

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

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

**Monday, April 1, 2024**

**5:00 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair  
Councilor Catherine Workman  
Marti Fiske  
Rabbi Daniel Aronson  
Gina Burke  
Ritu Budakoti  
Debra Bowie, Alternate  
David Morrill  
Dr. Mohammad Saleh

**Staff Present:**

Alyssa Bender-Jesse, Youth Services Manager

**Members Not Present:**

Dr. Dottie Morris  
Tedd Benson, Alternate  
Jennifer Nescimento, Alternate  
Aja Davis

**Mayor Jay Kahn** (from 5:29 to 5:49 PM)

**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 5:00 PM.

**2) Approval of March 4, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Bowie stated that regarding the March meeting minutes, she believes she should be listed as an alternate member. Ms. Bender-Jesse replied that she was participating as a full member for that meeting so the HRC could have a quorum.

Rabbi Aronson made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 4, 2024. Ms. Budakoti seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote with abstentions from members not present at the March meeting.

3) **Finance Report**

Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that the only thing different from last month's finance report is that she added the information about the HRC having paid the interpreters and the Community Kitchen (for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event). She continued that the Community Kitchen was very appreciative when she gave them the check for a lot more money than they were expecting.

Ms. Bender-Jesse asked if the way the finance report is formatted works for people, or if a different format would be easier. Discussion ensued. Dr. Saleh stated that the formatting is confusing at first but makes sense once you get used to it. For the benefit of the new members, Ms. Bender-Jesse explained the formatting more.

Ms. Budakoti asked if the "balance on hand" for the Keene International Festival is what is in the account now. Ms. Bender-Jesse replied yes.

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

Councilor Workman gave an update about the MDEIB. She stated that the strategic plan is almost finalized; they are just waiting on the action steps from one subcommittee. She continued that hopefully the strategic plan will be done next month. She listed the many new members the coalition has, including a new Treasurer, LGBTQ+ Committee Chair, and Regional Engagement Chair. She continued that there are still open spots on the steering committee and subcommittees, and they would like more people to join. She asked the HRC members to spread the word.

Dr. Saleh stated that the MDEIB's goal is to bring in people from all the towns in the Monadnock region. He continued that if people have friends in Monadnock region towns who are passionate about diversity and inclusion, the MDEIB would love to connect with them.

Councilor Workman stated that Gail Somers did a presentation to the MDEIB on the Cultural Center initiative she has. A next step for the strategic plan is to have, each quarter, a community conversation in parts of the region. The MDEIB welcomes ideas for those community conversations.

Ms. Budakoti spoke about encouraging schools' participation, with the high school and middle school, and maybe the lower levels once they consider the feedback from the middle and high school. She continued that diversity and equity work is so important in schools. Councilor Workman replied yes, and youth have such great ideas, too.

Ms. Budakoti stated that SAU29 hosts the SAU29 district-wide workshop, and maybe the MDEIB would have something to share with the teachers so they can use the MDEIB as a resource in the future. She will be in touch with Councilor Workman if she is interested. Councilor Workman replied yes.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the HRC would be interested in having Gail Somers present to them about the cultural center as well. HRC members replied yes.

Dr. Saleh stated that the last they heard, that organization [the Keene Community Cultural Center] was looking for donations. He asked if they could circulate that request. Discussion ensued to clarify whom it would be appropriate to share the donation request with, and how. Dr. Saleh asked about the bulletin board in City Hall. Ms. Fiske replied that the bulletin boards in the Library and City Hall are available for posting flyers but City staff cannot post third party information on City social media unless it is something the City is involved with itself. Ms. Bender-Jesse added that there is a bulletin board at the Rec Center, too. Councilor Workman stated that the URL is [monadnock.thelocalcrowd.coop/campaign/multicultural-community-center](http://monadnock.thelocalcrowd.coop/campaign/multicultural-community-center). Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that that Ms. Bender-Jesse can send the link to all HRC members.

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

Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that the City's internal DEI Committee changed its meeting date, so she does not have an update on its review of the RJCS Report.

Dr. Saleh explained, for the benefit of the new members, that they are talking about the HRC's executive summary of the RJCS Report, which they prepared with specific action items and submitted to the City for review. Ms. Bender-Jesse added that since Mayor Kahn was elected, the executive summary was resubmitted to him and the City Manager. She (Ms. Bender-Jesse) and Ms. Fiske are members of the City's DEI Committee, which just received the RJCS Report. Members had a month to review it and will talk about it at their next meeting, to talk about the next steps.

