

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, December 4, 2023

5:00 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Hunter Kirschner, Vice Chair
Dr. Mohammad Saleh
Marti Fiske
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Gina Burke
Tedd Benson, Alternate

Staff Present:

Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager

Members Not Present:

Councilor Catherine Workman
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate
Heidi Schwieger, Alternate
Dr. Dottie Morris
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 5:00 PM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of November 6, 2023 Minutes

HRC members noted the following corrections and additions to the meeting minutes:

- Gina Burke is a member, not an alternate.
- Rabbi Dan Aronson was present (arrived late).
- The meeting time of the MDEIB's Education Committee is 7:30 AM. (Minutes do not specify AM or PM).

- As part of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day discussion, Dr. Saleh had requested whether an online donation button/link could be added to the webpage. (Minutes do not include that).
- Spelling correction to the name: Father Greg Boyle.

Ms. Fiske made a motion to accept the November 6, 2023 meeting minutes as amended. Ms. Burke seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) **Finance Report**

Ms. Bender stated that her understanding from Andy Bohannon (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Director) is that the Finance Report (in the agenda packet) is as updated as it can possibly be. She continued that there are a few more finance software-related updates still in the works.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there were any questions about the Finance Report. Hearing none, she continued that it is not something the committee needs to vote on.

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

Dr. Saleh stated that the MDEIB's mission statement is complete but not yet ratified. He continued that there will be a meeting on the third Monday of the month and they hope to have that ready for public release.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the (HRC's executive summary of the recommendations of the RJCS Report) has been given to the City Council, but there has not been a response yet. She continued that they will leave this topic on the HRC's agenda until they hear something back.

Ms. Fiske stated that the City's DEI Committee is now in action. She and Ms. Bender are members. The DEI Committee has a member from each City department. They were given a copy of the RJCS Report. The City staff member who was there during the course of the community outreach and writing will be giving the DEI Committee more information, and then they will focus on what the DEI Committee's first tasks will be. They are collecting ideas at this point.

6) **Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

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

Rabbi Aronson stated that the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day working group met on Friday morning, and it was great to have Ms. Bender there. He continued that the event will be Monday, January 15, at 6:30 PM. The working group debated whether to have the event in the

Mabel Brown Room (at Keene State College) or Heberton Hall (at the Library). They chose Heberton Hall, which they believe will be a better fit for the capacity/audience they are expecting.

Rabbi Aronson continued that since the last HRC meeting, he spoke with folks at the Community Kitchen, who had already agreed to host a lunch with Father Greg Boyle and the faith leaders, mainly from the Monadnock Interfaith Project (MIP) but also whomever they want to invite to that. The conversation will be targeted to matters of faith and spirituality.

Rabbi Aronson continued that yesterday he got the news that the Community Kitchen will also host an 8:00 AM breakfast for civic and community leaders. He does not know the capacity; he guesses 50 or 60. The Community Kitchen has a new director of development who is very experienced, and has become a thought partner for raising money for this as well. One of her ideas, which he wanted to bring to the HRC, was having a suggested minimum donation for the lunch or breakfast. Her idea was \$100.

Rabbi Aronson continued that Toadstool Books is ordering a bunch of Father Boyle's books. Ms. Fiske stated that if Rabbi Aronson sends her the title(s), she will order them for the Library, too. Rabbi Aronson replied that he has several books, so she can look them up and choose. Ms. Fiske asked what he recommends. Rabbi Aronson replied Tattoos on the Heart and Barking to the Choir. He continued that he has written three since then. Ms. Fiske asked if it is correct that Father Boyle will not be focusing on any book in particular (when he speaks at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event). Rabbi Aronson replied that it is all related. He continued that the title of his talk will be "Cherished Belonging: Love in Divided Times." There will be a stack of books that people can purchase for him to sign. That could be a part of the donation.

