

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

**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday, December 5, 2022**

**5:00 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair  
Dr. Shaun Filiault, Vice Chair  
Jan Manwaring  
Marti Fiske  
Hunter Kirschner  
Dr. Dottie Morris (5:02 PM)  
Rabbi Daniel Aronson (5:03 PM)

**Staff Present:**

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities  
Director  
Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager

**Members Not Present:**

Dr. Mohammad Saleh  
Councilor Catherine Workman  
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate  
Heidi Schwieger, Alternate

**1) Welcome and Call to Order**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos read the HRC's statement: *"In our efforts to create a more equal and just society, we move forward with the firm intention to value the voices, opinions, and experiences of all people. We choose to proceed with the awareness and humility that the statements and decisions we make will have a different impact for those with different life experiences."*

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM. Roll call was conducted.

**2) Approval of November 7, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of November 7, 2022. Mr. Kirschner seconded the motion, which passed by a vote of 3-0. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos and Dr. Filiault abstained.

**3) Finance Report**

Mr. Bohannon reported that as he stated at the previous meeting, under "expenses," he put the events in chronological order.

Dr. Morris arrived at 5:02 PM.

**4) Budget Development**

Mr. Bohannon stated that the HRC essentially has five events – the Keene International Festival (KIF) is self-funded. The HRC receives \$1,000 from the City. They currently have a balance of \$3,991.88. The proposal from Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos was to divide \$2,000 equally among the four events, and if an event needs more money, the organizers for the event need to do the fundraising. Some events might not need any support.

Mr. Aronson arrived at 5:03 PM.

Mr. Bohannon continued that Juneteenth, for example, might cost more than \$500, if they need a sound system and to bring folks in. The HRC can discuss the proposal (to allot \$500 to each event).

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they also discussed having the use of the reserve of \$1,191 be voted on by the entire HRC. She continued that currently the HRC gets \$1,000 per year. She saw in the meeting minutes that the committee had discussed whether to make another request to the City for another \$1,000 so it totals \$2,000 per year. She asked if the HRC actually made a motion to make that request and write that letter. Others replied no. Mr. Bohannon stated that they were waiting for this meeting for Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos to be present. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if everyone is comfortable with requesting \$2,000, and with having \$500 as the starting point for each event's budget.

Ms. Manwaring stated that her question is whether the HRC is committed to doing those four events, because they have never done all four. She continued that it would mean the HRC members would need to work beyond these (monthly) meetings. Mr. Bohannon clarified that the four events are Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Pride Month, Juneteenth, the KIF [self-funded], and Indigenous People's Day. Discussion ensued. Dr. Filiault spoke about how MLK Day was the original purpose of the committee, and Juneteenth has happened for two or three years, and they had an Indigenous People's Day event this year. An independent group puts on Pride events, and people from that group have reached out to him and Mr. Kirschner about working together. He and Mr. Kirschner need to talk about what that could look like. It is worth leaving [Pride Month] as a placeholder for now, and if they decide not to use the funds, they could relinquish those funds later on.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the other aspect of this is the HRC made a call to the public, asking the public to inform the HRC about what trainings and events they need and want to see. She continued that the HRC might need to revise this list as they go, and have discussions as they go about how to fund things.

Ms. Manwaring stated that her question was more about whether the HRC members, who are all busy people, are able and willing to jump in and do this. She continued that she hopes so.

Dr. Morris asked if the HRC can request more money from the City, explaining that they have been tasked with more than their current budget can cover. Or will the other coalition MDEIB be responsible for doing some things? She continued that Juneteenth relied on kind people's donations.

Mr. Bohannon replied that the HRC can request City funding during this upcoming budget cycle. He continued that department heads need to submit those in February. Through the City Council process, the requests do not get approved until June. The HRC could find themselves making an additional request in May, but they really should try not to do that and instead make their request early. This year's MLK Day event will not cost the HRC anything. Thus, the HRC could probably reallocate those funds for the Juneteenth event. His opinion is that the Juneteenth event could need additional funding to help offset its costs. Some years the HRC has costs with the MLK Day event. Maybe \$2,500 or \$3,000 (would be a reasonable request).

Dr. Morris asked what the process is for making that request. Mr. Bohannon replied that first the HRC discusses it and decides upon an amount to request, then directs him to write a memorandum to the City Manager making that request.

Discussion continued. Ms. Fiske asked if people had different amounts to propose, regarding what the HRC should request. She asked if it is correct that the HRC currently receives \$1,000 and the proposal is \$2,000. Mr. Bohannon replied that that is utilizing some of the remaining/current funds. Ms. Fiske replied that she thought the proposal was requesting \$2,000 for next year. Mr. Bohannon replied that there would be \$1,000 from the City, and the remaining \$1,000 would come from the existing balance. Ms. Fiske replied that it sounds like they would want to plan for at least \$2,000 from the City and then fund balances to pad out where needed. She asked Dr. Morris if that is what she was thinking. Dr. Morris replied that she is thinking closer to \$3,000, because it does not feel comfortable to continue asking people to (present at HRC events) for free. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that for the past two years the Juneteenth budget has been about \$2,000, which has been possible due to other events not using their funding, and due to donations.