Dr. Saleh asked if it will go to the City Council and Mayor after the City's DEI Committee reviews it, and if it is correct that it has not yet gone to the Council and Mayor. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it has gone to the Mayor and the City Manager, and the HRC will get feedback on what they do with it. More importantly, the City's DEI Committee is actively working on it. Councilor Workman stated that she was a member of the ad hoc RJCS Committee, and the City Council saw the RJCS Report before that ad hoc committee disbanded. Dr. Saleh replied that he meant the executive summary from the HRC. Councilor Workman replied that Council has not seen it yet.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the HRC will look forward to hearing the DEI Committee's feedback.

**6) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

**A) Black History Month**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that this event was held in February. She continued that Dr. Morris was not present to update the HRC on how it went, but the HRC discussed last month that it was a very successful event.

**B) Juneteenth**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos reported that they are getting a lot of traction this year with Juneteenth. She continued that the programming is set, a concert on the Square on the night of Juneteenth, with performances by The Gaslight Tinkers and Senie Hunt. Crys Mathews, who was the Black History Month presenter, will perform at Brewbakers that week. At Toadstool, there will be a reading by young adult author Lesa Cline-Ransome. There will also be kids' films at the Colonial and elsewhere and a film at KSC (title TBD). The Community Kitchen decided to look into doing a Juneteenth community dinner prior to the concert. The YMCA's trail will be up in certain downtown businesses and at the Y.

Rabbi Aronson stated that the Keene Swampbats are having Juneteenth Night on June 19, instead of the Faith Night they had previously planned. He shared the story of how that came about, via a conversation he and Tom Julius of the Monadnock Interfaith Project (MIP) had with Swampbats staff. Mr. Julius was clear that if June 19 was Faith Night, MIP would not participate. Thus, Swampbats moved Faith Night to July 10 and they will do their first ever Juneteenth game on June 19. It is really important to Kevin Waterson. Swampbats is the most racially diverse team in the league. Discussion ensued.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the Juneteenth working group is in fundraising mode. She continued that their budget is just shy of \$7,000 and so far, they have raised \$2,700. Discussion continued.

**C) Keene International Festival (KIF)**

Ms. Budakoti stated that planning is underway, and her good news to share is that the KIF received the Community Partner award from KSC. She continued that Andy Bohannon will accept it on their behalf. It is exciting to have their work recognized and to know it is making an impact.

Mayor Kahn arrived at 5:29 PM.

**D) Indigenous Peoples' Day**

**E) Pride Event**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked for someone to volunteer to chair the Pride working group. Mr. Morrill replied that he would be happy to do it. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos and HRC members thanked him.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event was a success. She continued that she doubt there has been an opportunity to start planning for next year.

Rabbi Aronson stated that to answer the question Ms. Fiske asked earlier regarding how much money the event brought in for Homeboy Industries, he will first say that the Community Kitchen had sent an invoice of \$2,067 for the event/meals they did. He continued that at last month's meeting the HRC voted that all the money that came into the HRC coffers would go to pay for that and for the interpreters. None of that money ended up going to Homeboy Industries. However, he spoke with Homeboy Industries' development department after the event and it looked like they had received about \$2,000 of donations from the Keene community. He sent another \$480 in checks from some clergy, \$632 from book sales, and a \$2,000 donation from Bensonwood. The total was \$5,112.65, and probably more than that, because people were donating online as well. The MLK Day working group was aiming for \$5,000 and they were happy to exceed that.

Rabbi Aronson stated that next year, he wants to make sure they do enough planning ahead of time so the event can include a children's choir. He continued that that requires a lot of planning especially for public schools. Discussion ensued. Mr. Morrill stated that at the last meeting they talked about coordinating with other organizations for MLK Day. He continued that he has a contact at the Historical Society.

