

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, July 6, 2020

5:00 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

William Hay, Chair
Jennifer Carrol
Dr. Mohammed Saleh
Nancy Salwen
Dr. Shaun Filiault
Sofia Cunhas-Vasconcelos
Dr. Dottie Morris
Councilor Janice Manwaring

Staff Present:

Andrew Bohannon, Parks, Recreation, and
Facilities Director
Tara Kessler, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Mayor George Hansel

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Hay called the meeting to order at 5:02 PM and read a prepared statement explaining how the Emergency Order #12, pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04 issued by the Governor of New Hampshire, waives certain provisions of RSA 91-A (which regulates the operation of public body meetings) during the declared COVID-19 State of Emergency. Roll call was conducted. Mr. Bohannon welcomed Mayor George Hansel, and guests Daniel Smith and Hanisi Smith, and Pastor Nic Penaranda.

2) Approval of March 2, 2020 Minutes

Dr. Morris made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 2, 2020. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos seconded the motion, which passed by a unanimous roll call vote.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she has a correction: the title should be “Dr.” for Shaun Filiault and Mohammed Saleh (not “Mr.”).

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon stated that there is no financial change to the committee. He continued that the balance is \$4,097.43, and that carries over. This is a new fiscal year and \$500 will be coming in from the City of Keene and he will update the committee when that happens.

4) Mayor Hansel Discussion

Mayor Hansel stated that he wanted to check in with the committee and provide an update on some activities and ideas they had. He continued that when he first talked to the committee in January or February he talked about the committee's potential role in helping him make sure the City has diverse representation in its boards and commissions. He makes over 100 nominations to boards and commissions. Some are quasi-judicial, like the Zoning Board of Adjustment and the Planning Board. Some are advisory, such as the HRC and many others. Serving on one of these boards and commissions is a way for people to get a foot in the door and learn about how city government works and experience it. It is important to have diversity. It is ultimately up to the Mayor to find these people and ask them to join the groups but he sees a real opportunity for this group to play a role in that and help the Mayor to widen the number of people they are looking at. The committee could make sure the City is getting good representation from a lot of different communities in the city. This is not political. He would expect the committee to make sure they are striving for diversity of thought, diversity of backgrounds, and lots of other things. The way he sees this working is for the committee, on an every-other-month or quarterly basis, to help put together some potential nominees for the vacancies.

Mayor Hansel stated that he made an important change, which the City Council approved – they have expanded board/committee/commission membership to allow five alternate members on every committee. There is a lot of interest and he ran out of room, because there are statutory limitations on the number of full time slots available, so they expanded alternate slots. That will broaden the number of people that can participate. It also gives more flexibility. He currently has a lot of alternate member slots to fill - at least one on every committee. So, there is a lot of opportunity to get involved. He is just starting this out and he has made a couple nominations recently. He is slowing that down until he and the HRC get to a process they can all agree on. He welcomes input and hopes the committee is willing to take this on. He hopes this becomes a tradition that goes on beyond his term as Mayor. The City Clerk sent Mr. Bohannon a couple documents the HRC should look at – the current vacancies, and also the Mayor's "cheat sheet guide" that the City Clerk put together for part of his orientation. It talks about what the committees do and what the requirements are for the nominees. He hopes Mr. Bohannon can forward those documents to the members. The HRC can come up with their own process for this; the process does not have to be directed by the Mayor. He would appreciate getting some recommendations for the vacancies from the HRC at their earliest convenience.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he wants to make sure the committee understands: if they know individuals who want to come forward and serve it would be the committee's responsibility to send them to the Mayor's Office and not vet the people themselves. He continued that it is not the HRC's responsibility to debate the merits of a certain person for any specific committee. The

HRC's role would be to come up with names of people who they suggest would be a good fit, and send those names to the Mayor, and the Mayor would make the appointment, not the HRC. Mayor Hansel replied yes, that is correct. He continued that a good way to work it would be to solicit ideas from the committee, and have a 'nomination form' – the HRC could tell people to fill out the interest form that is online under the "Boards & Commissions" page of the City's website. If an HRC member wants to put someone forward and have a conversation with him about why they feel the person is a good candidate, that is perfectly acceptable. It would not be okay to debate a person's merits in a public HRC meeting. That is what they are trying to avoid; they do not want to talk about someone in a public meeting without their permission.

