

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 2, 2020

5:00 PM

**Booras Room,
Keene Public Library**

Members Present:

William Hay, Chair
Dr. Mohammed Saleh, Vice Chair
Janis Manwaring, City Councilor
Dr. Dottie Morris
Dr. Shaun Filiault

Staff Present:

Andrew Bohannon, Parks, Recreation, and
Facilities Director

Members Not Present:

Nancy Salwen
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos
Jennifer Carroll

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Hay called the meeting to order at 5:14 PM.

2) Approval of February 3, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Chair Hay and Mr. Bohannon noted the following correction to last month's minutes: on page 2, Chair "Hays" should be "Hay."

Councilor Manwaring made a motion to accept the meeting minutes of February 3, 2020, as amended. Dr. Saleh seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon reported that the current balance in the commission's account is the same as last month: \$4,097.43.

Dr. Morris made a motion to accept the finance report. Councilor Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

4) Committee Discussion

a. Dr. Bettina Love – KSC in March

Dr. Morris reported that Dr. Love had to postpone and will probably come in the fall. She continued that they are thinking of scheduling it during new student orientation.

b. Event Focus

- i. Collaborate Partners**
- ii. Collaborate Marketing**
- iii. 4 Seasons**

Mr. Bohannon reported that he has been talking with the Mayor about this committee and trying to make sure there is a broader reach and recognition, and more community exposure. He continued that he has talked with Ms. Carroll already and Dr. Morris helped him connect the dots with Hunter Kirschner at KSC. He, Mr. Kirschner, and Ms. Carroll met and talked about events and marketing. There are four events, one in each season: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in the winter, Holi Festival in the spring, Pride in the summer, and the Keene International Festival (KIF) in the fall. They can brand the events as collaborative events hosted by the Human Rights Commission/City of Keene, the Keene Historical Society, and Keene State College. All of those entities' logos would be on the promotional materials, along with other sponsors, but there would be a special logo designed with the three entities encapsulated together to promote diversity. They want to know what the commission's thoughts are about this idea. The idea was: let's not bite off more than we can chew. Those four events are a good amount.

Dr. Saleh asked if this does not mean changing their action plan, other than formalizing the collaboration between these four organizations. Mr. Bohannon replied yes. Chair Hay stated that it kind of worked out that way. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, it was leading that way – they just wanted to formalize that they can each use each other's logos, and show the community that they are collaborating. He continued that it is important for KSC to be recognized outside of the campus. They are doing a lot, and they welcome the public to the campus. Also, the city is welcoming the campus to the community. And the Historical Society has a broad reach and these are the types of events they are looking to do. This works out well.

Councilor Manwaring stated that it would be great if they could get someone who is more involved in the KIF to be on the HRC. Mr. Bohannon replied that he and Ms. Carroll are very involved with the KIF. He continued that Mayor Hansel is trying to create more alternate positions for this commission, to help the commission grow. Dr. Saleh replied that that would help, because many times they are one person short of a quorum.

Dr. Saleh asked if there are four entities collaborating. Mr. Bohannon replied no, just three, which is not to say that others will not be a part of the logos sometimes. They are just trying to make sure the three logos are together celebrating diversity and collaboration within the community.

Dr. Saleh asked, isn't KIF organized by just the City and the Historical Society? Mr. Bohannon replied yes, but KSC's logo would be part of it, too. They could have campus recognition and get students involved.

Dr. Saleh stated that he wants to talk about collaboration with the immigrant community. He continued that the immigrant community has had two social gatherings, one at Brewbakers and one at the Library. There is a certain overlap in the participants and interests, with that group and the group organizing KIF, so there is potential for collaboration. This is the kind of event international students from KSC could benefit from, discovering the other immigrant community in the city.

Mr. Bohannon stated that his conversation with Mr. Kirschner was very positive. He continued that he suggested to Mr. Kirschner that they share information with each other, such as the HRC's agenda packets each month or things that come up that the other might be interested in. The opportunity might be there to share information and contact about particular events. He, Mr. Kirschner, and Ms. Carroll all agree that they each have enough on their plates and do not want to add more, but if others in the community want to step forward they are welcome to, and the three entities could promote what others are doing.

Dr. Saleh stated that the person spearheading the effort for gatherings of the immigrant community has since left the group, but they are trying to communicate with people and see. Mr. Bohannon replied that anyone from the group is welcome to give him a call. Councilor Manwaring stated that maybe someone from the group could come to a HRC meeting and talk about what they are doing. Chair Hay replied that he does not think that group is planning an event right now, but the one he went to had amazing food, music, and poetry, from various countries.

Dr. Morris stated that as the Human Rights Commission, they want to make sure they do more beyond "food, fabric, fun, and festival," which is often what people think about when they think about diversity. She continued that it is important for them to take on supporting the disenfranchised groups living here in Keene. She, too, loves celebrating cultures, but they also need to go deeper. Dr. Saleh agreed.