Rabbi Aronson asked for the HRC members' thoughts on the idea of having a minimum suggested donation, which means that anyone could come and not make a donation. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked where the money would go. Rabbi Aronson replied to help the HRC pay Father Boyle's expenses. He continued that also, Father Boyle does not ask for an honorarium, so the money would mostly just go to him. The HRC will not have many expenses for the event; maybe just for printing and ads. Ms. Fiske replied that if the event is open and free to the public, Heberton Hall is free to use. Rabbi Aronson replied that Father Boyle's speech is free and open to the public, but there are these two other opportunities to rub elbows and benefit from his knowledge in a way that will benefit the community. Ms. Fiske replied that they can still ask for donations at the talk.

Discussion continued about whether to have a minimum suggested donation at the lunch and breakfast at the Community Kitchen, and who from the community is likely to attend the meals, such as civic and community leaders, corporate people, members of the faith community, and others. Discussion continued about what amount the HRC plans to raise for Father Boyle's Homeboy Industries organization, and what amounts the HRC has already and/or has pledged for.

Rabbi Aronson stated that he is hearing that the HRC's consensus is to not have a minimum suggested donation. He continued that they can make donation methods available to people at the time, and put a QR code on the flyer.

Rabbi Aronson continued that they (the working group) talked about inviting the KHS chorus to open the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day program with a couple of numbers, and had some backup ideas if that did not work out, but they really want to encourage youth to come. They also talked about follow up and next steps. He asked if Mr. Benson wants to share any thoughts on that, or maybe after the meeting. One idea was to do some youth work around this, which Ms. Bender is well positioned to be able to do. It is work that he would love for the MIP to start getting involved in, too, because none of the faith communities have youth groups to speak of. They just do not have that many youth. There is a real opportunity here to engage the city's teenagers, in particular, in social justice work.

Rabbi Aronson continued that he was not able to submit a grant application to C&S in time, due to a scheduling challenge. The YMCA is not able to be a financial sponsor of the event, but they will put their name on the flyer and send the flyer out to their mailing list. Councilor Workman has been away and has not responded to a similar request for funding from the MDEIB. He suspects the MDEIB is also not in a position to provide financial support but he wants to get them on board as a sponsor. He thinks that by next year this should really be a partnership from the get-go. Ms. Fiske replied that they can include the Library, and it can go out to the Library's mailing list. Rabbi Aronson asked her to send him a logo that they can include. He continued that he expected to do the flyer himself, but if anyone knows someone who is spectacular with flyers, they can let him know. The YMCA does a great job with flyers.

Rabbi Aronson continued that lastly, Ms. Bender had talked about a donation button for the Parks & Rec webpage, as a follow-up to the discussion from the last meeting, which was not recorded in the minutes. He asked her if she had an update on that.

Ms. Bender replied that unfortunately, she does not come bearing great news. She continued that she talked with the Rec Programmer today about the steps for that, but unfortunately, even on their side, they are not seeing a lot of traction in that area, in terms of getting any type of sponsorship or donations. About an hour before this meeting, she found out that when you sign up to donate or send any money, you have to register, which makes the process more confusing for people. People would have to figure out what webpage to go to, register to donate, create an account in the software, then send the money. It would probably be too confusing to be beneficial. She just found out that information, and thus has not had time yet to look at other options. She will talk with Rebecca Landry.

Discussion ensued. Rabbi Aronson stated that the HRC will be reimbursing Homeboy Industries for Father Boyle's travel expenses, which they should be able to do, between the money from

MIP, KSC, and the HRC's budget. Ms. Bender added that the City did receive the check from MIP.

Rabbi Aronson stated that he has one more question for the HRC. He continued that typically, when Father Boyle visits a community, he brings one of his Homeboys with him. It significantly increases the impact of his presentation when people are able to meet someone who is benefitting from the work that he does. He (Rabbi Aronson) initially suggested the HRC just bring Father Boyle in, due to not being able to afford another person. He does not know what the cost would be, but he thinks that the audience, once they hear Father Boyle, will be very generous and want to contribute to Homeboy Industries. He asked what the HRC thinks about asking Father Boyle if there is someone he wants to bring to NH with him.

