

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

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

**Monday, June 5, 2023**

**5:00 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair  
Hunter Kirschner, Vice Chair  
Jan Manwaring  
Dr. Dottie Morris  
Dr. Mohammed Saleh  
Marti Fiske  
Gina Burke

**Staff Present:**

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

**Members Not Present:**

Rabbi Daniel Aronson  
Councilor Catherine Workman  
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate  
Tedd Benson, Alternate  
Jennifer Nescimento, 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."*

She called the meeting to order at 5:05 PM. Roll call was conducted.

**2) Approval of May 1, 2023 Minutes**

Dr. Morris made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of May 1, 2023. Mr. Kirschner seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) **Finance Report**

Mr. Bohannon stated that everything is up to date, regarding what the HRC has received. He continued that the exception is that donations, listed under the Juneteenth event, shall be received; they are not actual at this point. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if that is what they are budgeting to go for. Mr. Bohannon replied yes. He continued that he thinks they have \$1,300 right now that they have received/cash in hand. The Juneteenth full expenses he showed as the \$3,800. The HRC had asked for the finance report to recognize that each event has \$500, so he put that in. He took a little liberty here, which the HRC can have him take back if they want – when they did Till this year, they recognized and celebrated Black History Month. It used to be Pride Month here in the budget. They can still add Pride Month; they just have not done anything with it. Thus, he added Black History Month as a line item. He is not trying to take anything away. If they do Black History Month each year, they can have it there. There is definitely room for them to do Pride Month. The way the HRC left it was with the knowledge that another group in town is organizing an event, and the HRC could piggyback at some point.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Mr. Kirschner is the chair of the Pride Month subcommittee/working group. Mr. Kirschner stated that what he remembers is that Dr. Shaun Filiault had suggested that it made sense for the HRC to not do a Pride event since the other group was doing it, and he (Mr. Kirschner) challenged that, saying that the HRC's mission is different enough from Keene Pride's that he thinks there is space for the HRC to do something. He continued that he does not have anything prepared for Pride Month this year, but it should stay in the budget as an event. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked for the line item to be put back in. Mr. Bohannon agreed.

Mr. Bohannon asked if he should keep Black History Month in there as well. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that they could at least leave it as a placeholder. She continued that they do not have a subcommittee/working group chair for that, and so on and so forth, but they can figure that out. Mr. Bohannon replied that as they begin to build momentum with MDEIB, collaborations could be an opportunity.

Dr. Saleh stated that he is confused by the math. He continued that the HRC's expenses column adds up to the \$5,645 listed at the bottom, but he is not sure what the "\$500" listed under the MLK Day and Juneteenth line items means. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that each event is allocated \$500 from the HRC's annual budget. She continued that that is the amount of money each event/working group starts with, without having to fundraise. Dr. Saleh replied that they could add a comment that it does not add up to the total expenses. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied yes, the "\$500" is more informational.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked to hear from Dr. Morris about an MDEIB update. Dr. Morris replied that she did not have an update, and asked Mr. Bohannon if he did.

Ms. Burke stated that she went to an MDEIB meeting for the first time, and they presented some findings about work they had been doing in the city. She continued that it sounds like the regional groups are meeting as well. It seems like the MDEIB is assembling more people.

**5) Racial Justice and Community Safety Report**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked where they are with the RCJS Report's executive summary. Mr. Bohannon replied that he has not yet done the work he had said he would do. He continued that Ms. Fiske has encouraged him via email this week, which he appreciates. He owes them some information.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if they should table this another month. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will make sure the document is sent off to the three or four individuals who said they would review it. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that to summarize, she thinks how they left it in the last group discussion was that a subcommittee would examine it and do the final editing. She asked if that is what is still in process. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, it has to go from his desk to theirs.

**6) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

**A) Juneteenth**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that there is no Juneteenth event report in the agenda packet, but regarding the flyer, they have been able to collaborate with the other groups that are doing Juneteenth programming. She continued that they meet again tomorrow. They have a little more fundraising to do, but the program is ironed out. They have created Facebook events, which she encourages HRC members to share and RSVP to.

Ms. Manwaring asked if there is anything that says what the HRC's part is. Mr. Bohannon replied that the website gives information about the two performances. He asked if Ms. Manwaring is looking for more of an agenda for the event/program. There should be more information on the YMCA's website. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the program is as follows: an opening/welcome by Kris Roberts, a performance by the Gaslight Tinkers, a speaker from the Black Cowboys podcast, a performance by the Alex Minasian Trio, a speaker from the ACLU whose focus is mass incarceration, a workshop performance from a local composer/musician, and a speech from Gail Summers. Ms. Fiske stated that the YMCA website does not specify the agenda for the HRC's event; it just has the general information that is on the flyer. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that they are meeting tomorrow and can address that. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, they can get that updated.

