

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, December 7, 2020

5:00 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

William Hay, Chair
Dr. Mohammed Saleh, Vice Chair
Dr. Dottie Morris
Jan Manwaring, Councilor
Ritu Budakoti

Staff Present:

Andrew Bohannon, PRF Director

Members Not Present:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos
Nancy Salwen
Jennifer Carroll
Dr. Shaun Filiault

Chair Hay 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.

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Hay called the meeting to order at 5:13 PM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of November 2, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Dr. Morris made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of November 2, 2020. Councilor Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon reported that there have been no changes to the finance report, and they are in good shape. He continued that the current balance is \$4,597.43.

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

4) Keene State College Alumni Outreach

Mr. Bohannon stated that he apologizes to Dr. Morris for missing the meeting with her and the KSC alumni. He asked if she will be having another meeting with them and/or if there is any follow-up with this agenda item.

Dr. Morris replied that the KSC alumni are willing to do anything; they just want to contribute in some way. She suggested that maybe they can be somehow involved with what Dr. Waller is planning to do at the MLK event.

5) Monadvocacy – [Tabled], June 2021

6) MLK Breakfast

Mr. Bohannon stated that he spoke with Dr. James Waller, who has agreed to be the speaker and has reserved the whole day. He continued that he did not go any further with him because he wanted to get some parameters from the committee before he reached out to him, and give him some times. Last year the event was 10:00 to 11:30 AM. Is that still a good time? Or does the committee want a different time? Dr. Waller would have an hour platform, and talk for about 45 minutes. If they wanted to bring the alumni in or do a Q&A session, they could.

Co-Chair Morris asked for confirmation that this will be a virtual event. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, that is correct.

Discussion ensued about timing. The group decided to keep the same timeframe. Mr. Bohannon asked if Dr. Morris would like to introduce Dr. Waller, or if someone else from the committee wants to, or if they want him (Mr. Bohannon) to do it. Dr. Morris replied that she would be happy to introduce him. She continued that the KSC alumni could do something in February for Black History Month. That way they are spreading the events out. Mr. Bohannon replied that that is a good segue – have Dr. Waller talk and then have some follow-up. He was at the Ad Hoc Racial Justice Community Safety (AHRJCS) Committee forum the other night. It sounds like the public is looking for more dialogue opportunities. If they had another conversation in February that continues the dialogue. He asked if the committee wants to do that. He asked if the alumni would speak in the evening, or if they want to do it on a weekend day. Brief discussion ensued and the group decided an evening would be best.

Mr. Bohannon asked if it should be February 2 or 9. Discussion continued. Dr. Morris will ask the alumni if one of those dates would work for them. Mr. Bohannon asked her to report back to him. He will put this on the January agenda.

Ms. Budakoti stated that this is an opportunity to involve local schools. She continued that this is important. Young minds are simmering with all of the narratives they hear from all sides. The more avenues the HRC can provide to them to have these conversations, the more they will be able to relate to them or understand them better. She will bring this to her colleagues at Keene

Middle School and also communicate with the high school. Will the public be able to participate (in the conversation with the KSC alumni)? Or can they broadcast it later? She is trying to think of how to reach the masses in the public domain.

Dr. Morris replied that the alumni do want to work with Keene Public School students. They would probably be happy to do anything the HRC asks, which could mean recording it and making it available and then having a debrief with students after they watch it. Also, coming down the pipeline, a group of people will be trained to do restorative circles. That would be a great way for them to help out with this committee as well.

Mr. Bohannon stated that that Zoom offers a couple different formats. They could use the “webinar” format. The guests would be invited and the public would just be able to view it. Or they could push it out to Facebook Live via the Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Department page. His goal, starting next year, is to have the HRC meetings broadcast live on Facebook, in addition to events such as the MLK event and the conversation with KSC alumni. Brief discussion ensued about Facebook live and virtual events.

7) Pride Month

Mr. Bohannon and Chair Hay noted that the HRC members of the Pride subcommittee were not present to address this item.

8) Juneteenth

Councilor Manwaring spoke about her desire to chair this subcommittee – she would set up a regular meeting time/day for the subcommittee, so the meetings were consistent. She continued that technology is not her strong suit, but she has a lot of ideas, and would like to have students involved. June 19th is a Saturday. She would like Railroad Square due to its visibility and the City’s goal of getting more people downtown. She would like to ask some members of the AHRJCS Committee to join this. She asked the HRC if this is okay. Members replied yes, definitely, and thanked her. Dr. Morris offered to help with Zoom.

Dr. Morris stated that the Black Heritage Trail just had a well-attended virtual event. Mr. Bohannon stated that he reached out to the folks who do the Black Heritage Trail but did not hear back. Dr. Morris replied that she will send Councilor Manwaring the email address of her contact. Mr. Bohannon stated that Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos sent an email saying she is unable to attend today’s HRC meeting but is able to take on some action items that the committee comes up with, and she would like to be involved with Juneteenth, so Councilor Manwaring can reach out to her.

9) Stand NH

Chair Hay asked if anyone has heard from Sam or A'ja. Mr. Bohannon replied that he tried to email A'ja but the email address he has is not working anymore. Chair Hay asked if he should track them down. Mr. Bohannon replied that it is up to the committee; he sends the HRC meeting information to Stand NH so they can join if they want to, but they have not been coming to meetings. It is up to the committee, regarding where to go from here. Chair Hay replied that he will reach out to Sam.

10) New Business

Mr. Bohannon stated that Gail Zachariah reached out to him – the Library is looking to put together a grant application that would coincide with the activities the HRC is looking to do. The Library's mission and the HRC go well together and they should be able to work together when the Library gets the grant to help promote the various events and conversations. It was a little bit like Monadvocacy. He and Ms. Zachariah have been playing phone tag and have not yet connected. He should have more information at the next meeting.

