

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, September 13, 2021

5:00 PM

Keene Library

Members Present:

William Hay, Chair
Councilor Jan Manwaring
Nancy Salwen
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos
Marti Fiske, Ex-Officio
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate
Dr. Dottie Morris

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities
Director

Members Not Present:

Dr. Mohammed Saleh
Dr. Shaun Filiault

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Hay called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

2) Approval of June 7, 2021 Minutes

Councilor Manwaring made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of June 7, 2021. Ms. Fiske seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon reported that The HRC budget is accurate but is not yet inclusive of the donations and expenses from the Keene International Festival. It is not caught up yet.

4) Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee Report

Mr. Bohannon stated that hopefully everyone has seen the report of the Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee (RJCS). He continued that the HRC has been tasked with overseeing this report and making sure they are keeping in mind all of the report's recommendations and making sure they are doing their due diligence. The HRC is the shepherd

of that document for the City of Keene and need to help it move forward. He is looking for the HRC's thoughts.

Discussion ensued. Ms. Fiske asked about the new group that was organized as a result of the report, and Mr. Bohannon explained that it started as a way of helping the Cheshire Medical Center work through their diversity issues, and after about a year and a half, it expanded to include other business leaders in the city. When the report came out, they wanted to expand further, and created the Monadnock Region Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (MDEIB) Coalition. He continued that HRC members are welcome to participate. He himself has not been able to attend meetings regularly because the timing conflicts with other City meetings, but he and Mayor Hansel are the City representatives and it would be good to have another. Discussion ensued about possible City representatives.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the MDEIB Coalition is focused on the Monadnock region, whereas the HRC needs to focus on Keene and the RJCS report.

Chair Hay asked if Mr. Bohannon could find out how many HRC members could attend the MDEIB Coalition meetings at once, and what happens if they inadvertently create a quorum of the HRC. Mr. Bohannon replied that he could ask the City Attorney and find out how that would work.

Ms. Salwen asked Dr. Morris about her participation with the MDEIB Coalition and what work is happening now. Dr. Morris replied the big task right now is writing a job description similar to what she does at Keene State College [Chief Officer of Diversity and Multiculturalism], but for the whole region, and fundraising for the position. She continued that the YMCA is taking the lead, but other people are contributing. She asked at the last meeting if they were going to do something before that person gets here, in addition to just waiting for this person, and she did not really get an answer.

Discussion continued about the timing of the MDEIB meetings and the functionality of Zoom. Ms. Salwen asked if this seems like a worthwhile group. Dr. Morris replied yes, especially if they are working with everyone. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she would be interested, although she cannot attend every meeting. Chair Hay and Ms. Salwen agreed. Mr. Bohannon stated that he will have a conversation with Dan Smith from the YMCA and the Mayor, related to the status of everything, to find out what the best course of action would be for this group. He will send that information along to the committee.

Mr. Bohannon asked the group how they want to, as the HRC, move forward with the RJCS report. He continued that it needs to be led by the Chair, such as "Let's review the report, let's take action items out of it, and those are our agenda items for the next six months". Chair Hay replied that he had a lot of ideas while reading it, but that was a while back. Discussion ensued, and the group decided to all review it and come ready to discuss it at the next meeting. Dr. Morris suggested they invite some people from the RJCS Committee.

Discussion ensued about larger meeting spaces, hybrid options, and how many people would be part of the meeting. Mr. Bohannon stated that he feels the group should be able to go remote but the law says otherwise. He continued that the law states that as long as a quorum of the HRC is physically present in the room, everyone else can be remote. They have the technology to do that, but they need five members to commit to be present to create a quorum.

Councilor Manwaring stated that when she re-read the report today, she noticed that over and over it stressed the importance of community discussions. She continued that that is what has naturally been evolving from this committee – they held events and conversations for Pride, Juneteenth, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and so on and so forth, and would have done something for Indigenous People’s Day if they had met this summer. They should feel good about the successes they have had as a group. And next month it is time to start planning for the next Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event.

