

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**AD HOC RACIAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Thursday, March 18, 2021**

**6:00 PM**

**Remote Meeting via Zoom**

**Members Present:**

Dr. Dottie Morris, Co-Chair  
Richard Van Wickler, Co-Chair  
Aditi Saleh  
Tia Hockett  
Eli Rivera  
Catherine Workman, Councilor  
Dr. Pierre Morton

**Staff Present:**

Rebecca Landry, IT Director  
Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation, and  
Facilities Director

**Members Not Present:**

Gail Somers

**George S. Hansel, Mayor**

Co-Chair Van Wickler 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. Co-Chair Van Wickler called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM. Roll call was conducted.

Co-Chair Van Wickler welcomed Mayor Hansel and asked if he wanted to say anything, since this is the ad hoc committee's final meeting after one year of work and they will soon be giving him their report. He continued that the committee was active, engaged, passionate, and committed.

Mayor Hansel thanked Co-Chair Van Wickler, Co-Chair Morris, and all the committee members. He continued that he could not be happier about the work that they have done, and he wants to emphasize that this is just the beginning. The outline and ideas that the committee is bringing forward is the City planting its feet and saying that this is an important initiative they are taking seriously. He thinks the committee's ideas are excellent. Some are easy to implement, others are more long-term, and the committee has highlighted that a lot of community education is needed. It will be a challenge and take a lot of time, and require a lot of stakeholders to buy in. This is the start.

Mayor Hansel continued that going forward, his vision was to adopt the report through the City Council process and then hand it to the Human Rights Committee (HRC). He is happy to work with the HRC and he is sure the HRC members have ideas on developing a broader implementation plan. That is not how it *has* to go, but those were his initial thoughts, for how to make sure the AHRJCS Committee's excellent work goes to the next level. He encourages all AHRJCS Committee members to get out in the community and go on social media and share this plan far and wide. He will invite Co-Chair Van Wickler and Co-Chair Morris on the radio show again. It is important for people to know that this was an intentional, well thought out process to come up with these ideas. They can let him know if they need his assistance in getting their message out into the community, because that is a big part of this.

He continued that the report questions whether this will become a task force, and there are issues still to be parsed out. There are diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and things that the City of Keene needs to do internally, and he is not sure the driving force behind those will be the same as the broader education components in the community. His initial thinking is that they do not have just one committee looking at this. They might have the HRC overseeing the broad umbrella of these initiatives, but they really need each City committee and each City staff person to take this on and get some progress in their own respective ways. He is open to ideas on how to get that done. Overall, he is very impressed with the committee's work, and he knows there is a lot still to be done, but he thanks them from the bottom of his heart. They all exceeded his expectations with the work they did. He continued that he gives special thanks to staff liaison Rebecca Landry, for doing such an excellent job pulling all of this together.

**1) Minutes of Last Meeting**

Co-Chair Morris made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of February 25, 2021. Mr. Rivera seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

**2) Review and Approval of the Final Committee Report**

Co-Chair Van Wickler stated that tonight is the committee's final meeting and tonight the hope is that they can give Ms. Landry whatever she needs to do the final fine-tuning adjustments, to present the document to the Mayor, who will present it to the City Council. He continued that the document is impressive, and they have done good work. He asked for feedback on or changes to the draft.

Mr. Rivera stated that he thinks the document is great and touches on all the points they had talked about. He continued that he just thought of something else: the City of Keene is a large employer, with probably over 300 employees. Is it time to consider having a Chief Diversity Officer or Diversity Director, to focus on these issues? The committee could add that to the recommendations in the report.

Co-Chair Van Wickler asked where Mr. Rivera recommends they insert that in the document. Mr. Rivera replied the Government Leadership recommendations, if others feel the same. Co-Chair Van Wickler replied that he thinks it is a great idea. Co-Chair Morris agreed.

Ms. Landry stated that the creation of and hiring for new positions is something that would go through the City Manager's Office through the budget process. She continued that how they word this is key. She thinks they should leave the door open for it to be a collaborative effort with, for example, the public schools or the City and the County. She likes the idea of putting the recommendation in the City & Community section, which is about specific tasks assigned to the City and recommended for other businesses, whereas Government Leadership is more about gathering stakeholders. Discussion continued about where specifically to put this.

