

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, September 11, 2023

5:00 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Hunter Kirschner, Vice Chair
Dr. Dottie Morris
Dr. Mohammad Saleh
Gina Burke
Rabbi Daniel Aronson

Staff Present:

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

Members Not Present:

Councilor Catherine Workman
Jan Manwaring
Marti Fiske
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."*

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 5:02 PM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of August 7, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Dr. Morris made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of August 7, 2023. Mr. Kirschner seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) **Finance Report**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that to remind everyone, the Finance Report is informational and does not need to be voted on.

Mr. Bohannon reported that the Finance Report is inaccurate. He continued that they are in the process of auditing it and some slight adjustments are needed. The City transferred to a new accounting system, and in doing so, the HRC, Keene International Festival, and Juneteenth (numbers) “got a little blurry.” Finance has done their piece and they are waiting on him to do his piece to clarify this. He will have an accurate budget for the HRC at the next meeting. Brief discussion ensued.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if Dr. Morris had any updates.

Dr. Morris reported that the Education Committee is meeting and working on things; the next meeting is next Tuesday at 7:30 AM at the high school if anyone wants to join. She continued that a subgroup has been creating a strategic plan and will present it to the full group in about a week. The subgroup may do further tweaking of the strategic plan based on the full group’s feedback, before the strategic plan can be presented publicly.

Dr. Saleh stated that there had been a big discussion about the recommendations that the committee made on the execution of the (Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee) report, and Mr. Bohannon was going to (send that). Mr. Bohannon replied that he was to submit a letter to the City Manager for that purpose. He continued that he took the item off the agenda since it had been moved on. He will give the HRC an update once he knows where the City Manager wants to take this; he does not know if it will go to a committee or not. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if he has sent the City Manager the executive summary and letter. Mr. Bohannon replied not yet, but he will.

5) **Acceptance of Committee Event Report**

A) **Keene International Festival**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that this event is in two weeks, and she looks forward to it every year. Mr. Bohannon stated that the event is in good shape; the organizers have received many financial commitments from people. Fourteen difficult countries will be represented. He shared more details of the event.

B) **Pride Event**

Mr. Kirschner reported that the film for Pride will be on Tuesday, October 17, from 6:00 to 8:00 PM in the Mabel Brown Room at Keene State College. He continued that he is working on

promotional materials and drafted a press release today. He gave more information about how they hope to involve the community, particularly KSC and educators. Mr. Bohannon suggested involving the high school and middle school communities. Discussion ensued. Dr. Morris stated that she can bring it up at next week's meeting of the MDEIB Coalition's Education Committee. Ms. Bender spoke in support of the idea and offered to connect Mr. Kirschner with one of the high school's assistant principals. Discussion continued. Mr. Kirschner and Dr. Morris will talk.

C) Indigenous People's Day

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Marti Fiske is not here to share an update. She asked if anyone else had an update. Mr. Bohannon replied that he has not talked with her recently, but she gave an update at the last meeting. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she thinks the HRC has one more meeting prior to the event. She continued that based on what Ms. Fiske shared at the last meeting, it sounds like this event is in the works, and presumably the HRC will do some marketing of it prior to the next meeting. She suggested she and Mr. Bohannon reach out to Ms. Fiske and see if she needed any support from the HRC.

D) Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Rabbi Aronson stated that he sent a message to Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles to see if Father Gregg Boyle would be available for this upcoming Martin Luther King, Jr. Day or in 2025. He continued that he hopes to hear back soon. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Day working group will meet Tuesday, September 19 at 7:30 on Zoom and welcomes HRC members.

E) Black History Month

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if Black History Month was on the event list before. Mr. Bohannon replied that he added it, since the HRC screened the movie "Till," and he was thinking maybe the HRC would want to do something again. Dr. Morris spoke about an exceptional musician she recently saw live in VT, who would be a great performer for Black History Month. She will share a link to some of her music with the HRC members. Mr. Bohannon asked if Dr. Morris wants to pursue this opportunity. Dr. Morris replied yes, she has begun conversations with this musician's agent/manager/booking person. Discussion ensued about venue possibilities.

F) Juneteenth

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that there is not much to report, since Juneteenth was just a couple months ago, but the Juneteenth working group meets in October to get started with planning next year's event.

6) **Community Survey**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she saw in the minutes that last month there was a question as to where the community survey stands, and she looked in the minutes from the meeting before that to see where the HRC had landed. Mr. Bohannon and Ms. Bender replied that the HRC had tabled this. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the minutes say the HRC questioned whether such a survey would focus on the Monadnock region or just Keene, but in the meantime, HRC members could send suggested edits (of the survey questions) to Mr. Bohannon if they wanted to. She asked if anyone recalls why the HRC was tabling this topic. Others replied lack of capacity; lack of clarity regarding the purpose/what the HRC would use the data for; and the possibility of redundancy, given that the RJCS ad hoc committee did this type of information gathering already.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if HRC members currently have interest and bandwidth for revisiting the topic of the community survey, or if they want to keep it tabled and leave it on the agenda to check in next time. Others replied that they would like to table it. Discussion ensued about the work of the MDEIB/the Coalition. Mr. Kirschner stated that Councilor Workman had spoken about how the Coalition is creating a hotline that would gather data in a different way. Mr. Bohannon stated that maybe KSC, Antioch, or Franklin Pierce could be involved with this (survey) work. Discussion ensued. Dr. Morris spoke of how Franklin Pierce might not have the people or space for this right now. Discussion continued about tabling the community survey topic for now, until the HRC finds the right fit.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she recalls conversation about an active effort to tie the HRC in better with the Coalition and the efforts out of the Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Bohannon replied that as a Chamber board member, he can say that this conversation does not come up anymore. He gave more information about how people from the Chamber board are mostly doing DEI work through the Coalition subcommittees now. Discussion continued. Dr. Morris spoke about the strategic plan that a Coalition subcommittee is working on.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she thinks they should leave this on the agenda, just to keep it in their minds. Discussion ensued about the capacity-building work of the Coalition.

7) **New Business**

Rabbi Aronson stated that Hundred Nights had an amazing race this past weekend. He continued that the funds raised far surpassed the expectations of leadership. Leadership and volunteers created a fantastic program that participants, including him and his wife, really enjoyed. He continued that it was “one of the best community-building events he has ever been part of,” and gave more information about it. Dr. Saleh asked if he could talk more about the format of the event. Rabbi Aronson replied that it was a series of 17 or 18 fun challenges for teams of two to complete, in various locations throughout the city. He shared more details and some examples, such as a sack race and moving a ping-pong ball to a goal line only by squirting it with squirt

guns. Money is raised by each team paying an entrance fee and gathering sponsors. Discussion ensued.

8) **Adjourn – Next Meeting October 2, 2023**

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:47 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Andy Bohannon, PRF Director