Mayor Hansel stated that he also wanted to mention the recent confirmation of the Ad Hoc Committee on Social Justice and Community Safety. That is being headed by Dr. Morris and Superintendent Richard Van Wickler. It is a targeted task force. He, Dr. Morris, and Superintendent Van Wickler talked the other week and came up with an aggressive meeting schedule. That task force's work will develop a report with some recommendations and it may be within the realm of the HRC's scope to make sure the recommendations are put into place, and keep watch over that, and continue the work after the report comes out.

Dr. Saleh asked, regarding the Ad Hoc Committee, is there a need or opportunity for the HRC to be present in some of the conversations that will be happening? Mayor Hansel replied that anyone is welcome to attend and participate in those meetings, which will initially happen via Zoom. He continued that anyone interested should talk with the committee chairs. Dr. Morris and Superintendent Van Wickler will be looking to involve the public more, and on an on-going basis. There is a lot of interest in that. He is not sure what form that will take but he knows the committee chairs are thinking about it. Dr. Morris replied yes, it is their intent to get as much community input as possible. Mayor Hansel stated that the Ad Hoc Committee's report will be submitted to the City Council and he expects it to be submitted to the HRC, too, possibly for action but at least for them to talk about.

Mayor Hansel stated that he wants to expedite the nominations process as much as possible and asked if the HRC could get that going within the next month or two. He continued that he has nominations he needs to make and he has been holding back.

Dr. Filiault asked, regarding the nominations: In what manner do the suggestions given by the HRC differ from the suggestions of any other community member? Mayor Hansel replied that it is potentially more official, coming from the HRC, and it will be an organized process for the HRC to solicit these names and put them into contention. He continued that he assumes the HRC is talking about the need for representation from the different groups and places in the community. He assumes that through the HRC's work they will get to know a broader array of people. That is his hope. Having all the HRC members out there thinking about this, reaching out to people, and soliciting names, will stretch far beyond what he could do as Mayor. Mr. Bohannon stated that he will put this on the next agenda.

5) **Monadvocacy Discussion**

Mr. Bohannon stated that he is part of a small group that meets at the Cheshire Medical Center, and Dan Smith, CEO of the Keene YMCA, brought forward the topic of “Monadvocacy,” and he thought it would be perfect fit the HRC. He continued that Mr. Smith’s daughter Hanisi Smith has been a part of this and has played the Monadvocacy game. Pastor Nic Penaranda is joining the meeting from the Chicago area. These folks are here to have a conversation with the HRC about what is happening out there, and given the various discussions that have been happening nationally, he thought this was a good way to begin a conversation about something that might be able to happen here in Keene. He asked Mr. Smith or Pastor Nic to speak.

Mr. Smith stated that in those conversations they were looking for ways for everyone to have a greater awareness of systemic racism and how it plays into society as a whole. He continued that his daughter attended a camp in Michigan, where Ms. Penaranda led a game called Monadvocacy. He asked her to introduce it.

Ms. Penaranda thanked the group for the invitation to present this. She shared her background: she is originally from New York, and has a Bachelor’s degree in sociology and history, and a Master’s in Business Administration, and a divinity education. She has been trying to combine all of these different things. In the fall of 2018 she was asked by her national church to give a presentation on racial justice. The presentation would be to a teenage, predominantly white audience. Her question was how she could do it differently. She thought, why not talk about racial justice through play? Monadvocacy is like a Sociology 101 class through play, and its design is based on a well-known board game. The idea is: even though the original game is corrupt and based on capitalism, there is a bigger world that happens there. She wondered, in creating Monadvocacy, what if everyone who came in had a different level of power and privilege? It is all based on facts, statistics, and personal life experience.

