

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

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

**Monday, August 7, 2023**

**5:00 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Hunter Kirschner, Vice Chair  
Jan Manwaring  
Dr. Mohammad Saleh  
Tedd Benson, Alternate  
Rabbi Daniel Aronson  
Gina Burke  
Councilor Catherine Workman (at 5:08 PM)  
Dr. Dottie Morris (at 5:07 PM)

**Staff Present:**

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

**Members Not Present:**

Marti Fiske  
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate  
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair  
Jennifer Nescimento, Alternate

**1) Welcome and Call to Order**

Vice Chair Kirschner called the meeting to order at 5:03 PM. He read the HRC's statement aloud: *"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."*

Roll call was conducted. Mr. Kirschner stated that alternate member Tedd Benson is a voting member today, filling in for Marti Fiske.

**2) Approval of June 5, 2023, Meeting Minutes**

Rabbi Aronson made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of June 5, 2023. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) **Finance Report**

Mr. Bohannon reported that he updated the Finance Report with the reflections from the last meeting and provided all of the donations the HRC received related to the Juneteenth event. He wants to thank Mr. Benson for Bensonwood's continued donations to the HRC's events.

Mr. Bohannon continued that he added Pride back to the HRC's events, in the budget, as they discussed. They are in a new fiscal year now, and the money from the City of Keene is \$2,000.

Dr. Morris arrived at 5:07 PM.

Mr. Kirschner asked if anyone had questions about the Finance Report. Hearing none, he continued that the HRC will thus accept the report as informational.

Councilor Workman arrived at 5:08 PM.

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

Dr. Morris reported that a Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition (MDEIB, or the Coalition) subcommittee is working on the MDEIB's mission statement. She continued that the next meeting is tomorrow at 5:00 PM. The education subcommittee is meeting as well.

Councilor Workman stated that the Coalition's subcommittees have plenty of room, if anyone is interested in joining the coalition. The Coalition would love to have them.

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

Mr. Kirschner stated that he thinks the (executive summary of the) report has been finalized. He asked if Mr. Bohannon or Ms. Bender had anything to say. Ms. Bender replied that all of the edits the HRC members have given over the past couple meetings have been added into the document. She continued that it is as up to date as possible. Mr. Kirschner asked what the plan for the document is now. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will make sure it goes to the City Council for their next meeting, September 6.

Dr. Morris asked what the next steps are, after it is submitted to the City Council. Mr. Bohannon replied that that HRC would still continue to take action on the items the HRC is responsible for. He continued that he guesses that the City Council will accept the report as informational and send it back to the HRC for the HRC to continue its work. He continued that the City Council might ask for specific action, but he does not know. He will submit a cover memo, suggesting action items for the Council. However, this is an election year, with anticipated turnover of quite a few Councilors. He encourages Councilor Workman to advocate for the RJCS report. He believes the HRC needs to continue advocating for awareness, education, and collaboration with

other community members and entities like the MDEIB. Showing that connection is very important for the HRC, as is continuing the HRC's various events so they become a cycle/pattern people get to know and these issues stay on people's radar.

Discussion ensued. Dr. Saleh stated that his understanding was that some of the recommendations from the report that the HRC are ones the City would take concrete action on. Many of the recommendations are specifically for the City of Keene. It is not just about being philosophically aligned. They expect the City to take some action. Ms. Manwaring stated that she wants the Council to send the report to a Committee, not just accept it as informational. Councilor Workman replied that it would be more likely to be sent to the Finance, Organization, and Personnel (FOP) Committee or Planning, Licenses, and Development (PLD) Committee, as opposed to the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee that she is on, but it might go to the City Manager for implementation, since she oversees all the departments. The City Manager could give updates during her weekly updates at Council meetings.

Councilor Workman stated that the items tasked to "City of Keene and Keene employers" could be taken to the MDEIB's Business Advisory subcommittee, which has many regional employers as members. She continued that her understanding was that the City of Keene was supposed to act as the role model for all the other employers in the city.

Dr. Saleh suggested the HRC request the City Manager, if tasked with this report's implementation, give quarterly reports on what action steps have been taken. Councilor Workman agreed. Mr. Bohannon replied that they could ask for that.

Rabbi Aronson spoke of the benefits of getting this report to the City Manager before it goes to the City Council meeting and having the HRC embed within the document possible places for the recommendations to land, to "grease the wheel" and save the Council some time. The City Manager might have recommendations for alternative wording that would make it easier for the Council. Mr. Bohannon replied that he can incorporate that in his cover memo to her, seeking the conversation ahead of time, and report back to the HRC to let them know where the action will be going and what the timeline is. If it does go to (the PLD or FOP) committee, he encourages HRC members to be present at the committee meeting to speak to it. It is important for the HRC to demonstrate how engaged they have been with this. Dr. Morris replied that the HRC can offer themselves as consultants who can come up with strategies. Each recommendation requires a specific plan and then prioritizing what to do. Others from the MDEIB could be consultants, too. Working together on goals, actions, strategies, outcomes, and a timeline would probably make the City more likely to say yes and take action. Others agreed.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he will draft a memo with the language he is hearing the HRC wants. He asked if he could send it to some HRC members for feedback. Others replied yes. Mr. Bohannon will send it to Mr. Kirschner, Dr. Morris, Dr. Saleh, Rabbi Aronson, and Ms. Fiske. Mr. Kirschner stated that the HRC will have a meeting before the City Council meeting the

report goes on. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, the timing aligns well. Dr. Morris asked Mr. Bohannon to remind the HRC members of the Council committee meeting date. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, he will let them know the date when they have one.

Dr. Morris asked about sharing the RJCS report with the MDEIB. She asked Councilor Workman if it would just be informational, and when they should share it. Discussion ensued about the timing. Mr. Bohannon stated that they should share it after it goes through the Council meeting. Councilor Workman stated that the Coalition meets August 21 and September 18. Others agreed that the September 18 meeting is more realistic.

**6) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

**A) Keene International Festival**

Mr. Bohannon reported that September 23 will be the Keene International Festival (KIF) at the Recreation Center from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM. He continued that the food and craft vendors are lined up. Everything is ready to roll. He encourages everyone to follow the KIF group on Facebook.

Rabbi Aronson asked who from the HRC is actively engaged with that. Mr. Bohannon replied that Ritu Budakoti is the KIF chair, and he is the staff liaison. Dr. Saleh asked if the Keene Sentinel has covered the event in the past. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, and they will be doing another article. Dr. Saleh replied that there are people who do not know about the KIF but should, so this is an opportunity to increase its visibility. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will pass that feedback on to the KIF group at their next meeting.

**B) Indigenous People's Day**

Mr. Bohannon stated that Ms. Fiske sent an email to him, Ms. Bender, and Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos: *"Please let the group know that the Indigenous People's Day event will be Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday evening, the first weeks of October. Either the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, or 5<sup>th</sup>, or the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup>. Filmmaker has contacted two potential panelists and will figure out which dates are best for their October schedules."* Ms. Fiske continues to work on that. They will have more details later.

**C) Martin Luther King Day**

Rabbi Aronson stated that the working group has not met, because they do not yet have a working group. He continued that he would like to leave tonight knowing with whom he can work to make this happen. He would like to do the breakfast event that the HRC used to do before COVID. He was not around for it then and needed to learn about it. He asked if the HRC had previously had another event after breakfast. Mr. Bohannon replied that it used to be a "day of service," and breakfast was a time for people to hear remarks from the interfaith group before going out into the community for their service projects. There were many people and many

service projects. It mainly ended because some of the service projects were not very engaging – they were services that people needed, like painting or cleaning farm stalls, but youth did not get engaged. It would be great to have the day of service again, or breakfast and a speaker, or a non-breakfast event. It is up to the working group to decide. Discussion ensued about the pros and cons of a morning, day, or evening event.

Rabbi Aronson asked what other volunteerism days the City has. Discussion ensued about Green Up Keene, the United Way day of volunteerism, cleanup of trails, and so on and so forth. Mr. Bohannon spoke of how the MLK Day volunteers were mainly high school students, since they had the day off from school, some middle school students, and some families. Discussion continued about previous MLK Day locations and programs. Rabbi Aronson stated that if they do a day of service, they will probably want to look at records from the past and choose the projects that were most successful and avoid the ones that were not. He continued that for anyone thinking of joining the working group, that is part of the work they need to do.

Rabbi Aronson stated that he would love for the HRC to host Father Greg Boyle, a Jesuit Priest who runs Homeboy Industries and has devoted his life to helping people build lives of meaning. He gave more information about Father Boyle. He continued that due to Father Boyle's schedule, they would probably not be able to book him until next year. Mr. Benson spoke in favor of the idea.

Rabbi Aronson asked who will join the MLK Day working group, and received affirmative responses from Dr. Morris, Mr. Benson, and Ms. Burke.

Dr. Morris stated that a few times, Keene State College (KSC) had a teach-in, which were very successful. She continued that at a teach-in, people can volunteer to offer a talk on fill-in-the-blank, and spread the word that it is happening, and then people can go to these various talks at the day-long event. She spoke of how it could be a "day of service" for anyone who offers a talk to educate the community, because we have many local experts we might not even know about. She gave examples of positive experiences she has had with teach-ins. She continued that she would love to have a citywide teach-in, although maybe at a different time of year than MLK Day, when they could use backyards and outdoor spaces.

Rabbi Aronson stated that he keeps thinking back to something Ms. Budakoti had said, about how her students, in a discussion about race and safety, talked about how their parents are clueless. He continued that maybe the focus of their work should be on children and their parents, and have it tiered by age. Dr. Morris spoke about how she could offer something as a CALL class, as she thinks there would be a lot of interest from the CALL program. (Cheshire Academy for Lifelong Learning). Discussion continued, and HRC members noted that there is a lot of opportunity here for partnerships.

Mr. Benson stated that he wants to take a moment to talk about why he is here and why he belongs to the MLK Day working group. He continued that when he went to Colorado State University, he co-founded the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Equality, which did a lot of good and also got him kicked out of school. Due to that experience, his company (Bensonwood) was the first company in New Hampshire to acknowledge Martin Luther King Day, making it a holiday before the State and most states did. It has been a company holiday since the mid-1980s. He shared more of his story, and discussion ensued. Dr. Morris stated that she used to work at Colorado State University and spoke about her experiences there. Other HRC members expressed excitement about the upcoming MLK Day working group meetings, and MLK Day events.

Mr. Bohannon suggested that if the working group decides to reach out to Father Boyle, they do that soon, to see if he is available in January 2024, and if he is not, see if he can make a commitment to January 2025. He continued that the Juneteenth working group already have some people booked for the 2024 event because they were not available for 2023. It feels good, going into planning an event, knowing that some of the work is already laid down for the next year.

Mr. Kirschner stated that it is not on the agenda, but the Pride working group report is in the agenda packet. He continued that he is in the Pride working group, and will thus speak to it. (The event will be) a screening of the documentary "CURED." He gave information about the film, stating that it is the story of the activism that led to removing homosexuality from the DSM in 1973. He continued that it will be Tuesday, October 17, in the Mabel Brown Room (at KSC) and is now fully funded, between the HRC and KSC. He is connected with other organizations like Monadnock Family Services and the NH Psychological Association, trying to get as many people in the room as possible. He will be facilitating small group discussions, and one of the filmmakers will be present for a Q&A.

Mr. Bohannon asked how the event will be promoted, and if there will be materials that get shared to promote it. Mr. Kirschner replied there will be promotion on social media, printed flyers, and maybe a press release. Co-sponsors will work within their own networks to promote it. Discussion ensued. HRC members talked about involving the MDEIB, the Monadnock Interfaith Project, and MAPS (Monadnock Area Pastoral Counseling Service).

#### 7) **Community Survey**

Ms. Bender stated that she does not think there is an update for this. She continued that if she remembers correctly, where they left off was one or more HRC members said they were going to go through the (community survey from Lebanon, NH) and create their own questions for the survey. She has yet to see anything. Mr. Bohannon stated that this might be an opportunity to partner with the Coalition. He continued that he wants to be able to say what the (survey results) will provide the HRC, if they conduct the survey, and what they will use the information for. Maybe the HRC is in a place where they feel that (their role is) providing events and education.

Lebanon used the survey for visitor experiences, to see if people coming into Lebanon were feeling welcomed. That would be important. He wonders if that type of survey could be adopted by employers and businesses. He does not want to be dismissive if the HRC wants to do this, but he is just thinking about their capacity, given everything else they are doing.

Councilor Workman stated that she recently has come across four people who moved away from Keene due to the hate they have experienced living here. She continued that Keene attracts folks to come here but does not do a good job retaining them. It might be worthwhile to conduct the survey to look into this. There may be unheard voices from people who feel the same way, and do not feel welcomed here. Discussion ensued. Mr. Benson spoke about his reservations about conducting the survey, regarding the HRC's ability to reach a meaningful cross-section of the community. Dr. Morris stated that she is not sure how a community survey like this would be different from the meetings the RJCS Committee had to gather information from the community. They received input from many different people, including anonymously. Rabbi Aronson asked if she is saying she thinks this work has already been done. Dr. Morris replied that she does not know; it depends on the purpose. Mr. Kirschner stated that what he hears is maybe stepping back from looking at the specific questions and looking at the overall objective.

Mr. Bohannon suggested they put this on more time, let the RJCS report play out in front of the Council, focus on the events, and revisit the community survey topic in maybe November or December. Others agreed. Councilor Workman stated that the Coalition is putting together a hotline for people to call if they feel they are being discriminated against or unsafe in the community. She continued that people would not be calling to elicit a response, per se, but calling in to document (what happened) and whether it involved an establishment, a place of business, a place of worship, etc., so the Coalition can start to see if there are common denominators and trends that emerge, and then to address them head on. If the HRC tables the community survey, they might be able to combine the two, and use the hotline to gather the data they would have collected through the community survey, if enough people utilize the hotline.

Mr. Kirschner noted that "1.B." of the RJCS is about using the community survey as a form of assessment of how the City are doing with meeting the goals. That is a future project, therefore, because there are not goals just yet.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he will keep the Community Survey on the agenda and add Pride Event to the agenda as well. He continued that maybe he will just add all six events to the agenda.

#### 8) New Business

Mr. Kirschner asked if there was any new business. Dr. Morris asked if the next meeting is really on September 11, and if anyone knows of any events happening. Mr. Bohannon replied that the HRC is meeting on September 11 because their regular meeting date is Labor Day.

9) **Adjournment – Next Meeting is September 11, 2023**

There being no further business, Mr. Kirschner adjourned the meeting at 6:09 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Andy Bohannon, PRF Director