



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA

Monday, October 7th, 2024 at 5:00 PM
Room 22 Upstairs, Recreation Center

Members:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos
Dr. Dottie Morris
Dr. Mohammad Saleh
Marti Fiske
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Councilor Catherine Workman
Gina Burke
Ritu Budakoti
Aja Davis

Staff:

Alyssa Bender-Jesse, Youth Services Manager

Alternates:

Tedd Benson
Debra Bowie
Emma Charles
Jennifer Nascimento
David Morrill

Agenda:

1. Welcome and Call to Order
2. Approval of September 8th, 2024 Minutes
3. Finance Report
4. Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition Updates
5. Racial Justice Community Safety Report
6. Acceptance of Committee Event Reports
 - a. Indigenous Peoples' Day
 - b. Martin Luther King Jr. Day
 - c. Black History Month
 - d. Juneteenth
 - e. Pride Event
 - f. Keene International Festival
7. New Business
8. Adjourn – Next Meeting November 4th, 2024 at 5:00 PM

“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.”

1 City of Keene
2 New Hampshire

3
4
5 HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
6 MEETING MINUTES
7

Monday, September 9, 2024

5:00 PM

Room 22,
Recreation Center

Members Present:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Councilor Catherine Workman
Dr. Mohammad Saleh (at 5:06 PM)
Marti Fiske
Rabbi Daniel Aronson (at 5:08 PM)
Gina Burke
Ritu Budakoti
Debra Bowie, Alternate
Emma Charles, Alternate
David Morrill, Alternate

Staff Present:

Alyssa Bender-Jesse, Youth Services Manager
Amanda Palmeira, Assistant City Attorney
(until 5:10 PM)

Members Not Present:

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

8
9
10 **1) Welcome and Call to Order**

11
12 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos read the HRC's statement: *"In our efforts to create a more equal and*
13 *just society, we move forward with the firm intention to value the voices, opinions, and*
14 *experiences of all people. We choose to proceed with the awareness and humility that the*
15 *statements and decisions we make will have a different impact for those with different life*
16 *experiences."*

17
18 She called the meeting to order at 5:01 PM. Roll call was conducted.

19
20 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos welcomed Amanda Palmeira, Assistant City Attorney, and stated that
21 she is here to answer a question that had come up.

22
23 Ms. Palmeira stated that she has been in conversation with the Mayor and the City Attorney
24 regarding the HRC's recommendations about the Racial Justice and Community Safety report.
25 She continued that to give the HRC the perspective and concerns of the City Attorney's Office,

HRC Meeting Minutes
September 8, 2024

26 she will begin with a satellite-level approach to give some context. She explained how the HRC
27 is one of the City of Keene's 26 boards and commissions, most of which are products of City
28 Council action and advisory to/reporting directly to the Council. She explained how a few of the
29 public bodies are created by State legislature, not the Council, but the HRC is not one of them
30 and is advisory to the Council. Her understanding is that with recommendation 1.A., the HRC
31 wants to request all public bodies in the City begin their meetings with a statement about equity,
32 fairness, and equality. No specific legal bar prevents the HRC sending such a request to the
33 Council. However, the City Attorney's Office wants the HRC to be aware of the effect of that
34 type of request and give words of caution.

35
36 Ms. Palmeira continued that first, the HRC and other public bodies are created by the Council
37 with clear responsibilities and authorities, and the public bodies "act as islands and don't control
38 each other." Those lines would be blurred if the HRC submitted their request. It is best to avoid
39 having one board trying to control other boards, especially the statutory boards. The City
40 Attorney's Office has this concern regardless of which board or committee is making the request
41 and regardless of the board or committee's message.

42
43 She continued that second, they are concerned about the "slippery slope" concept, which is what
44 kind of example or precedent this would set for one board to make a request that would have
45 implications for all other public bodies. Another committee, or a member of the public, could
46 then make such a request, wanting to see some sort of statement or action taken by all the City's
47 public bodies. The implications could be problematic.

48
49 Ms. Palmeira continued that she understands recommendation 1.A. is a statement furthering
50 equity and fairness, which is notable, but again, (the concern) is not about the *type* of message.
51 The HRC could feel that such a statement is uncontroversial and should be universally accepted,
52 but there could be a group of people who have the same adamant belief about something
53 contradictory to that and send it to the Council. There would be no legal bar to that, just like
54 there is no bar for the HRC's recommendation/request.

55
56 Ms. Palmeira continued that with all that said, nothing prevents the HRC from making this
57 request of the Council. The process would be to send the communication to the City Clerk's
58 Office, addressed through the Mayor to the City Council. She asked if there were questions.