Ms. Landry stated that she thinks item A (about assigning the recommendations to committees, groups, or a task force) is redundant because it is stated elsewhere already in the document. She asked if the group is okay with replacing item A. Committee members replied yes. Ms. Landry suggested they replace item A with Mr. Rivera's recommendations. Discussion ensued about how to word it. The group came up with: "It is recommended that the City assign an administrative role within City government that is dedicated to overseeing the diversity, equity, and inclusion mission set forth by the ad hoc committee." Mr. Rivera stated that the recommendation is for a dedicated position, not for the City to add Director of Diversity duties onto a position that already exists. This is a full-time job in itself.

Ms. Landry stated that Co-Chair Morris submitted some suggestions and writing for the introduction. She asked if she wanted to read through it. Co-Chair Morris stated that she will let people read through it right now and then give feedback on what she came up with. Ms. Landry and Co-Chair Van Wickler gave suggestions for how to slightly change the wording in a few places, for clarification. Mr. Rivera and Ms. Landry stated that they like and appreciate Co-Chair Morris's additions. Discussion continued about grammar, spelling, and formatting of the document. Ms. Landry thanked Co-Chair Morris for replacing the term "call out racism" to better match the philosophy Councilor Workman had talked about, regarding how it is about calling people in, not calling them out.

Ms. Landry asked the Co-Chairs if she should go through the one section that was not completed the last time they met. Co-Chair Van Wickler asked if it was in the draft she sent them. Ms. Landry replied yes. Co-Chair Van Wickler replied that in that case, they should be fine. Ms. Landry stated that it was in the City & Community section that they just edited. She continued that it has some very specific recommendations and the City Manager did read through it, and she was very pleased and said some that some of these recommendations are specific assignments to the City business, and some are looking for recommendations that will maybe call for acts of the City Council and/or other committees and/or other stakeholders. She also identified that there are some things that will be done administratively, while others will be done by committees or groups.

Co-Chair Morris asked if it would be helpful for the AHRJCS Committee to put this (report) out there and then wait a few weeks and have a forum with a Q&A about the report, or if they should just send the report out there and be done. Co-Chair Van Wickler replied that in his view, they were tasked to do this report, and they heard that their report surpassed the Mayor's expectations, and it surpassed his expectations, too; he is delighted with the results. They ought to let it go forward. Hopefully, this becomes the catalyst for change. That is what their charge was; their charge was not to solve all the problems, but to identify them and make what recommendations they can to make improvements. He thinks they have done that.

Co-Chair Van Wickler stated that everyone has read the report, and they have made some amendments to it, and it is good to go. He asked if Ms. Landry had anything else to point out on the document. Ms. Landry replied that they are done with the document as long as they captured Co-Chair Morris's comments and Mr. Rivera's. She continued that if there are any other changes or edits, now is the time to do those; she cannot make changes off the record. She hears what Co-Chair Morris is saying about not wanting to close the door, because there might be some feedback that would make them think maybe they should change or add something. One of the strongest recommendations in the report is that this just be a very beginning step, and for the community to have opportunities to provide more input on a regular basis.

Mr. Morton stated that he would also like them to recommend that accountability or metrics be considered for this work, as a way of measuring the impact towards these goals. Co-Chair Morris replied that she likes that. Ms. Landry replied that she thinks the report already has something like that. Co-Chair Van Wickler replied that it does, but not as specific as what Mr. Morton just said. He continued that he thinks it is a tall order, for anyone to measure that, not that they should not try. Output is not what they want to measure; they want to measure impact. In thinking about the community and the problems, what he keeps getting hung up on are the silent people. How do you measure something you cannot see, cannot interact with? That would be a significant challenge.

Mr. Morton replied that he thinks all they can do is put forth the recommendation. There has to be a mechanism to tell us if we are moving in the right direction, or if we are not, and if we are making an impact. Any diversity professional worth their salt will be able to come up with creative solutions to do that. Co-Chair Van Wickler replied that first they would have to approve the recommendation to have that person, and then the second recommendation would be to have that person do what Mr. Morton is proposing.

Councilor Workman stated that in the Government Leadership section, B has a recommendation about the identification of clear and measurable goals. Ms. Landry replied yes, but she is hearing that Co-Chair Morris and Mr. Morton want to be a little stronger about the measurements. She continued that B says that it will be very important to identify clear and measurable goals, and C says, 'please take forward all these recommendations of this committee,' which is the first step, and that it 'will require consistent effort, analysis, and adjustment, including regular follow-up

on the specific recommendations in this report.’ If they want stronger language, that might be the place to put it.