**7) New Business**

Mayor Kahn stated that his wishlist includes building a calendar (to put on the Mayor's webpage on the City website), which he shared with Ms. Bender-Jesse and Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos earlier today. He continued that through a search of State statutes, they determined that there are about 32 statutes that designate a day or month of celebration, in honor of, in recognition, and so on and so forth - events that should be honored by the State. As the calendar rolls out, it is more and more apparent that there are many things our community recognizes that are not part of State statutes, such as violence victims or acts of genocides designated by the US government but not specifically in State statute. Then there are things like KIF, groups that exist in and are important in the community, honoring events like Holi Day that are not part of State statute but important to our community. Once the inventory of such days/events is good enough – and it is maybe 80% there – then the question is what to do with it, and how to promote the events better so they are giving voice and a sense of recognition and belonging in our community. They can do this on the HRC page and the Mayor's page on the City's website. He is very willing to do that. He started, for example, (putting) Black History Month and Women's History Month (on

his webpage), which are important to him personally, but there are other places and groups in the City that might be the better voice for certain things, like for Holi Day. He would like to use his page to at least highlight events and the organizations that sponsor them. He would love the HRC's help with this, such as circulating the calendar to whatever groups they think have something to contribute. It would be even better if they could identify a lead person for such groups. He will start with April, which has several violence prevention and genocide awareness events, and begin publicizing the good things the community is doing. He would love the HRC's support.

Councilor Workman stated that the MDEIB has active social media accounts, and they would appreciate the Mayor sharing the MDEIB's posts. Discussion ensued.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the Mayor gave her and Ms. Bender-Jesse the spreadsheet in which he is inventorying the days/events/groups to populate the calendar with. She continued that Ms. Bender-Jesse will send that spreadsheet to all the HRC members for them to look at and give feedback on. Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that if anyone has additions for the spreadsheet, such as dates, events, or contact people, they can send her that information. She continued that she will then put together a revised spreadsheet and send it to the Mayor.

Rabbi Aronson asked where to find the Mayor's webpage on the City's website. The Mayor replied that in the "Residents" section is a "My City Government" section, and the "Mayor" page is under that. He continued that it contains, for example, the remarks he gave for MLK Day.

The Mayor stated that he has another meeting to attend. He thanked the HRC and left at 5:49 PM.

Ms. Budakoti stated that regarding community events and publicity, sometimes she misses events because she did not hear about them in time via the media. She continued that she is not suggesting the HRC send out a press release for everything they do, but it would be helpful to do press releases prior to events like Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Juneteenth, and Indigenous Peoples' Day so the Keene Sentinel can capture it before the fact. They would reach more people, because there is a sizable group of people who do not use social media. Discussion ensued about publicity. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos shared what the Juneteenth working group has planned for publicity. She continued that it will be up to each event chair to make sure the publicity methods are implemented. Maybe the HRC could put together a best practices document for how to publicize these events. She would be happy to start a draft of that. She will send it to Ms. Bender-Jesse, who will share it with the HRC, and people can build upon it and modify it as needed.

Dr. Saleh spoke about the importance of press releases. Ms. Fiske replied that she has submitted many press releases that never made it into the Keene Sentinel, so it depends upon the editor to pick it up. Discussion ensued about contacts at the paper, ways of increasing the likelihood of a

press release getting published, and the importance of inviting Keene Sentinel staff to attend events.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there was any other new business. Rabbi Aronson stated that Monday, April 15 at Alumni Hall at KSC, the MIP is sponsoring an interfaith Passover Seder from 6:00 to 8:00 PM. He and others will be leading it. There is no cost to attend but they welcome donations and they are asking people to register via the MIP's website.

Dr. Saleh stated that he knows members of City boards and committees cannot attend meetings remotely/via Zoom and count as part of the quorum, but he would like to request that members be allowed to attend remotely at least for purposes of observation and participation, if they are unable to attend in person. Even if they cannot vote remotely.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos and Ms. Bender-Jesse spoke about how they are not sure if the City would allow that. Ms. Fiske replied that it is up to each City board/committee to set rules for attendance. She continued that for example, Library Trustees are allowed to participate remotely if the in-person group votes via roll call vote to allow a remote participant. Remote participants cannot count toward quorum but are allowed to vote, with each vote done via roll call.

Discussion continued about potential procedures for remote participation. Dr. Saleh spoke in support of allowing members of the public to attend HRC meetings remotely. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked Ms. Bender-Jesse to look into what the HRC is allowed to do, and how. Ms. Bender-Jesse agreed and stated that what to do is up to the HRC, as long as they are following the necessary rules and guidelines. She continued that she would be happy to set up hybrid meetings, if those are allowed. She asked if Ms. Fiske could send her any written information she has about the procedures the Library group uses. Ms. Fiske agreed. Councilor Workman added that there should be information on the City's website/the City Council's Rules of Order, since the City Council does this, too. She will look for it. Discussion continued about the procedures for remote meetings and what it was like in the past.

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 6:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Alyssa Bender-Jesse, Youth Services Manager