59
60 Councilor Workman stated that she understands the concern about advising other committees on
61 how to conduct their meetings, but she thinks they could at least recommend to the Mayor that he
62 read the statement at the Council meetings and maybe the three standing committees. She
63 continued that that is different than asking all 26 public bodies. Ms. Palmeira replied that that
64 would avoid the problem of controlling the other public bodies, but would not avoid the slippery
65 slope concern. She continued that the HRC, as an advisory body, submits communications to the
66 Council through the same channel that members of the public do.

67

68 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the HRC sending the recommendation to the Council
69 means risking it not being adopted. She continued that the HRC has no control over what
70 happens to the recommendation once it is sent. Ms. Palmeira replied yes, the Council is fully
71 autonomous with deciding how to act on it or not act on it.

72
73 Ms. Budakoti stated that she has a clarification question. She referenced a discussion the HRC
74 previously had about the (Council rules) requiring people to stand while talking to the Council.
75 Councilor Workman replied that the conversation about the Council's Rules of Order, and the
76 rule about standing, is a separate issue than what they are discussing now.

77
78 Ms. Budakoti asked if the idea is that the HRC needs to seek City Council approval for things
79 they are doing, such as the Keene International Festival, which is aligned with the HRC. Ms.
80 Palmeira replied no, they would only need to go to the Council if they were requesting funding
81 or for the Council to do something. She continued that the City Code lays out the things the
82 HRC has the authority to do on their own.

83
84 Ms. Palmeira thanked the HRC for having her and left at 5:10 PM.

85
86 **2) Approval of August 5, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

87
88 Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of August 5, 2024. Ms. Budakoti
89 seconded the motion.

90
91 Ms. Fiske stated that she has a correction to make, on page 6, under "C. Indigenous People's
92 Day." She continued that the sentence, "Unfortunately, the grant did not work" should be
93 changed to "Unfortunately, the performers could not settle on a date." It was not a matter of
94 grant funding.

95
96 Ms. Budakoti stated that she has a correction as well – on line 221, her last name is misspelled.
97 She continued that it is correctly spelled elsewhere in the document.

98
99 Rabbi Aronson made a motion to approve the August 5, 2024 meeting minutes with those two
100 changes. Councilor Workman seconded the motion, which passed with a vote of 6-0 with Ms.
101 Fiske abstaining.

102
103 **3) Finance Report**

104
105 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that she has a correction to make. She continued that for the Pride
106 Event, it should say \$238.06, which leaves a balance on hand at \$2,954.44. She had forgotten to
107 add the \$7.50 she spent at the Dollar Tree.

108
109 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that the City employee who was in charge of the automatic sending of
110 Council-approved money from the City's budget to public bodies' budgets retired recently. She

111 continued that she did not know how that process worked; she thought it was always an
112 automatic transfer and figured out today that it is not. Thus, the money allocated to the HRC has
113 not actually made it into the HRC's budget. Technically, the balance shown at the bottom of the
114 Finance Report is the actual balance in the bank, but the HRC has an extra \$2,000 on top of that.
115 She will put it in the HRC's Finance Report when she sees it officially in the account.

116
117 Ms. Bender-Jesse continued that she added all the expenses and donations for Juneteenth. The
118 reason it is on the side column under actual Juneteenth and not in the other one is because the
119 other one is all set up and it keeps updating and changing the balance on hand. Because the HRC
120 was not the fiscal agent, she did not want to have that affecting the HRC's balance on hand
121 number. But now all the numbers are allocated, so it is able to show all the amazing money the
122 HRC raised.

123
124 **4) Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition (MDEIB) Updates**

125
126 Councilor Workman stated that she does not have much of an update from last month. She
127 continued that they are still looking for new members. The Coalition met with the Keene for
128 Palestine group and had a good discussion.

129
130 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked about the strategic plan the Coalition had been working on.
131 Councilor Workman replied that it is not finalized yet, but she could send the strategic plan
132 document (to the HRC). The action steps are what the Coalition is still working on, but the road
133 map is there.

134
135 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked for a reminder of the dates and times of meetings. Councilor
136 Workman replied that the steering committee meets the third Monday of the month, from 4:00 to
137 5:00 PM at the YMCA or via Zoom. She continued that they do not generally post meeting
138 notices or minutes, but they are always open to having folks attend. It helps if people reach out
139 ahead of time because the meeting room is very small and they want to make sure to
140 accommodate visitors.

141
142 **5) Racial Justice and Community Safety Report**

143
144 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that she does not have an update, as the last meeting (of the City's
145 internal DEI committee) was canceled. She continued that they are seeking more members.
146 They are still working on the survey she told the HRC about last time.