Co-Chair Morris stated that she likes the part about accountability, too. She would love to have that added, because she does not think it is anywhere else in the report. It is easy to say, “We will do [these recommendations]” and then everyone is looking at everyone else to figure out who will do it, and no one actually does it, because everyone thinks someone else is doing it. If it is really clear in some type of plan about who is responsible and what the accountability measures are, that is helpful. That could be in someone’s evaluation. People could be held accountable if they do not do what they are responsible for doing.

Ms. Landry replied that she hears what Co-Chair Morris is saying and thinks it is important. She is just struggling to figure it out, because they have everything from specific tasks assigned to the City, to the City Council, to the committees, but then also a broader assignment as it is really important to bring in community stakeholders. Thus, it would be difficult to have a single accountability. Mr. Rivera’s addition to recommend having a Diversity Officer position/role helps. And if they want to add stronger language, it might fit best in B or C.

Mr. Morton stated that he agrees that that is where to put it. Discussion continued about the language. Mr. Morton suggested expanding “goals” to “goals, accountability measures.” Others agreed.

Co-Chair Van Wickler stated that to go back to Co-Chair Morris’s thoughts about follow-up, the Mayor said today that he might invite Co-Chair Morris and him (Co-Chair Van Wickler) back on the radio, and also asked everyone on the committee to share the report, which he is on board with and intends to do. He continued that as this report is shared with the community, people might reach out to the committee with questions about it, and that is their opportunity to give clarifications, feedback, and follow-up.

### **3) Discussion of Presentation to the City Council**

Co-Chair Van Wickler asked Ms. Landry to clarify the AHRJCS Committee’s role in the presentation to the City Council. Ms. Landry replied that the way the process works is: once the committee is finished with the final language of the report tonight, she will send a final copy of it to the committee members, and it will be put on a City Council agenda. She continued that there will either be a presentation to the full City Council or perhaps to a particular City Council committee, such as the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee or Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee. They would have the opportunity to share the report with the City Council and with the public, as it hits the agenda. When the meeting is held for that agenda, members of the AHRJCS Committee would be present to say ‘here is what we did – we met a dozen times over 8 months; we had public forums; we came up with final recommendations and here is what they are,’ and then they would field questions from the City Council members. That could be the Co-Chairs, but she 100% encourages everyone on the

committee to be there if they are able, to represent the really good work that was done here. From that point, the report is published on the website and probably will be picked up by the media.

Co-Chair Van Wickler asked if they just hang out and wait for further word on that. Ms. Landry replied yes, they have to see where it ends up on which agenda, and then she would let them know the date. It would probably be April 8 or 22. Co-Chair Van Wickler stated that when they are summoned to the City Council, he hopes that everyone can make it. He continued that Gail Somers is not here tonight so they will have to get the word to her.

Ms. Landry stated that speaking of Ms. Somers, she had a great recommendation of using job boards that were specifically for people of color, and the City has an opening at the Library and did some research about that. She continued that the Library Director was able to find, through the Library Association, a specific job posting board for people of color who have that skillset. She was so happy that Ms. Somers made that suggestion. That is great news to share with the City Council.

Councilor Workman stated that she wants to thank everyone, and it has been a real pleasure to work with everyone on this committee. She thanked Ms. Landry for her hard work as well and stated that she is so impressed with the document. Ms. Landry spoke in response about how she appreciates the efforts and work of the committee and the public and how rewarding it was to be a part of this.

Co-Chair Morris made a motion for the Ad Hoc Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee to accept the document as amended tonight. Co-Chair Van Wickler seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Co-Chair Van Wickler stated that for the last few minutes of the meeting, he would love to go around and have everyone share reflective thoughts. Ms. Saleh, Ms. Hockett, Mr. Rivera, Mr. Morton, Councilor Workman, Ms. Landry, Co-Chair Van Wickler, and Co-Chair Morris all spoke positively about how it felt to be a part of this committee. Several spoke about the need for this work to continue, and the ways in which this work continues.

There being no further business, Co-Chair Morris adjourned the meeting at 7:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reid, Minute Taker

Additional edits by,  
Katie Kibler, Clerk's Office