Ms. Penaranda stated that to give a run through of the game, everyone comes in and gets a different level of power and privilege, adjusted to the average income and access of a white man. The white man is the control. For example, you can play with the power and privilege of an Asian man, who on average makes \$1.18 for every white man’s dollar; or with the power and privilege of an Indigenous woman in the United States, who makes 56 cents compared to a white man’s dollar. Not everyone collects \$200 for passing go or starts with the same money. The board is influenced by the neighborhoods of Chicago and the different terms and policies in place. There is a redlining area, and a permit parking location, and reverse redlining areas, and the 1%, and so on and so forth. On the board itself, there are different things determining where you have access to and what you can actually do. In the reverse red lining area, for example, if you do not an accumulated wealth of \$2,000 and you are playing with the power and privilege of a person of color, you cannot buy in that area. If you are playing with the power and privilege of an Indigenous woman and are starting off with less money than the white man, you have to go around the board 10 times with nothing happening to you in order to even get to the ballfield of being able to afford it. That is how they can talk about race and justice not as one person’s

relationship with another person, but a system's relationship to a group of people. That is what is really important here in these discussions. It is not solely about one person's relationship with another person, but how systems have been set up to put different people in different places. The outcomes always look different in the game. It is not that everyone you expect to fail will fail. But it helps you see the hardships in cards that get played with different policies getting put in place, all based on real things that have happened. And the game allows for players to stop and have a conversation as they go, and see how they are operating, what their strategies are, and what each person brings into it. Each person brings their own background, and their own relationship with money, and their own understanding of how to play the game.

Ms. Penaranda continued that she has played this a lot now, with junior high, high, college students, and adults. For a lot of people there is always something to learn. It is not exclusively a black/white situation, or a man/woman situation. There are many perspectives the game tries to incorporate. There has to be a call to action after the game, and that is: how this game/facilitation will influence how we live our lives and how we advocate for a more equitable world afterwards. Later today she will be playing the game with a seminary group and recording it for a larger audience.

Mr. Smith stated that when they were talking about this game they were thinking about bringing Ms. Penaranda to the Keene community to have multiple people play the game in multiple settings, with her facilitating conversations about it. He asked his daughter to share her thoughts.

Hanisi Smith stated that the game is good at illustrating systematic oppression. She continued that "systematic oppression" is a term people might hear often without really understanding what it means. Sometimes when talking about racism people might mention systematic oppression but then the focus of the conversation is on people's relationships with other people and interpersonal experiences about racism. So she thought this game was a good visual representation, and interactive game that helps people understand that there is a lot that minorities cannot control. She played as a Latina woman, and the game ended for her when someone pulled a card saying ICE had raided their homes. The game was really impactful and she enjoyed the conversations she had with other players.

Ms. Penaranda stated that she wants to clarify: the point of that card was to have a conversation about what silencing means, and also the assumption that an ICE raid is directed toward the Latino community. How many people have been taken in or have to be silent because of their relationships with people who are undocumented?

Mr. Smith asked if anyone had questions. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked how they see this playing out. Would they break a large group up into smaller groups to play the game, as kind of a conference event? Is that how it works? Or is it done sort of as a game show so that more people can participate at the same time? Ms. Penaranda replied that she has done it with small groups, and in a group of 40, for example, broken up in teams of 5 people who have to work together. That has been a good method. She prefers having teams. It can be done kind of as a

game show. She will be recording a session of it on Zoom tonight, which will be a different experience and she will be able to get a better sense of how flexible the game is.

Ms. Salwen stated that she thinks about who in the community they could bring this game to. She continued that she thinks the people who could benefit the most from it are not the people who would think about coming. How could they get this to people who could really have a change in perspective? Mr. Bohannon replied that he could see it being offered to the middle and high schools and Keene State College (KSC), people at the Library and the Rec Center, the YMCA, Historical Society, and so on and so forth. He continued that they have a lot of partners at the table that could be interested. He is sure that if they brought Ms. Penaranda to Keene, having the game at many locations would provide multiple opportunities for different people to participate. They have to figure it out and cross promote, but he loves the idea. He thanks Ms. Penaranda for coming today and thinks this is worth having a further conversation about.