147
148 **6) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

149
150 **A) Pride Event**

151
152 Mr. Morrill stated that the Pride Event working group will be tabling at the Keene Pride festival
153 on Sunday. He continued that they are looking for volunteers for that and have a sign-up sheet

154 today for the HRC. They will be handing out stickers and temporary tattoos, talking with people,
155 and sharing a survey for people to fill out, regarding what Pride events the public wants to see
156 from the HRC. They plan to do a larger Pride event in June.

157

158 **B) Keene International Festival**

159

160 Ms. Budakoti stated that she will send Ms. Bender-Jesse a digital copy of the KIF's flyer to share
161 with the HRC. She continued that the event is two weeks from now, September 28 from 11:00
162 AM to 3:00 PM. Planning and preparations are going well. She encourages people to attend.
163 There will be many performances, including from Keene students, and everyone is excited. The
164 KIF would love some volunteers from the HRC.

165

166 **C) Indigenous People's Day**

167

168 Ms. Fiske stated that they are all set, working on the advertising now for the event on Sunday,
169 October 13 at 1:00 PM, at Heberton Hall at the Keene Public Library. She continued that she
170 will send the flyer to Ms. Bender-Jesse to distribute to the HRC in a JPEG format. It would be
171 great if people could share the flyer on their personal social media pages. They are looking
172 forward to having Hawk Henries here, who is quite a performer and a skilled artisan. He will
173 perform traditional music and his original compositions, on flutes he has made and the 150-year-
174 old flutes he has repaired.

175

176 **D) Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**

177

178 Rabbi Aronson stated that Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is Monday, January 20, 2025. He
179 continued that to put together a planning committee, he has emailed the Keene School District
180 (KSD), the high school, the middle school, the MDEIB, the Library, and the Greater Monadnock
181 Collaborative. He hopes to center the voices of students, as Ms. Budakoti is doing, mindful of
182 the fact that Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is a holiday and teachers cannot be required to do
183 anything. He is seeking support from directors of bands and choirs, and hopes the event will
184 start shaping up in the next several weeks.

185

186 Ms. Budakoti stated that the schools have an early release day/extended advisory prior to the
187 holiday. She continued that if Rabbi Aronson has a resource he wants shared with the school
188 community, the advisors could share it with students through their advisories. Rabbi Aronson
189 thanked her and replied that he will talk with her more about that later.

190

191 **E) Black History Month**

192

193 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Dr. Morris chairs the working group and is not present, so
194 they will skip over this.

195

196 **F) Juneteenth**

197 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the Juneteenth working group will meet in October to
198 start planning for 2025.

199
200 **7) New Business**

201
202 **A) Keene for Palestine Discussion**

203
204 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked to hear from the guests from Keene for Palestine. (Katie
205 Carbonara) stated that they (she and Ella Bogdonoff) are attending this meeting without having
206 prepared anything, and were curious to hear what (the HRC)'s thoughts are.

207
208 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked the HRC for their thoughts on their previous discussion about
209 this topic. She asked whether there is something the HRC would want to participate in or
210 research further, and if there is anything they feel is appropriate within the HRC's remit that they
211 can contribute.

212
213 Rabbi Aronson stated that he intended to go to the Palestinian culture night but could not make
214 it. He continued that he thinks it is a great thing to have and he would love to go to something
215 like that in the future. He asked if anything else is planned.

216
217 Ms. Carbonara replied that the event was a huge success. She continued that a wonderful
218 Palestinian woman and her daughter came and told their family's story, showed photos, and
219 shared food. The (organizers) would love to do another event in the future but have no plans yet.
220 A film screening will be at the library next Wednesday at 5:30 PM. They are working on an
221 upcoming action as part of a group of organizations from around VT and NH. If they schedule
222 another cultural night, they will let the HRC know.

223
224 Ms. Bowie stated that she attended (the cultural night) and it was very effective. She continued
225 that it gave people a little bit of understanding of what it was like to stand in the shoes of a
226 (Palestinian) family without all the horror that has been happening to and in that land. It was very
227 well done. She saw Dr. Saleh there as well.

228
229 Dr. Saleh stated that he realized how little he knows about the people's lives, culture, and music,
230 because that does not come into the conversations. He continued that many people would have
231 benefitted by seeing something like that, and he recommended to the organizers that they record
232 it and put it on YouTube. He has not come across anything like it in the public domain, and
233 maybe that is a failure on the part of broader society not to recognize the community as people.