Mr. Bohannon stated that collaborating with the YMCA gave them the ability to do a few things, such as tapping into their marketing, which includes paid radio spots. He played the radio spot that Councilor Workman did for Juneteenth. He continued that next week they will be going to

the radio station with Pierre Morton to do an overview about the event with Dan Mitchell. The publicity is great. Local Burger is a sponsor, and for every burger sold that day, the HRC gets \$5 back. The more people buy at Local Burger that day, the more the HRC gets back. The YMCA is putting together coupons, so he encourages everyone to get coupons at the event and share them.

Ms. Manwaring asked what help is needed that day for setup. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that setup is minimal, because they decided to do away with the stage, which was not used in previous years. She continued that setup will mainly be the sound system and popups. Mr. Bohannon replied that they have popups to bring. Ms. Manwaring asked about chairs. Mr. Bohannon replied that he can do chairs for people under the tents, not for the general audience. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she thinks they have it handled, but if Ms. Manwaring wants to come help, she is more than welcome. Ms. Manwaring replied that she will definitely be at the event, but it sounds like setup is covered.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if anyone had further questions about Juneteenth. Hearing none, she asked if this is a good time to address Indigenous People's Day. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, he did forward some information, which Ms. Fiske can speak to. Ms. Fiske stated that she thinks this ("Voices from the Barrens" documentary) could be a good program, and it would not be a heavy lift. She continued that she took into account Dr. Morris's considerations that she had told the HRC about, regarding bringing in an outside tribe. The film is about a group that is doing a sustainable agricultural program, and the Keene area does not have such a program. The people on the panel would be joining via Zoom, which reduces the cost. Ms. Fiske gave more information about the panelists, the film, and logistics. She continued that the final costs depend on how many panelists the director is able to get, one or two. The maximum expected cost would be \$340. She knows there is a budget available, but if there are concerns about not being able to continue to do this, the Library could front a portion of the cost or all of it if necessary. The Library could pay \$40 for the DVD because she would like to add it to the Library's collection.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked what Ms. Fiske is looking for from the HRC. Ms. Fiske replied that she is looking for whether the Committee would support this event, and if so, at what level of financial support. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that the event has a \$500 budget to start with and the number Ms. Fiske quoted was less than that. Ms. Fiske replied yes, but she is cognizant of the fact that the HRC has been overspending in some areas. She expects the cost to be \$340.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the HRC supports this, or if there are any concerns about going forward. Ms. Fiske asked if anyone has concerns about the HRC funding the \$40 for the DVD. Others replied that it is fine.

Mr. Bohannon asked if the HRC agrees with allocating the \$340 for this event. Others replied yes. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they will go ahead and do that. It does not need a

motion. She continued that Ms. Fiske will go forward with this unless anyone objects, and hearing no objection, it sounds like Ms. Fiske can go forward.

Dr. Morris stated that recently, there was an article that confronted the heritage of some people in NH. She continued that it is a complicated, painful, traumatic discussion. It is something for the HRC to be aware of. How can the HRC discuss it, and what are the implications of the racist culture that has created the need to even have the discussion? She does not know when, but at some point, they need to address this. Ms. Fiske suggested the possibility of hosting a panel discussion with people from local tribes and people from the Canadian, (government)-recognized tribe, but it is so complicated and contentious. Dr. Morris stated that the (conflict) is deeply rooted in white supremacy. Others agreed.

Ms. Fiske stated that for those unaware of the situation, the United States has Federally-recognized tribes and State-recognized tribes, and NH only has State-recognized tribes. Dr. Morris added that white supremacy is (the reason why the federal government does not recognize the NH tribes). Ms. Fiske replied yes, who gets to determine who is a Native person. She continued that Federal recognition comes with certain benefits, and there is a power imbalance between people who are recognized and those who are not recognized, regarding the ability to move forward agendas, programs, and so on and so forth. There is current disagreement about whether the Native people recognized by the State of NH are “truly” Native by the same standard that the tribe in Canada has to have.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that [the problem is] who defines “Native.” Others agreed. Dr. Morris stated that Indigenous people are the only people who have to prove who they are. She continued that it is different for others. [White supremacist culture] says you are African American with just one drop, for example, but Indigenous folks always have to prove they are Indigenous. Often, a different definition is used, among people who are Indigenous, as to who is a part of their (tribe). It is the whole question of who questions/defines one’s identity. She shared about how the first thing a tribal leader in Labrador, Canada said to Canadian officials was, “My identity is not up for debate. I will tell you who I am.”