Discussion ensued. The HRC discussed the expenses, both known and potential; the money coming in for the event, both known and potential; and what it would mean to have the additional person come. HRC members asked clarifying questions. Rabbi Aronson shared more information about the event's budget. Discussion continued about promotion of the event, and Rabbi Aronson encouraged HRC members to reach out to any potential sponsors they can. He continued that what he is hearing is that the HRC likes the idea of inviting a Homeboy to come, assuming the additional travel/lodging cost would be approximately \$800, not \$2,000+. Discussion continued, and Mr. Benson stated that he is not in favor of it unless the additional person is a participant in the event and talks about their personal experience. He spoke about a past event in which some of the people did not speak, and it felt awkward to have them on stage seemingly just to be seen. Mr. Kirschner stated that it would be helpful to have firm numbers for the expenses.

Mr. Benson stated that his company (Bensonwood) will financially sponsor the event, supporting it at whatever level is needed. Rabbi Aronson and other HRC members thanked him. Discussion continued about sponsors.

Mr. Benson stated that another conversation topic, which came from Dr. Morris in their recent discussion, is the question of what the action plan will be. What are they bringing back to Keene as a result of this event? Is there an action plan they can be talking about on that day? He continued that Father Boyle's presentation should inspire them to do something. Rabbi Aronson replied that they can brainstorm about that. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that they need to move on in the agenda, but that is an important conversation. She continued that they have one more HRC meeting before the event. Potentially, a sub-group could meet, so long as they do not form a quorum, sometime in the next month. Rabbi Aronson replied that the working group will be meeting again, so they can discuss it then, and they welcome ideas from the HRC members.

B) Black History Month

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Dr. Morris is chairing this. She continued that they will hear from Dr. Morris next time. She knows Dr. Morris has already done quite a bit of legwork on this, per the meeting minutes from last month.

C) Juneteenth

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that at the next working group meeting on January 9, they plan on having their basic budget and the first pass at a program. She continued that they have a list of people they would like to have for the program and are going through it to see who is available.

D) Keene International Festival

Mr. Kirschner stated that he is part of the KIF working group but does not have any updates. He continued that he does not think there are any, other than the date being set.

E) Indigenous Peoples' Day

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that there is no update for this event, since it just passed.

F) Pride Event

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the Pride Event, too, just recently happened.

7) New Business

Rabbi Aronson invited the HRC members to join the Menorah Lighting, December 14 at 5:30 PM. Dr. Saleh asked for more information about what is happening. Rabbi Aronson replied that there will be music, the lighting of the menorah, and food to eat. It will be the eighth night of Hanukah, and there will not be eight speakers; it would be too much. He will invite eight people to turn the lightbulbs, but they will not be giving speeches. Discussion continued. Rabbi Aronson asked if Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos could light one and say something (two minutes) during the event, as the HRC Chair. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she would be happy to.

Mr. Kirschner stated that his term ends at the end of the month, and this is his last meeting. He continued that it has been a pleasure to get to know everyone and work together. He will continue his work with the KIF. The HRC members thanked Mr. Kirschner for his time, energy, and contributions.

Discussion ensued about HRC membership terms. Dr. Saleh asked what the avenue is for members who would like to apply to serve another term if their current one is ending. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she thinks the Mayor reviews the membership terms and can

invite someone to continue. Discussion continued. Dr. Saleh stated that it would be good to have clarity. Ms. Fiske stated that her understanding is that anyone whose term is set to expire, who is interested in continuing, should contact the Mayor to request that and CC: the City Clerk.

Ms. Bender stated that she will reach out individually to the HRC members whose terms are in need of renewal, if they would like to renew. She continued that for the next meeting, she will bring the whole committee all of the information they need about membership terms.

8) Adjournment – Next Meeting January 8, 2024 at 5:00 PM

Ms. Bender stated that next month, the HRC will meet on the second Monday instead of the first, because the first Monday is New Year's Day.

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:57 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager