8 but might discriminate in other ways or give another reason for saying no. A lot of education/stigma-reduction work is being done, by him and SCS and other organizations, too. New Hampshire has the lowest housing vacancy rate in the country. That is not a bad thing overall. But it is a problem when there are more people than there are available homes. In other states, such as MA and VT, landlords are allowed to charge double security deposits, so there are more vacancies, because many people cannot afford to pay that much up front. Here in NH you cannot ask for a security deposit more than the amount of the first month’s rent. That has been the biggest problem – too many people trying for the same apartment. It used to be a combination of low vacancy rates and landlords’ lack of knowledge. But now, if someone says “I don’t have enough for the security deposit, can you work with me?” the potential landlord will direct people to SCS or other services, because they know how it works, so that is a huge change. Or landlords will call SCS and ask, “Do you or your program have anyone who’s looking for a place? I will do what I can to work with them.” A lot of the supportive housing programs deal with fair market rent or rent reasonableness, which there are HUD requirements for. In some cases landlords are willing to either include utilities or lower the rent so they can meet those HUD requirements so they can put someone in the program. That has been a blessing. In all counties he covers, he is finding that landlords have become more educated or trained and more ready to accept those programs. But the vacancy rate is what is so difficult now.

Mr. Saleh asked how there is a shortage of rental properties, when people are leaving the state and NH’s population is declining. He continued that those two contradict each other. Mr. Waters replied that all of a sudden in Keene, in the past couple of months, other apartments have opened up, such as the Colony Mill Apartments – but those are expensive. Ms. Carroll stated that she knows in some areas of the state, most of the available apartments have turned into Airbnb properties, although she has not heard that is an issue in Keene. Mr. Waters replied no, but there are issues with this being a college town – for example, landlords commonly charge about \$1,600 per month for a 5-bedroom rental; or they can include internet, cable, electricity, and heat, and charge \$650 per room on a 5-bedroom unit and that is a good business decision for them, especially if the students out-of-state parents are paying that rent. But that is dialed back a little, too.

Landlords get older and tired of fixing the same holes in the walls and picking up the hundreds of beer cans.

Dr. Morris stated that there is lower enrollment at KSC. KSC has agreed to try and keep more students on campus. Mr. Waters replied yes, they will probably see results from that in two or three years. Yes, young people are moving out, but there are still families here. The number of people experiencing homelessness is declining, although not as fast as we would like. So yes, young people moving out of NH is helping some of the folks who have been on housing waiting lists get in, but it is not enough still. Lots of people leave NH and miss it and come back when they are a little older. They discover rent hikes.

Councilor Manwaring asked what SCS does for folks like the ones in the paper recently, the family with five children. Mr. Waters replied that that situation is pretty tough. He continued that they can do landlord/tenant mediation, since it is easier to keep housing than to find new housing. Shelters through SCS have smaller rooms, like four beds per room, and that is not enough space for a family of seven. The Human Services Department can sometimes put families in a hotel room for a very short time, but that is very rare. There is not money for that often. And motel owners need to be willing to accept the money. Once, a hotel owner let a homeless couple stay for two days and they stole a TV, so now the hotel owner does not allow homeless people to stay there, even though that theft was a one-time thing. The hotel would rather forego the money than take the risk. Ms. Salwen replied that it sounds like it is really hard for folks to get a break.

Mr. Waters continued that to return to the topic of a two-parent family with five children, SCS might ask, can the children (or some of them) go with other family members and SCS could shelter just the parents? Or can an older child stay at a friend's house? They try to buy some time to problem solve and get the family back together, to do it in a safe way. This community does really well – the Greater Keene Homeless Coalition meets regularly, with all of the service providers at the table. There is collaboration from SCS, Monadnock Family Services, Monadnock Developmental Services, the Keene Police Department, DCYF, and so on and so forth. It is about finding the right supports and bringing everyone together. Everyone works together. This means organizations are not being pit against each other, and everyone is holding each other accountable. They once got a family of five a bus ticket to go stay with family in another state. It was \$450 and needed to happen right away, so three organizations shared the expense. There is a lot of that kind of collaboration in the community.

Mr. Saleh asked what the first step is for a person who becomes homeless. Who do they call? Mr. Waters replied 211 is the hotline to call to get linked up with resources. He continued that they do an intake over the phone, and the 211 staff gives the person's information to the appropriate people. That way, a person experiencing homelessness does not have to repeat their story over and over. The 211 staff gets information about the person's name, contact information, family size, story (for example: facing eviction by the end of the week), who the person has already called, and so on and so forth. Then

when 211 gives the information to Mr. Waters, he can talk with the person about more details, and ideas and plans, and then he (Mr. Waters) emails 211 back and gives the result of the conversation. So if the same person calls 211 again, the 211 staff member has the updated information. It is a matter of constant communication to make sure if the person keeps falling out of the temporary solution, it does not mean starting from scratch. If you call from a NH cell phone, you reach the NH 211, but if you call from a cell phone that's based in a different state (say, VT or ME), you will reach the 211 in the state the phone is associated with, even if you are physically in NH, so that is something for people to keep in mind.