Chair Hay stated that in this community, having celebrations is good because it wakes people up – it is a "Hey, we're here" message. Mr. Bohannon stated that it is important to do more "culture dives" and have other support or welcoming mechanisms, or an educational component that provides people with opportunities to come together and talk and support one another. Chair Hay replied that that almost begs for a comment about Project Home. Mr. Bohannon replied that he did not put that on the agenda, but yes, they can talk about it under "New Business."

c. June Event

Mr. Bohannon stated that Dr. Filiault has information to share. He continued that collectively, they have ruled out the idea of a parade.

Dr. Filiault stated that he was put in touch with Matt Wyatt, the Executive Director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Rochester, NH. He continued that that group was the spearhead for NH Pride in 2016. They talked about what it looks like when a smaller community takes on the creation of a pride event. He says a parade is generally not realistic, and it is better to have a block party or community event, or to have a week-long event. Pride flags in downtown windows work well, through a collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce. It raises community awareness. They could get in touch with the Chamber and downtown businesses to see if they could do the flags. Rochester had a block party, bands, local merchants set up for food, and so on and so forth. The brought other organizations down for information, like the NH chapter of the ACLU, pride groups in the state, PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), and others. They had drag queens, performances, etc., for a one-day event, then there were other things throughout the week. Mr. Wyatt said that June tends to be a congested month, so a Pride event does not even need to be in June. Rochester held Pride in August to get away from the “Pride burnout” in June. The City Council could declare any month as Pride Month in Keene. It could be September to get the college involved. Rochester’s initial budget was about \$1,000, which was not bad. They received a Chamber of Commerce grant for the collaboration. It is an event with a fairly low impact financially, but has a great impact on the community, regarding increasing visibility of a marginalized population.

Mr. Bohannon stated that that type of event is exactly what he, Mr. Kirschner, and Ms. Carroll talked about. Mr. Kirschner was looking for bands, and it would be really cool to get a drag queen show here. He began conversations with Vicky Pittman at the Colonial Theatre. There is some opportunity there. He is not sure it will be super difficult to pull together. He will keep talking with Mr. Kirschner and keep the HRC updated. Dr. Filiault added that Susan MacNeil might have potential contacts for drag queen performers.

Dr. Morris stated that one year, many trans students had a major problem with a drag queen show – some people were being disrespectful to the performers and not understanding the culture, and some people felt that having the impact of that event caused more harm than good. They had to have an educational piece about how drag fits into LGBTQ culture. If this Pride event being planned includes drag, they should first help the community understand where drag fits in the LGBTQ culture. Dr. Filiault replied that he could do that. He continued that they need to recognize the trans community, too, and involve someone from the trans community in the planning, because no one else can speak to that. He continued that Mr. Kirschner could pull someone in for that piece. It is about being culturally sensitive.

Mr. Bohannon thanked Dr. Morris for the information and insight. He continued that he will follow up and see what they can do.

5) New Business

Councilor Manwaring stated that first she has old business – will the commission continue to meet on Mondays? Do Mondays work for enough members? Discussion ensued. Mr. Bohannon stated that he will send out a Doodle poll to everyone, with all of the various options, and they will go from there.

Dr. Saleh stated that Ms. Carroll and the organizer from the Keene Indian Association proposed that following the Holi Festival at KSC, it would be useful to have a similar event for Ramadan. He continued that it would draw attention to the end of fasting, which is a big cultural aspect of Muslim community, to counter the anti-Muslim sentiment. He told them he would bring it up at this committee. There are maybe 20 to 30 Muslims in the community. Maybe there could be a potluck and an educational piece where someone from the Muslim community talks about the cultural significance of Ramadan. There was an event like that a couple years ago at Wheelock Park and it was not a collaboration; it was just the Muslim community. The Keene Indian Association has some Muslim members. It is something to explore.

In response to commission members' questions, Dr. Saleh explained more about Ramadan, a Muslim cultural celebration that begins in the middle of April. You fast from dawn to dusk but breaking the fast is considered a community event, a socializing event. There is a certain amount of gravity. The fasting can be difficult, because you don't even have water until dusk. Ramadan is a time to reflect.

Mr. Bohannon stated that coming back to an earlier conversation, the celebration of International Women's Day is a potluck event in Cohen Hall, and if the commission wants to move toward that type of thing for Ramadan, he bets Ms. Carroll would jump on that. Dr. Morris replied that she would, too.

Dr. Saleh stated that they had a preliminary conversation last year after Holi. Mr. Bohannon stated that he thinks that conversation did not go anywhere, only because of the amount of things Ms. Carroll had on her plate. But they can talk about it again. Dr. Saleh replied that he will talk with the Muslim community and report back at the next meeting. Mr. Bohannon asked him to connect with him before the meeting, so he can connect with Ms. Carroll.

6) **Adjourn – Next Meeting is Monday, April 6, 2020**

The meeting adjourned at 5:51 PM when the quorum was lost.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Edits respectfully submitted by,
Andy Bohannon, Staff 3/10/2020