

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, November 1, 2021

5:00 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Councilor Jan Manwaring
Dr. Dottie Morris
Nancy Salwen
Dr. Mohammed Saleh
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos (arrived at 5:13 PM)
Marti Fiske, Ex-Officio

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities
Director

Members Not Present:

Ritu Budakoti, Alternate
William Hay, Chair
Dr. Shaun Filiault

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Vice Chair Saleh called the meeting to order at 5:04 PM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of October 4, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Dr. Morris made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of October 4, 2021. Councilor Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon reported that the finance report is in the agenda packet, and everything is up to date, related to the Keene International Festival (KIF) and the HRC's expenses. The current balance is \$4,191.88.

Dr. Morris asked, in regards to the expenditures for the Juneteenth event, if Mr. Bohannon received information from Amina Jordan-Mendez and Julissa Rodriguez. She continued that Nicole Young should not have been paid; she sent Mr. Bohannon an email about that. She asked if they were paid and the information is just not on this report, or if the HRC has not paid them. Mr. Bohannon replied that he sent the information to Dennis in the Finance Department. He continued that he will run a report on that and see what happened with this. He did the audit for

the KIF but not for the HRC. He will run that report and email Dr. Morris if there are any discrepancies.

Vice Chair Saleh stated that the Finance Report is accepted as informational.

4) Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee Report

Vice Chair Saleh stated that the committee members have before them a draft statement of inclusion that Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos wrote. He continued that the idea is for the committee to read it and see if they want to make changes to it. He continued that he recalls that the purpose is to encourage the statement to be read at the start of meetings, and the HRC can start by doing that themselves. Ms. Salwen asked if the statement would be for the City Council and all City committees, as well as the HRC. Vice Chair replied that is his understanding. Mr. Bohannon replied that it would be a recommendation from this committee to the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee, asking the MSFI Committee to recommend it to the City Council.

The committee discussed the wording of the draft statement of inclusion and discussed edits and changes. Councilor Manwaring stated that she is not sure if the City of Keene's mission is as the statement describes, or if the City even has a stated mission; and the draft statement is too long. People would be more likely to read it at the start of meetings if it was shorter.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos arrived at 5:13 PM.

Discussion continued about whether the City of Keene has a mission statement, and potential rewording of or elimination of that beginning part of the draft statement. The committee decided to strike the first few sentences so that it begins with: "As we begin this meeting..."

Heidi Schwieger, HRC guest, suggested that "differently abled, whether physically or mentally" be changed to "disabled," because "disabled" is the norm and the preferred term. Others suggested and agreed upon "those living with disabilities." Discussion ensued about the importance of person-first language, and other wording changes to the portion of the draft statement that reads: "...people of color, people of all cultures including indigenous peoples, people of all faiths or none, those [living with disabilities], those who identify as members of the LGBTQIA community, those who identify as women, and immigrants." Dr. Morris asked for "those who identify as women" to be changed to "Those who identify as women or non-binary."

Lengthy discussion ensued about the definitions of terms such as "immigrant," "migrant," "refugee," "asylum-seeker," and "those not native born," what the best wording is, and how to use person-first language to be the most inclusive. The group decided to change "immigrants" to "those not born in the United States, regardless of citizenship status."

Discussion continued about the statement's readability and person-first language. Ms. Fiske suggested "...people of color, all cultures, all faiths or none..."

Dr. Morris suggested adding "children" to the list of underrepresented people, stating that she learned that there are more laws in NH to protect animals than to protect children. Ms. Salwen suggested "people of all ages," which thus includes children and seniors. Others agreed.

Someone suggested the term "BIPOC" to replace/shorten "people of color, and people of all cultures including indigenous people." Discussion ensued and general agreement was that the general public is not familiar enough with the term.

Vice Chair Saleh suggested they pause on this task for now, and review it again at the next meeting. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will circle it back to the City Attorney for his input and let him know that it will come back to the HRC Committee to review, before it goes back to him, before it goes to the MSFI Committee. It will be a bit of a process, but the HRC has tuned it up quite a bit.

Dr. Morris stated that there is also the term JEDI – Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. She continued that many people are thus making "JEDI statements." Discussion ensued about the acronym and the possibilities.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he wants to read the updated draft statement, for the record:

"As we begin this meeting, we choose to proceed with the awareness that the statements and decisions we make will be perceived differently by those with different life experiences. We move forward with the firm intention to hold space for the voices, opinions, and experiences of those to whom space has historically been refused. These include but are not limited to people of color; of all cultures, including indigenous people; of all faiths or none; those living with disabilities; those who identify as members of the LGBTQIA community; those who identify as women or non-binary; those not born in the United States, regardless of citizenship status; and those of all ages."

Mr. Bohannon and committee members thanked Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos for her work in creating the first draft. Mr. Bohannon praised the committee for their work on this statement as well.

Vice Chair Saleh stated that there was another action item regarding the RJCS Report. He continued that on page 5 of last month's meeting minutes, the second paragraph states, "Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that before they move on to the next recommendation, she would like to have the action item for 1.C. to at least be to come back to this. Others agreed." Moving forward, they need to act on this item that they planned on acting on. Discussion ensued, and Ms. Fiske read recommendation 1.C. out loud: "That the City continue its commitment and efforts toward racial justice and community safety whether via an existing committee such as the

Human Rights Committee, a new equity and inclusion task force, or a joint effort of multiple community organizations and agencies.” Vice Chair Saleh stated that the HRC’s discussion was about data – how to gather it, the purpose of gathering it, and the importance of it. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied yes, and the question of whether there are existing sources (Police, schools, and so on and so forth) or if they need to find a way to collect the data, such as doing a climate survey.

Vice Chair Saleh stated that last time when they discussed this they maybe did not consider the fact that recommendations 3 (Public Safety) and 4 (City and Community) have a similar idea. Mr. Bohannon asked for more information about what recommendations Vice Chair Saleh is looking at. Vice Chair Saleh replied that he thinks the HRC should also be looking at the 2nd and 4th recommendations, instead of putting all of their efforts into 1.C.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if he is suggesting the HRC finish doing a review of all of the action items in the document and see which ones have synergy and could be approached together, as the HRC develops its action items. Vice Chair Saleh replied yes. He asked if there was a reason why they decided to skip 3 (Public Safety). Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied because it is not really the HRC’s purview; it is the Police’s. Others agreed. Mr. Bohannon stated that the Keene Police Department’s accreditation with CALEA is extensive and the KPD has gone through training. He does not think this committee should be involved with the Police standards.

5) Committee Programs

A) MLK Day

Vice Chair Saleh stated that the idea is to try to replicate what the HRC did for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day two years ago. Dr. Morris asked if it will be in person. Discussion ensued about the event two years ago at the Library, with music.

Ms. Salwen stated that she emailed the author of Raising White Kids to see if she is available. She continued that she has not replied, but last year, she had expressed interest. She (Ms. Salwen) told the author that the event would be online, because that was her assumption. If she hears from the author in the next week or so, she will let them know.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he thinks the event should be online, out of an abundance of caution. He continued that he thinks they could reach just as many people this way. Last year 60 or 70 people attended the online event, and there were that many in person (the year before). It would be possible to get a more diverse audience, and speakers, if the event were online. Ms. Fiske stated that last year, people shared the link, and the Elm City Rotary Club watched almost half of it as a club.

Councilor Manwaring stated that on a different note, State legislation was passed on race theory and implicit bias, and half of the committee for the Governor’s Advisory Council on Diversity

and Inclusion were quoted in the newspaper as saying “You just muzzled us.” People are confused about what “race theory” and “implicit bias” are, and they are now not allowed to talk about it in schools. Dr. Morris replied that the concept of “implicit bias” was developed in the 1940s or 1950s, and all of a sudden, people are saying it is problematic. She continued that other states have passed similar legislation. Vice Chair Saleh asked if they should talk about this at the MLK event. Councilor Manwaring replied that it would be good to have someone who can talk about it, and empower people to question it.

Discussion continued about possible speakers. Dr. Morris suggested Patricia Harris as a person who can explain critical race theory and might be available. Ms. Salwen asked if the group would be interested in inviting the musical performers they had two years ago. Discussion ensued about what an online sing-a-long would be like, and the preferred duration of a musical performance or sing-a-long. Dr. Morris suggested contacting Debbie Irving, author of *Waking Up White*, as a speaker. Ms. Salwen suggested the poet who came to Juneteenth. Dr. Morris stated that at Keene State College (KSC), she was trying to put something together with poet Magdalena Gomez; maybe the HSC could be involved.

Mr. Bohannon stated that this is the November meeting, and the HRC will not meet again until December, so they have to come up with a speaker, presenter, or program, for December, so they can begin to publish the information. He continued that otherwise, they will be in last year’s routine of getting it out in January.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos suggested they first decide how long they want the event to be. Discussion ensued, and the group agreed upon an hour. Mr. Bohannon stated that last year, having a speaker for 45 minutes and 15 minutes for questions and answers worked well. Dr. Morris asked if they should have a working group to work on this. She continued that she can reach out to Patricia Harris and Debbie Irving and report back. Ms. Salwen asked if the group is still interested in Jennifer Harvey (*Raising White Kids* author), if she emails back. Councilor Manwaring replied that they should find out what her fee is.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos summarized that they want an hour-long event, with 45 minutes of a speaker and 15 minutes of question and answer; and they are looking for one speaker, and have three people in mind, off the top of their heads. One of the three has already been reached out to, and two are people that Dr. Morris will reach out to. She suggested that the first person to tell Mr. Bohannon that a person they reached out to said “yes” is the person they will go with. Dr. Morris and Ms. Salwen can communicate with each other about this. Dr. Morris replied that after she attends a book event on Wednesday, she might have another person to reach out to. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if Mr. Bohannon is allowed to share the information with the HRC if a speaker has been chosen during the time before the December meeting. Mr. Bohannon replied yes. Vice Chair Saleh asked if they are ruling out the possibility of music or poetry. Others replied yes, unless they strike out with the three or four potential speakers identified.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that although Ms. Salwen and Dr. Morris are the ones with the contacts, they should feel free to reach out to the rest of the HRC if they want help with something. Discussion ensued about another contact Dr. Morris has.

Vice Chair Saleh stated that at the last meeting, Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos had asked if the agenda could have the dates of the HRC's events listed, to help the HRC will planning. He continued that he does not know the date of the next event on the list, the Holi Festival – is it far enough away that they do not need to talk about it right now? Mr. Bohannon replied that they can probably move all of the (planning for the) events to future meetings. He continued that he worked with Jennifer Carroll and Ms. Budakoti on the Holi Festival. At the next meeting, they should begin to talk about Pride month and Juneteenth. He will add dates.

Councilor Manwaring suggested that at the next meeting, they plan to spend 20 to 25 minutes on the RJCS Report, and then the rest of the meeting could be for events planning, so they are not trying to cram the events planning into the last 10 minutes. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that her concern is that if they do that, they might not have even gotten through the action items in the RJCS Report by 2023. Mr. Bohannon replied that Vice Chair Saleh had a great idea earlier, about going through the report and seeing which items are ones the HRC can actually take action on, and from there, they could create a spreadsheet of the topics and actions and dates of completion. He continued that that has been done with several other committees, like the Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee and the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board. Maybe at the next HRC meeting, if people have reviewed the report, they could put all of the items up and go from there. Dr. Morris replied that it seems like Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos has highlighted what she thought were (items for the HRC). Maybe they could each highlight. Vice Chair Saleh replied that their homework from last time was to read #2 and #4 and have ideas. He asked if they should have someone created a template spreadsheet. Ms. Salwen replied that maybe they should wait to see what the nature of things are that they want to do, because they might not be action items. They might be whole projects.

Dr. Morris asked if she is allowed to send video clips of the potential speakers to the HRC members, outside of a meeting, to get their thoughts. Mr. Bohannon replied that since it is for the purposes of education, yes; they would not be taking any governing actions. The City Attorney says that is okay. Discussion ensued. Ms. Salwen asked how many HRC members would be allowed to get together to watch the video clips and discuss. Mr. Bohannon replied that they could all do that, as a “work group” related to this educational experience.

- B) Holi Festival**
- C) Pride Month**
- D) Juneteenth**
- E) Keene International Festival**
- F) Indigenous People's Day**

6) **New, Other Business**

Vice Chair Saleh asked about the “more time” item on the agenda, Keene State College Outreach. Mr. Bohannon refreshed the committee’s memory about what that referred to, and asked if they wanted to remove that from the agenda. They agreed.

7) **Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, December 6, 2021 at 5:00 PM**

There being no further business, Vice Chair Saleh adjourned the meeting at 6:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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