Dr. Filiault asked what the budget was last year for the MLK Day event. Mr. Bohannon replied \$0, because for the last two years, Dr. Morris has been able to utilize her resources. He continued that it is important to keep in mind that those were on Zoom. Dr. Filiault asked what a typical budget would be for a live MLK Day event. Mr. Bohannon replied that it depends on the program. This year, the Historical Society has brought forward their event, which the HRC talked about. There is no charge for that. Unless the HRC decides to get breakfast items and coffee, there will be no cost. Ms. Fiske stated that from her Library experience, she can say that bringing in a speaker at that level would generally be about \$500 plus refreshments.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that it might be more realistic to start with \$1,000 per event. She continued that the Library footed the bill for the Indigenous People's Day event this year, and for MLK Day they have been lucky enough to use Zoom and Dr. Morris's network, but yes, it becomes a little bit exploitative if the HRC is constantly asking for that donation and not doing stipends and things of that nature. She does not want the HRC to rely on the notion that those will be free of charge going forward. She asked if it would be appropriate for the HRC to raise their request to \$4,000 per year, and if they might get that. Mr. Bohannon replied that as long as the HRC can demonstrate that it is being used and is needed, they can qualify that as a reasonable ask, but that does not mean the City will give it. They can ask.

Mr. Bohannon stated that it sounds like for the time being, a different group is hosting its own Pride events and fundraising for those events, and down the line, the HRC will talk about whether/how to collaborate with them. He continued that the HRC is thankful for the Library moving forward with the Indigenous People's Day event, and if there are grants for the Library to do that, that is great, but he thinks if the HRC asks for \$3,000 per year and puts \$2,000 to Juneteenth and \$1,000 to the MLK Day event, they might be able to make up that \$500 if it is only \$500, or if it is only \$250 for MLK Day they could use that to offset the Pride event or Indigenous People's Day. The HRC already has almost \$4,000 in the bank to offset that.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if she is hearing correctly that if the HRC asks for that money, they really need to spend it, and they already have \$4,000 in the bank, so asking for more without spending what is there is probably a "not consistent" ask. Mr. Bohannon replied that he would say that a consistent ask is \$3,000 every year. He continued that he thinks that would be a reasonable ask. Given what they are looking at citywide for the Racial Justice and Community Safety (RJCS) Report and actions that will be needed there, and other education and outreach, they can rely on some of that to do that. Asking for \$3,000 and committing \$1,000 to MLK Day and \$2,000 to Juneteenth (makes sense). They know they will spend that \$2,000 for Juneteenth; that is a given. It is the other events how they are able to network.

Dr. Morris asked if there are things in the RJCS Report they will need money for. She continued that their request will be even stronger if they can say that in order to conduct the business they were tasked with from the report, now they need funding to be able to implement some of these things. They could justify the request for that reason. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that most of the action items coming out of the RJCS Report were not things that the HRC could do; they were things that other City entities needed to do.

Mr. Aronson asked about Holi Festival, stating that it was on the HRC's list of events at one time. He continued that he thought it came off due to scheduling issues. He asked if it should go back on. Mr. Bohannon replied that that was a collaboration between the Historical Society, the Keene India Association, and KSC. In 2019, the HRC was having conversations about it and he bought all the colors, which are still sitting in boxes. People from the KIF had suggested doing Holi Festival at the Rec Center. That is how that came about. However, they need to know what

the Keene India Association and the Historical Society want to do. These partnerships need to be aligned.

Mr. Aronson asked if they should thus have a line item for miscellaneous co-sponsorships, or support for other organizations that might come to the HRC for, say, \$100 or \$200. For example, if the Jewish community or Muslim community wanted to do something, or something else. Dr. Filiault replied that he thinks they do, and that is their balance on hand. He continued that they do need to spend down their balance on hand before they start asking for more. Mr. Aronson replied that maybe that should be a line under “expenses,” and they can let people know that they are available to do that. Dr. Filiault replied that they could allocate a certain amount from their balance on hand each year towards miscellaneous sponsorships or endorsements, and advertise that they have that available for worthy causes.