Discussion continued. Ms. Fiske spoke about the various criteria non-Indigenous officials have said people must meet in order to be defined as Indigenous, such as being raised on a reservation with an Indigenous father, and how the Indigenous people in NH may not be able to make this unbroken line of genealogy like the people in Federally-recognized tribes. Dr. Morris stated that a presenter at a conference she went to predicted that if the US government continues with its method of defining Indigenous people, by 2065, there would be a definitional genocide. Ms. Fiske replied that that was the [US government’s] whole purpose of doing this – it either forces Indigenous people to stay in a very small group that essentially has no power, or essentially dilute them so much that they no longer have any power. Dr. Morris stated that (former VT governor) Howard Dean once declared that Abenaki people were “not real Indians,” and Vermont lost a lot of funding because of that. Discussion continued.

Ms. Manwaring spoke of how the HRC's mission is to educate people, and to get the issues out there so people know, because she does not think many people know about (these issues). Dr. Morris agreed, stating that she did not know, until she heard that lecture, that the US government desired to engage in this definitional genocide. Ms. Manwaring spoke about the work she did with the (Cheshire County) Historical Society about Black folks in Keene, and how she learned, through that, about the group of Indigenous folks who were called "white" in one Census then "American Indian" in a different Census, back and forth, and how the pressure must have been incredible. Ms. Fiske added that they were also dealing with the eugenics movement in the 1900s, where many people did not want to be identified (as Indigenous) because of that. Dr. Morris stated that the question of who gets to decide goes back to white supremacy. She spoke of the example of Thomas Jefferson, who made it so that some of his (dark-skinned) children and descendants by law could be defined as white. It is about who has power. Ms. Fiske replied that they saw how that was used in the Holocaust, too. Dr. Morris replied yes, same thing; it is an old story. She continued that the HRC could probably come up with a good presentation about these issues, such as how people say "that was all in the past" and that none of this matters, but it continues to have a major impact on people's quality of life, how people feel about themselves, how people move through the world, and some of the conditions under which they are living.

#### 7) Community Survey

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she thinks there were three or four people identified who were going to figure out next steps with this. Discussion ensued about what those next steps were, including looking at/editing the survey questions to make sure they are relevant to the Keene community specifically. Ms. Fiske read from the May meeting minutes: *"Dr. Morris stated that she can look at editing the survey, thinking about Keene and the Monadnock region. She asked if they have the original to look at. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will send it around. He continued that collectively, they would want to figure this out, and that there is a big difference between the Monadnock region and the city of Keene. Thinking out loud, they should work with MDEIB simultaneously so they do not duplicate work and put together a larger pool of information. Next steps would be to coordinate with MDEIB. Mr. Bohannon asked if they think the MDEIB would take this on. Dr. Morris replied that she thinks so. She continued that it is something that the MDEIB has discussed before, at least at a subcommittee level. Mr. Bohannon stated that a conversation with Councilor Workman would be the next step. He can do that. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the question remains as to whether they would focus on the Monadnock region or strictly Keene. In the meantime, if HRC members would want to send suggested edits to Mr. Bohannon, they can. Discussion can continue about collaborating with MDEIB."*

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she got three things out of that: one, Mr. Bohannon needs to send the original survey around for edits. Mr. Bohannon replied that he has it in PDF format. Ms. Fiske replied that he can send it to her, and a Library staff member can translate it into a Word document and send it back to him. She continued that then he can send the survey in the Word document format to everyone else.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if Mr. Bohannon is still good with having a conversation with Councilor Workman. Mr. Bohannon replied that they can get first this survey into Word format and take it from there. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos agreed.

**8) New Business**

Mr. Bohannon stated that the final City budget will be passed in two weeks. He continued that it does have the financial increase that the HRC requested. Others replied that that is great news/exciting.

Ms. Fiske stated that she has the opera materials (created/composed by Jon Ripley O'Brien about the life of Jonathan Daniels). She continued that Rabbi Aronson had been interested in looking at it, and if anyone else is, they can let her know. She thought it was interesting and it could be a nice local production. Dr. Morris stated that a few years ago there was a theater production about Jonathan Daniels at Heberton Hall. Brief discussion continued.

**9) Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, August 7, 2023 at 5:00 PM**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that this is a misprint, because the HRC had canceled the July meeting. She continued that the next meeting will be August 7, 2023. She will not be there, so Mr. Kirschner will be chairing the meeting. Mr. Bohannon stated that he will not be (at work) the week beforehand, but will send an email out to check whether enough HRC members plan to attend on August 7. He continued that if they know ahead of time there will not be a quorum, Alyssa Bender will cancel the meeting.

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:53 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reid, Minute Taker

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