Dr. Morris stated that KSC would be interested in having this. She continued that it would be great to play the game with first year students as part of their integration into the community. She sees it as a very valuable opportunity.

Dr. Saleh asked if there is a website where people could take a role and experience it instead of doing it as a team. He continued that not everyone will be have an opportunity to participate in a team setting. If there is a web-based interface it would give access to a broader audience. Ms. Penaranda replied yes, there could be an opportunity for that. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that given all the variables it sounds like it would be a fairly sophisticated back end.

Chair Hay stated that it seems like you would have to play several times to get the full picture. Ms. Penaranda replied that they typically play for 90 minutes to 2 hours because they frequently break to talk, reflect, and see where everyone is at, and they do not get as close to the end or through the cards as she would like. Typically by the end if there are some key cards that have not gotten pulled yet she will conclude with “Let me just read you a few more things that could have happened.”

Dr. Morris stated that the middle school would be interested, given the conversations that are already happening there. She continued that it would be great to have this game there. Ritu Budakoti replied yes, the middle school would be very interested. She asked: is there any post-game follow-up or activities that happen, so the momentum continues and it becomes part of the curriculum? Ms. Penaranda replied that that is a great question. She continued that so far in the work she has done she has not had the opportunity to check in with groups afterward, but she has plenty of resources to share. She could make resource lists for different ages and levels, if Keene were to bring her in for this.

Ms. Carroll stated that she thinks this is brilliant. She continued that a lot of work has clearly gone into it and it must be very impactful. She imagines there are some emotional responses to some of these scenarios in the game and it is wonderful to be able to have conversations with

students when they are emotionally invested in it. She can see the Historical Society being interested in this. She can also see, as Ms. Budakoti was saying, that the follow-up is important, particularly about how this plays out in New Hampshire. Making those local connections would be important for the follow-up.

Dr. Morris replied yes, the post-game debrief would be critical. So the training of teachers and other key people/staff members would be important, to do follow-up discussions on campus maybe a week out. It is a great idea to talk about how to do follow-up activities and conversations, so they can hold on to any gains that were made via participation in the game. Ms. Penaranda stated that if they want to go forward with this she would love to meet on Zoom again with folks who are looking for “What next?” items and then she could better make adjustments with the resources.

Mr. Smith stated that since the game is so good at helping people see systemic reinforcements of privilege and power, maybe the different committees within City government could play the game together and have some dialogue about, for example, “Hey, we never thought about how maybe this Zoning practice could be reinforcing racism in our own community.” Maybe they would see new insights and epiphanies that would lead to change in our own city.

Chair Hay replied, and schools, too. He continued that at the demonstrations around town, lots of students say that the history curriculum is so lacking – it is just a couple things about race and that is it. When children are talking about how they have experienced racial taunting since the very beginning of their school years and it does not get addressed, that is an opportunity for change. Racism is just brushed aside, and he is appalled. This game would be an amazing thing to stick into the schools.

Ms. Salwen added: also law enforcement, although it might be too much to hope for. She continued that it would be amazing for law enforcement to have a facilitated experience of this game.

Dr. Morris stated that she loves the idea of looking at people in positions of power who create policies and procedures to really examine the impact of those policies and procedures. It would be great to have the City Council participate. They cannot mandate it but it would be great if they were involved.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she thinks this committee should play the game as well. Others agreed.

Mr. Bohannon stated that Ms. Penaranda could spend a week in Keene [since there are so many opportunities]. Ms. Penaranda replied that she could stay a few days. She asked where the nearest [big] city is to Keene. Brief discussion ensued about the area.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked when Ms. Penaranda would be available to come to Keene. Ms. Penaranda replied when it is safe and comfortable to have in-person events again. Then they can pick a general month and work for a certain date. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, he thinks it will be a while. He continued that this particular discussion needs to happen in person not in a Zoom platform, so they can talk about that. He and Ms. Penaranda can have a discussion about logistics and he can get a proposal before the committee. Dr. Filiault spoke about how it is too soon to put together specific dates, since they do not know what will be happening with the pandemic. They should be putting out a general sentiment that the HRC likes the project and wants to see it go forward, but beyond that, it is difficult to plan specifics. Others agreed.

Dr. Morris asked if she has done the game over Zoom. Ms. Penaranda replied that today will be the first time. Dr. Morris asked – if this Zoom game goes well, would Ms. Penaranda be willing to test it with a group of college students on Zoom? Ms. Penaranda replied yes. Dr. Morris replied that she might be able to get a group of first year college students together to play the game on Zoom before the in-person gathering. Ms. Penaranda replied that she will give Mr. Smith a synopsis of how it goes tonight. She continued that the only downside to playing it on Zoom is that since they are not together in person they will have to write a lot of things down, and keep track of the fake money and numbers, so players would have to be really “on it,” and that could play a part in how people react to it.

Mr. Bohannon thanked Ms. Penaranda and stated that he will connect with Mr. Smith after Ms. Penaranda’s Zoom game tonight and they will keep talking and move forward. He will share the information with Dr. Morris as well.

Ms. Salwen stated that if it would be useful, Ms. Penaranda could test the game with the HRC via Zoom.

Chair Hay thanked Ms. Penaranda and stated that they look forward to seeing her in the future. The committee thanked Dan and Hanisi Smith as well.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he will reach out and provide more information at a future meeting. Chair Hay replied that that sounds good.

6) Future Initiatives

Mr. Bohannon stated that this is a standing agenda item. He continued that he does not think it is too early to start thinking about the Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast. That is the only event they will really be able to plan. Hopefully it will be okay to meet in person in January. Does the group want to start thinking about that event? He is reaching out to people the HRC had talked about earlier.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if they want to start thinking about things to do remotely over Zoom. Mr. Bohannon replied that they can; they might be able to facilitate more that way. He

continued that his only concern would be capacity. The Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Department's Zoom platform can only host 100 people. He does not think other departments in the City have Zoom platforms can host any more than that. Dr. Morris will be working with the Mayor on his agenda on the other committee and there might be more that comes out of that that the HRC can tap into. Virtual events are a good opportunity right now.

Ms. Budakoti stated that regarding the 100-person capacity of Zoom, there is one thing that can be done: you can have a side-by-side streaming on YouTube or Facebook and people can be sending their messages there while watching in real time and there is no capacity limit. Mr. Bohannon thanked her for the information. He continued that he thinks that is how Mayor Hansel does it.

Dr. Filiault stated that he thinks they should assume any events in the next six months or so will be virtual. He continued that Facebook Live would allow maximum participation. It would be great to have events online anyhow, because it means people who would not be able to attend in person can now participate.

Mr. Bohannon stated that there were some names put out there. He continued that they can revisit those and start those conversations. Any speaker that they invite to be a part of this has to be willing to use that online format and be open to all, so that is something that they should consider.

Chair Hay stated that he agrees with Dr. Filiault that they should be planning for online events, as great as it would be to be able to meet in person.

Dr. Filiault stated that for next June, they should be looking toward Juneteenth and the LGBT event. He continued that hopefully by then they can be live. A Pride parade is probably a one-year event in the making, so it is probably worth starting to look at that, assuming that a year from now they will be able to be together in person. They should do something for Juneteenth as well. Those two events overlap, since they are for two historically oppressed groups of people.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked what the first step would be to get the events started. Would it be having a discussion of what they want the events to look like? Asking the City for permits? Dr. Filiault replied that the first step is to decide if they want to do a Pride parade, or something more like a block party, a drag show at the Colonial, movies and guest speakers, etc. Yes, it is deciding what the vision is. A parade is a heavy lift, especially for a small community, but it helps to start a year in advance.

Ms. Salwen stated that they should keep in mind supporting the Keene International Festival (KIF) so that does not slip off the radar. Mr. Bohannon replied that this year's KIF has been canceled. He continued that the date is set for September 18, 2021 for the next one. Ms. Carroll stated that they have a meeting in August to do something to honor the date when it would have occurred this year. Ms. Budakoti replied yes, they are hoping to do a recognition of the event

and are still throwing out ideas for how to do that. She continued that they will update the HRC as soon as they have that information.

Councilor Manwaring stated that if the HRC meetings are only an hour, they should have subcommittees to do some of this work, or else they need to extend the HRC meetings to be longer than an hour. Dr. Morris asked how many people can be on a subcommittee. She continued that they would need to avoid having a quorum. Councilor Manwaring replied that it is doable, and subcommittees can be open to the public. Mr. Bohannon replied that they can establish subcommittees at the next meeting. He continued that next month or in September they should define what they want to accomplish and how they will get there, and work their way backwards. They might think of having subcommittees for the MLK Jr. Breakfast, Juneteenth, Pride, or “June Event” and “January Event” subcommittees. Each event will take a group of people in order to make this happen, as Ms. Carroll and Ms. Budakoti can attest to, as it takes a lot to make the KIF happen. They do not want the burden to be on one or two people to make an event come together.

Dr. Morris asked if non-committee members can be on subcommittees. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, he thinks so. He continued that like Mayor Hansel mentioned before, there are more alternate spots open – either four or five for the HRC. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if ‘subcommittee creation’ can be an agenda item on the next meeting. Councilor Manwaring and Chair Hay agreed.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she has another request - she finds it very difficult to feel like part of a committee when she cannot see everyone. Can the Zoom screen be used to show participants’ faces instead of the meeting agenda? Discussion ensued about the Zoom layout, and Mr. Bohannon stated that he will talk more about this with Councilor Manwaring.

Dr. Saleh asked, regarding the last meeting’s discussion of Black Lives Matter: was there any development from that subcommittee? Mr. Bohannon replied there was no subcommittee formed. He continued that at the first City Council meeting in June, an LGBTQ month proclamation was read, as the HRC had requested. For the second City Council meeting in June, he had recommended to the Mayor that the HRC was interested in having some sort of Black Lives Matter proclamation read, and Councilor Bobby Williams put something together and had it read. He does not have the proclamation now but could get it if the committee wants. Dr. Morris replied that Councilor Williams read the proclamation at the Juneteenth event at the Russel Park/field, too. Dr. Filiault stated that it seems like the need for the BLM subcommittee was eliminated by the creation of the Racial Justice committee that Dr. Morris is co-chairing.

7) New Business

8) Public Comment

Margaret Broadhead, of 135 Castle Street, asked if the committee’s budget is usually spent on the events they have been discussing or if it is ever spent on other things. Mr. Bohannon replied

that regarding the Finance Report he shared earlier, there is a small amount of money that was generated by an event about 15 years ago and it carried over. This is one of the only committees in the City that is allowed to fundraise. When they do have events, like Monadvocacy, if they were to bring in someone like Pastor Nic Penaranda the money would be used for that purpose. The budget is only used for event-specific items.

Ms. Broadhead asked if they see any branch of the City government talking about this information that has been raised regarding the history of the person for whom the City of Keene is named. Mr. Bohannon replied that he is not aware of any branch of City government discussing that matter. He continued that if that is something she wants to bring forward he suggests she write a letter to the Mayor and City Council and they would refer the topic to one of the three standing committees. The matter would be brought in front of them.

Ms. Broadhead asked if it is a matter the HRC would ever talk about. Chair Hay and Ms. Salwen replied yes, they can see the HRC talking about it. Chair Hay stated that it is worth digging into. Ms. Broadhead asked if she should ask them to do that with a letter to the Mayor. Mr. Bohannon replied that he thinks the best method would be for her to contact the Mayor and City Council and the City Council may direct the matter to the HRC.

9) Adjourn – Next meeting is August 3, 2020

Mr. Bohannon stated that the next scheduled meeting is August 3. He continued that he will not be available for it, but he could have another staff member set it up for them if they still want to meet. Discussion ensued. Mr. Bohannon stated that it seems like a quorum would be available to meet. Chair Hay replied that they will meet on August 3.

There being no further business, Chair Hay adjourned the meeting at 6:24 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Respectfully edited by,
Andy Bohannon, Staff