Chair Hay asked everyone to really have the RJCS report down pat next month and come to the meeting ready to discuss it. He continued that they should invite other people to participate over Zoom. Discussion ensued about the location. Ms. Fiske spoke about the Library’s camera and speaker system. Mr. Bohannon stated that since the Library now closes at 6:00 PM on Mondays, the meeting can be in the Rec Center’s “Zoom Room” in case the meeting goes longer than 6:00 PM. Councilor Manwaring agreed. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that given the nature of next month’s conversation, she does not think they should be in a position to feel limited by time and not be able to have the full conversation they need to have.

5) Event Recaps
A. Pride Month

Mr. Bohannon stated that the Pride events were quieted because they ran out of time. He continued that the HRC will have to reexamine how they go about planning and holding events so they do not overload themselves. Pride was a good idea, and they distributed 6 or 8 flags to downtown businesses and have more for next year. Brief discussion ensued about different versions of Pride flags, diversity flags, and the meanings of flags and symbols.

B. Juneteenth

Chair Hay stated that the Juneteenth event went very well and the subcommittee did excellent work, and the speakers and performers were great. Councilor Manwaring agreed and stated that it was great to see it on the front page. Three hours was perfect for the event. She continued that Dr. Morris did a wonderful job. Other HRC members agreed and expressed positive feedback.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the subcommittee did not get a chance to debrief as planned. She continued that it is probably worth at least each of them making some notes, though, and collecting them for next year. Discussion ensued about not meeting if it creates a quorum.

Ms. Fiske stated that the feedback she received was that the event worked well for the first time it was held, but the communication could be tightened up, regarding the last minute changes in timing. There seemed to not be one specific subcommittee member to contact regarding, for example, the performers.

Ms. Salwen stated that another improvement/intention for next year would be creating written programs. Ms. Fiske suggested they post the schedule at Railroad Square and on the website.

Chair Hay asked what the YMCA was doing for Juneteenth, which was not coordinated with the HRC's events. Other HRC members replied that the YMCA was doing a membership drive and dedicated allies were upset that it was like an advertisement for the YMCA. Councilor Manwaring stated that the Juneteenth subcommittee met with the YMCA people twice, but by that point, the subcommittee had already been planning its event for three months and it was too late. The plan is for the YMCA people and the HRC subcommittee to plan together next year, starting in January. Mr. Bohannon added that the YMCA and the HRC each had different designs and were not willing to combine them. The marketing and design could be coordinated if the two groups started working together sooner next year.

Ms. Salwen asked if other groups in the city were doing Juneteenth events, because she heard talk of it. Ms. Fiske replied that there was an organization collecting all of the statewide Juneteenth information and posting it on Facebook, trying to be a clearinghouse. Ms. Salwen asked if it would be best for Keene to have one big/major thing everyone is connected to. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it would mean taking one organization's overarching vision. She continued that the HRC subcommittee saw things differently than the YMCA. Councilor Manwaring replied that they also tried connecting with the Historical Society. Dr. Morris added that a reenactor was also interested. Councilor Manwaring replied that now that they know all these folks are interested, they intend to start in January and to plan it together, to have different things going on. Discussion continued.

Ms. Salwen stated that Railroad Square was a great location. Others agreed. Mr. Bohannon stated that he agrees with keeping it downtown. He suggested in front of the Rec Center as an alternate location, so they can move right inside if the weather is bad.

C. International Festival

Ms. Budakoti reported that the International Festival will be Saturday, September 18, 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM, at the Rec Center, as COVID-safe as possible. Masks are highly recommended. She continued that there will be food, activities, crafts, and performances. Mr. Bohannon shared a few more details and thanked Ms. Budakoti and the team for the hard work they have put into this.