Ms. Fiske replied that she wants to make sure they have the authority to forward money to other organizations, since the money is given to the HRC by the City. She continued that if they co-sponsor something it might be a clear line, but if they are not clearly co-sponsoring an item it may be a problem of authority. Dr. Filiault replied that they certainly would have to be a co-sponsor on whatever it was. Mr. Bohannon replied that he cautions the HRC about this, for the sake of history, because the HRC used to have \$13,000 in the bank, not just \$3,000. Then, organizations came in, and the HRC said, “Sure, we’ll give you \$1,000!” or \$4,000, or \$500, and it was not reciprocated or the HRC was not deemed a co-sponsor of these things. Thus, they really crunched down on their collaboration, in saying, ‘We are not just a funding source. Just because we are from the City of Keene and we do have a balance, it does not allow you to just come in and take our resources.’ He cautions the HRC about this. That said, this is not an adopted budget by the trustees or City Council, it just the HRC’s budget to go by. And if they deem that they want to have this miscellaneous support line, they can. There could be an event that comes out of the blue that is a perfect opportunity for the HRC at, say, \$2,500, and the HRC can approve it and spend it. As long as it meets the mission and purpose of this group, nothing is stopping them from doing that.

Dr. Morris replied that in the early days of this committee, they had major speakers. Then as the money decreased, it was harder to bring people in. She does not see why they could not go back to that level of events within the city, if they plan to move the needle any. It seems like people think this is the work people should just do out of the kindness of their hearts. There are a lot of people the HRC could get, such as faculty members from UMass who are publishing in social justice, but if the HRC only has, say, \$400 to offer to these people who are being pulled by a lot of other entities, they will be going with the other entities. The HRC could do some amazing work here, and they could spend the money to make it happen. She gave examples of work other communities do for MLK Day, and her hopes for the HRC to rise to the challenge and be as great as they can be.

Mr. Bohannon replied that he agrees the HRC can rise. He continued that he met with Luca Paris and Dan Smith from the YMCA, and they were joined by Mark Belden, the president of the

Savings Bank of Walpole. They talked about what each group is doing, because there are three groups moving in the same direction but not communicating enough with one another. They will fix that, and meet periodically. To Dr. Morris's point, one of the things he, Mr. Smith, Mr. Paris, and Mr. Belden discussed is having a community forum discussion with a guest speaker to start a great conversation. That is in the works, determining what that might look like and who would take it on. The group is getting established. Mr. Bohannon spoke a bit more about how Mr. Smith talked about wanting to collaborate more for events with other groups, so the YMCA is not doing "one-off" events.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that to close the loop on the budget development conversation, she would like the HRC to vote on their budget request. Do they want to ask for \$3,000 per year? Discussion continued.

Mr. Aronson made a motion for the Human Rights Committee to ask [the City of Keene] for \$3,000 per year for their budget. Ms. Fiske seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if they want to vote on how to distribute the money in their budget, or if they should table that for another meeting. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will put the memorandum together for the HRC to review at their next meeting. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos thanked him and stated that that is a great starting point.

**5) Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition (MDEIB) Updates**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she heard Dr. Morris has been unable to attend MDEIB meetings because they are at the same time as when she teaches. Dr. Morris replied that she told the MDEIB she was unable to attend this semester, but she will be going again starting with the next meeting, now that the semester is ending this week.

**6) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked for a discussion about the MLK Day event. Mr. Bohannon stated that he met with Jennifer Carroll from the Historical Society. He continued that a couple meetings ago, Ms. Manwaring spoke about the project the Historical Society was working on, called Recovering Black History in the Monadnock Region. The HRC had wanted to find out more about that. The Historical Society has put together many materials related to that project, which Ms. Carroll will put together into a presentation approximately 40 minutes long, followed by a Q&A session. That will be the MLK Day event. On February 22, there will be a second conversation, with Michelle Stahl of the Monadnock Center for History and Culture, and archeologist Gail Golec, to share some of the stories from the project.

Dr. Morris stated that she spoke with Keene Cinema about the possibility of a showing of the movie Till. She continued that they told her they will not know until January, because if it gets nominated for an Oscar they will bring it in, but at this point they do not have a plan for it. It does not seem like the Colonial has plans to show it, either; she thinks they, too, are waiting to hear about the Oscars. If the movie does come to Keene, they can definitely do a program around it, but it might not be in January. At KSC, she is working on bringing in a speaker, Theo Wilson, a Black man who went undercover in a white supremacist group. He speaks about many things but has a special MLK Day address and challenge. She will let the HRC know how that pans out. Mr. Wilson's talk would be at the college but people from the city would be invited to attend. She really hopes the film works out.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if Dr. Morris would like the HRC to sponsor the film. Dr. Morris replied yes, that would be a part of it. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that the HRC could still sponsor it even if it does not happen in January. Mr. Bohannon stated that he wonders if there could be a larger collaboration between the college, the City, and the Monadnock International Film Festival, to help bring Till to the Colonial. Dr. Morris replied that it is expensive to screen, being a major motion picture. Mr. Bohannon replied that the Monadnock International Film Festival might be able to do some of the legwork related to sponsorship. That might be a conversation they could have. Discussion continued about the film.

7) **Community Outreach**

A) **Martin Luther King Jr. Day**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they talked about MLK Day in the previous agenda item. She asked if there was anything else to discuss for Community Outreach.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the HRC received an email, related to the City's Downtown Infrastructure Project. He continued that he forwarded the email to the HRC members. The email is from Eric Swope, who mindfully shared his thoughts regarding the definition of "public space" and the importance of it being welcoming. If HRC members have not yet done the survey [to share ideas/visions related to the Downtown Infrastructure Project], he highly recommends doing so. He also highly encourages them to share the survey link with others to get their feedback as well. It is about redefining downtown Keene. There is a link to the survey in the email, and there are postcards in the lobby about it.

8) **New Business**

Mr. Bohannon stated that someone had asked about the membership terms for the HRC. He continued that up for a second term are Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos and Councilor Workman; he will ask Councilor Workman if she is up for that second term. Dr. Morris has served two terms. He asked if she is willing to extend her term. Dr. Morris replied yes.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the City of Lebanon, NH has a DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) Commission. Through the RJCS Report, the City of Keene will be forming its own internal DEI Committee. Through research, they found that Lebanon put out a survey to their community

related to DEI. He wanted to find out if this is something the HRC is interested in doing, as part of their responsibility to learn how to educate the community, and to do outreach. This survey could provide direction for educational events that the HRC might be able to fund or co-sponsor down the road. That is something to contemplate. He can send the survey around so everyone can see it, but first he wanted to see if this is something the HRC is interested in. The responses to the survey would go to the City, but it might give that baseline information that the HRC could work from. Maybe every year or every other year they could send out the survey, to see how the community is feeling related to this topic. It has been quite a while since KSC has done their internal survey. The City has never done anything like this.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the committee wants Mr. Bohannon to show them the survey. Others replied yes. Mr. Bohannon stated that he told the City Manager that he would discuss it at this meeting, and if the HRC approves of moving in this direction, he will send the HRC members the survey. At their January meeting, if they decide the survey is a go and they want to do this, the survey would get sent out and be open for about three weeks. They would hopefully have responses by the February meeting, or by the March meeting.

Ms. Fiske stated that as a department head who is also working on similar work for the Library Department, and doing strategic planning this winter, she thinks it would be great if this survey could be shared with other City departments for their own work as well. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, this is a great community opportunity, but certainly could be used in-house as well.

Mr. Aronson stated that he has new business/an announcement as well – two things of note are happening on December 21. At 5:00 PM, Congregation Ahavas Achim is having a Hanukkah Menorah Lighting on Central Square. They have invited the Mayor, representatives from the Cohen Center and the Monadnock Interfaith Project, and State Representatives Jay Kahn and others. It will be about a 20-minute event, and the menorah will not stay out. He is also donating a menorah to the holiday display in City Hall. The Longest Night Vigil starts at 5:30 PM at St. James. It is the annual vigil for homelessness, and will include a reading of a list of names of homeless people who have died this past year due to exposure to the elements.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked why the menorah will not be staying out. Mr. Aronson replied that it has to be plugged in, and he does not know if the City would be okay with that. He continued that there are also vandalism concerns. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she was afraid he was going to say that (regarding vandalism). She continued that it struck her that Keene lights a (Christmas) tree for a month or two. Mr. Aronson replied that this is homemade, wooden, and retrofitted for lightbulbs instead of candles; it is not a big, sturdy structure that could stay outside exposed to the elements.

Ms. Manwaring stated that she wonders if the HRC should/could be doing anything regarding the anti-Semitic feelings flying around the country at this time. Mr. Aronson replied that that is a good question, and it is part of what prompted him to think about this. He continued that there are definitely things the HRC could be doing. He will have to give it some thought. He is happy



to bring back recommendations at the next meeting. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that that would be wonderful.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he will send the HRC members copies of the draft that Dr. Filiault wrote (for the executive summary of the RJCS Report). He thanked Dr. Filiault for his efforts. He continued that due to the length of the discussions the HRC had, he knows Dr. Filiault struggled to consolidate everything. He suggests the HRC members take time to digest it and return to discuss it at the January meeting. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos agreed. Dr. Filiault stated that it is certainly in the draft stage, after many attempts at trying to keep it to a reasonable length; he was unable to keep it to just one page.

9) **Adjournment – Next Meeting Monday, January 2, 2023**

Mr. Bohannon asked if they want to change the date of the January meeting, since the City is closed on January 2. Discussion ensued.

Dr. Morris made a motion to move the HRC's next meeting to January 9, 2023. Ms. Fiske seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:52 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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