Mr. Saleh asked about the opiate crisis. Do people call for emergency shelter a lot? Mr. Waters replied yes, emergency shelter is a frequent request. He continued that it is about problem solving, when shelters are full. Maybe a tank of gas would help people get to where they need to go and SCS can help with that, or a local church or another organization can. Sometimes older folks get scammed by someone pretending to be someone they are not, to get money, which is called "catfishing." He shared a story as an example, of an elderly Florida couple who came to Cheshire County because of information about a caretaking opportunity that turned out to be a scam, and SCS helped them get a bus back to Florida.

Chair Hay and the committee thanked Mr. Waters for doing the work he does and for coming to speak tonight. Mr. Waters replied that he has always wanted to have a job that helps people so much. He continued that he is never in a rush to leave at the end of the day.

#### **b. MLK Event**

Mr. Bohannon thanked Ms. Salwen for lining up Annie Patterson and Peter Blood to perform at the event. He continued that the event will not really be a breakfast – it will be from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM, and there will be coffee service, tea, and some type of breakfast snack.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he has reserved both the KSC Alumni Center and Heberton Hall here at the KPL. He asked which location the committee wants to use. Brief discussion ensued, and the group chose Heberton Hall.

Ms. Salwen spoke about the confirmation email she received from the performers, who will arrive around 9:00 or 9:30 AM with their own sound system. She continued that they want to know the size of the room, and also whether the group wants a concert with a "sing-along feel," or if they expect people will be chatting amongst each other during the singing. The committee replied, concert with a sing-along feel. Ms. Salwen stated that they also want to know if other speakers will need to use the sound system. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will find out and confirm that. Ms. Salwen asked if the performance would go past 11:45 AM. Mr. Bohannon replied no.

Mr. Bohannon asked if Dr. Morris is okay with giving a brief introduction/welcome, thanking people for being there and giving some information about the event. Dr. Morris replied yes. Ms. Salwen asked if Dr. Morris is familiar with Annie and Peter. Dr. Morris asked her to send her a link with information. Mr. Bohannon stated that Dr. Morris will introduce Annie and Peter, then they will perform, and they can do a brief question and answer session, and then that is the end of the event.

Dr. Morris stated that she forwarded Jay Kahn's email to Mr. Bohannon. She continued that Mr. Kahn wanted to know what the committee was planning for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. She was not sure if there would be publicity to put out. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, there will be – he has staff that will create a flyer, and they will create a Facebook event and start sending that out.

Mr. Bohannon asked Dr. Morris if she knows whether the college catering service does off-campus catering. Dr. Morris replied yes, they do. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will contact them and inquire about their popular "breakfast cookie," which they created a few years ago for a Healthy Monadnock meeting and have kept going due to demand. Ms. Salwen expressed hopes that the food will be ample enough for people. Councilor Manwaring asked if there can be fruit, too. Discussion continued about the food.

### **c. Future Event: Colonial: We Shall Overcome**

Mr. Bohannon reported that The Colonial is having an event on January 18, 2020 and offering discounted tickets. He continued that the committee is welcome to attend, and he encourages them to spread the word. It should be a great event. Chair Hay replied that he cannot wait. Mr. Bohannon stated that a lot of people have asked if the HRC is going to do something again, and he said yes. This is the first step. Next year, they are looking to collaborate and do more. They are moving in the right direction.

## **5) New Business**

### **a. Green Dot Process**

Mr. Bohannon stated that Leslie Johnson contacted him, looking to do the Green Dot Process here, through this committee. He continued that it has been done here before. Dr. Morris stated that it is a bystander training. Mr. Bohannon asked if the committee is interested. He continued that if so, this would be a discussion at the next meeting. If they are not interested, he can call Ms. Johnson back and tell her that. Ms. Salwen and Chair Hay asked questions about what Ms. Johnson had in mind, and Mr. Bohannon replied that he does not know. Chair Hay asked if they should have her come next month. Councilor Manwaring suggested putting Ms. Johnson and the Green Dot Process on next month's agenda.

Chair Hay asked if there was any other new business. Mr. Bohannon replied that Pam Knight has resigned, and there will thus be a vacant spot for a new member. He continued that they should also discuss the meeting date, which seems to be problematic. Discussion ensued about everyone's schedules, availability, and preferences. Chair Hay

stated that it seems like Mondays will not be a problem in the New Year. Mr. Bohannon stated that they will stay with the current schedule of meeting the first Monday of each month.

**6) Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, January 6, 2020**

The meeting adjourned at 5:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Respectfully edited by,  
Andy Bohannon, Staff