Mr. Bohannon asked HRC members to please let him know if they know of anyone interested in fiscally sponsoring this event. Ms. Budakoti added that there are some volunteer spots because some people have backed out. Councilor Manwaring replied that she will help.

Councilor Manwaring asked if the HRC will have a table. Mr. Bohannon replied no. He continued that he did not know how much value there would be in that, and they were trying to consolidate the groups, and this committee had not met in three months. Ms. Budakoti stated that if they have something to communicate to a wider audience, there will be a welcome kiosk; that is a possibility. Chair Hay asked if anyone wanted to write something up. Ms. Budakoti suggested photos from Pride or Juneteenth. Ms. Salwen stated that she took a lot of video, but she does not know how to send it to people. The files are on her computer. Discussion ensued about how to share media. Ms. Salwen agreed to put the files on a thumb drive and give the thumb drive to Mr. Bohannon.

6) New, Other Business

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the sharing video topic brings up something to keep in the back of their minds: the website, content, and how the group is reaching out to the community. She continued that the Juneteenth information did not get distributed as well as they had hoped. This is not something to discuss now at this meeting, but how they are handling their media and a public face is a topic to keep in mind. Mr. Bohannon replied that that is a good suggestion, because they need information ahead of time and then they can distribute it among all the platforms. He continued that he will give this some thought and put “marketing concepts” on the next agenda.

Discussion ensued about the City’s website, Facebook and other social media platforms, and what content the group wants to see on the HRC’s webpage on the City website. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that when people ask about HRC events, she tells them to check the City’s website because she thought it had events listed, but it does not. The HRC should do more to promote its events in advance. Ms. Salwen agreed. Mr. Bohannon replied that they also need to make sure their events are well planned in advance so they are not waiting until the last minute to make edits to events. He continued that for example, last year they pulled off the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event, but it was last minute.

Ms. Fiske clarified that the calendar on the City’s website is only for meetings of public boards and committees. She continued that there is a separate “news and events” tab. Content needs to be posted by the City’s IT Department, so anything the HRC wants posted has to be sent to IT. Mr. Bohannon added that the City is starting a major website update.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she wanted the HRC to do something for Indigenous People’s Day, because it is important, but the HRC did not meet for three months. She continued that she made some good connections, and through one of those, learned of an event at which Robert G. Goodby will speak about a book he has written and what it is like to be a Native American in this

area. She distributed flyers, and stated that it is called “A Deep Presence: 13,000 Years of Native American History.” It will be at the Historical Society on October 11. She asked everyone to please spread the word.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that because the summer cuts them off at the knees a bit, if they want to do something for Indigenous People’s Day, they have to plan well in advance. Mr. Bohannon replied that this year was crazy because of COVID, but it also has given the committee a taste of what it is like to have an ambitious calendar and manage expectations and planning. They have to make sure that they are going to be meeting what they have committed to do, and to do it well. That is one thing to be cognizant of.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she is not running again for City Council but she will ask the Mayor if she can stay on this committee. She continued that if everyone is okay with it, she will ask Councilor Workman if she can be the representative. Mr. Bohannon replied that Councilor Manwaring is not the City Council representative to this committee. He continued that there is a City Council liaison seat, but she chose to be a member. A liaison does not get a vote. Dr. Morris stated that Councilor Workman was on the RJCS Committee.

Chair Hay asked if this committee is complete with its nine members or if there is room for more. Mr. Bohannon replied that the Mayor wants to add people to be alternates. That way if someone is not here they could have a quorum easier. Chair Hay spoke about someone he knows who may be interested in joining this committee. Councilor Manwaring stated that they do not want the same three or four people doing everything and it would be good to have more.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if next month’s agenda can include the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event so they can start planning. Others replied yes.

7) Adjourn – Next Meeting is Monday, October 4, 2021 at 5:00 PM

There being no further business, Chair Hay adjourned the meeting at 5:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Andy Bohannon, Director Parks, Recreation and Facilities