Mr. Bohannon stated that this meeting would have been Jennifer Carroll's last meeting – she has served her term. He continued that he wants to thank her for everything she has done. There is now a vacant seat and the HRC is looking for new members. He asked everyone to please spread the word in their circles. The City's website, under "Boards and Commissions," has a note saying "If you are interested in joining a committee, click here." If there are people interested, let's get them engaged. Mayor Hansel is eager to get new members onto the committees with openings.

Mr. Bohannon asked if Dr. Morris could connect him with the folks involved with the Black Heritage Trail.

Chair Hay stated that his item for new business is: whatever the HRC learns, they need to put out more, because many people are blissfully unaware of certain histories. One topic he has been digging into lately is reparations. A Bill, HB 40, has been before Congress for 29 years, and it is to put a committee together and explore looking at reparations for African-Americans because of slavery. The Bill is not to pay people out, just to look at and discuss the topic. The Bill keeps not making it. He is going to call his Representative's office and ask about this. Many people do not know about this topic. It is important for the HRC to learn as much as they can and share their findings with people. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, those opportunities are out there, but he does not know exactly how to share those messages, other than to include them on future agendas for discussion.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he sent around a Government Alliance on Race & Equality (GARE) webinar that happened last week; they happen twice a month. He listened to it and it was interesting; he learned about what it is and the educational opportunities that they have. At the end of the webinar they asked for a \$1,000 membership. This is something the HRC could learn more about and see what resources GARE could provide to them. Maybe it would be worth the

membership cost, but they would have to look into it. He continued that also, this committee traditionally has a member from the Library, and currently does not. They should talk with the Mayor about getting another representative from the Library – the Library has pretty significant resources, more than what Parks and Rec has. At the last AHRJCS Committee meeting, someone pledged to donate \$500 to the Library to provide more books on various subject matters of this nature, noticing a need there. That shows the role of the Library as being a centerpiece for the type of work the HRC does and could do and could promote.

Dr. Morris suggested that before [considering joining GARE] they first see what the Black Heritage Trail has to offer. She continued that [Executive Director] JerryAnne Boggis is always looking for new projects for it. That could be a way to start local, without spending a lot of money to go national. There are also two Indigenous people in that part of the state, the Pouliots, who would be happy to come to Keene and help discover the original names of places; that is a project they are doing around Durham. And they do information sessions around that. Maybe they could invite them to an HRC meeting to talk about the work they do and what they might be able to do in Keene.

Chair Hay replied that he likes those ideas. Mr. Bohannon replied that he agrees, too; he would rather they at least start local, instead of starting with a national platform that might not be as relevant. Working with local people like the people Dr. Morris has suggested could be more meaningful to the local community and probably more engaging. Discussion continued and people spoke in favor of trying to connect with local people/organizations/resources. Dr. Morris stated that she will reach out to the Pouliots, who are part of a statewide committee that might include other people who might be willing to participate as well. She will invite the Pouliots and JerryAnne Boggis to a future HRC meeting. Chair Hay replied that that sounds great, and if Dr. Morris needs help with anything, she can reach out to the HRC. Mr. Bohannon asked that Dr. Morris email him or include him in an email with the full names of Dr. Morris's contacts and the organizations they are a part of. Dr. Morris agreed.

Chair Hay asked if there was any other new business.

Ms. Budakoti stated that she has an idea – she sees that Keene has many different groups working with a certain purpose, and she thinks it would be very helpful for everyone if there was a way/format/platform where people from these various groups come together to share what they have been learning and doing in their groups, and what the resources are that the public can access. There are so many “hidden gems” that people may be missing. She loves events and would be happy to help coordinate some type of event or platform that brings people together to learn about all the different initiatives and groups that are working toward this common purpose of building our community. Chair Hay replied that he likes it, and it would help prevent people or groups from feeling like they have to reinvent the wheel. Ms. Budakoti spoke about how it could include KSC and professional development as well. Dr. Saleh stated that he likes the idea, for a post-COVID world. Ms. Budakoti agreed. Discussion continued. Mr. Bohannon stated that maybe it could be something in Railroad Square in the spring, and people could have tables.

Ms. Budakoti replied that she was thinking more of a day where everyone gets to learn, maybe starting at Railroad Square, but she would like to see this as a collaboration with KSC. It would be great to have it at different places in Keene in different years, so people get to see the community. Chair Hay complimented Ms. Budakoti's vision.

Mr. Bohannon asked if there was any public comment.

Sarah Benning stated that she learned about the HRC from attending last week's AHRJCS Committee forum and is glad to be here. She continued that she echoes what she has heard other people talk about tonight, regarding the difficulty in finding information about what is going on in town, in government and in educational and social settings. She does not have a solution; it is a complicated problem. But it feels frustrating, as a resident who has been in Keene for about three years. She is looking for ways and places to get more involved. It seems like a lot of the events and topics the HRC is talking about are of a lot of interest to her and she wants to know more and do more and be present more. She thanks them for this introduction to the HRC's work. Chair Hay thanked her and welcomed her to come back next month, too.

Mr. Bohannon stated that Ms. Benning makes a really good point that information needs to be shared more. He continued that he really likes Ms. Budakoti's idea to create something. He will share this with City department heads. They have some good momentum here tonight and he is excited.

11) Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, January 4, 2021

There being no further business, Chair Hay adjourned the meeting at 6:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Respectfully edited by,
Andy Bohannon, PRF Director