234
235 Ms. Carbonara stated that she has a document of resources, which she would be happy to share
236 via email.

237
238 Dr. Saleh stated that when the HRC discussed (Palestine) at their last meeting, Dr. Morris made
239 the point, which he seconded, that this is traumatic and difficult to talk about, but the HRC does

240 not exist to do the easy conversations. He thinks it was Ms. Carbonara who brought up the fact
241 that no other NH towns have a human rights committee, which he had not known. The fact that
242 Keene does have one means something. The HRC was originally the Jonathan Daniels
243 Committee, then built into Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and then became the HRC. The
244 inspiration comes from Jonathan Daniels, whose work, fundamentally, was getting people to care
245 about people they typically would not care about. He believes that the spirit of the conversation
246 Dr. Morris started is that the HRC needs to be thoughtful and look for the framework that is
247 helpful. If people try to have a conversation just to hurt each other, that does not help. He thinks
248 Dr. Morris's expectation, if he understood, is that the HRC can help develop a framework where
249 a healthy conversation could take place. He expects the HRC can continue on that path, even if
250 it takes many months. He does not want to think that just because Keene is a small town, their
251 impact is small. He believes they have the potential to make a (bigger) impact.

252
253 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that if this conversation is to continue, it might be best to have a
254 subcommittee (working group) of the HRC to brainstorm what something like that might look
255 like. She asked if Dr. Saleh would consider leading such an effort – for the brainstorming, not
256 necessarily the execution. Dr. Saleh replied that he cannot walk away from it just because it is a
257 difficult task, so yes, he accepts. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if other HRC members are
258 interested in joining Dr. Saleh and brainstorming. Ms. Fiske, Mr. Morrill, Chair Cunha-
259 Vasconcelos, and Ms. Bowie stated that they will be a part of it.

260 261 **B) Other New Business**

262
263 Councilor Workman stated that the executive committee members of the Coalition have been
264 communicating, via email, about the recent tragedy that happened at Keene Middle School
265 (KMS). She continued that the Coalition had been planning to do a community conversation at
266 the end of September, but that date would have fallen on the same date as the conversation KMS
267 is planning. The Coalition has pivoted. They will put a pause on their (the Coalition's)
268 community conversation until at least mid-October, and they have extended their support and
269 resources to KMS, if KMS will allow the Coalition in to assist with the conversation later this
270 month. The Coalition is also re-evaluating what the October topic might be, tying it into how to
271 start/have these tough conversations, how to be kinder to one another, and how to listen to one
272 another even when we disagree. The topic of how to have civil conversations is something that
273 keeps going around, because it impacts all facets of life, and nearly every humanitarian conflict
274 boils down to that.

275
276 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that she will put on her Youth Services hat and say that she would love
277 to join/support any of these conversations and efforts. She continued that she has been working
278 with (Superintendent) Rob Malay and is the liaison between the City of Keene and SAU29.

279
280 Ms. Fiske stated that on November 9, 1:00 PM at Heberton Hall, the Friends of the Library are
281 sponsoring a Circle Conversation, "See No Stranger: A Circle Conversation to Connect Our
282 Community." She continued that it is about how to become more comfortable conversing,

283 living, and working with people in a world of polarization and lifestyles. It will be two hours
284 long and will involve small group discussions, followed by a large group discussion to envision
285 restorative practices in the community. It is facilitated by Leaf Seligman. Patrick Heneghan will
286 be part of it, too. She will send information about it to the HRC, through Ms. Bender-Jesse.
287 This event fits in well with much of what the HRC has been discussing today.

288
289 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that she has created a mock-up of an HRC brochure, for the HRC to
290 look at today. She continued that she is open to any feedback on it. Regarding HRC promotion,
291 she will try to attend and help at all of the HRC's events, but if she has to miss one, she would
292 appreciate other HRC members taking photos at the event and sending them to her. She
293 welcomes photos from any of the events, even the ones she is present at. She would love to add
294 more photos from HRC events (to the brochure). There will be many copies of the brochure at
295 the Keene Pride event they are tabling at.

296
297 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that regarding the HRC's conversation about wanting a banner or
298 tablecloth or something with the HRC's logo on it, she emailed the HRC a few weeks ago with
299 some price estimates for those. It is up to the HRC about which direction to go in.

300
301 Discussion ensued about the banner versus tablecloth and the costs of each. Ms. Fiske expressed
302 concerns about the banner stand easily toppling in the wind. Ms. Bender-Jesse agreed and spoke
303 of the likely need for the banner to be replaced periodically. That is why the tablecloth is an
304 option to consider. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked the HRC if they agree it is reasonable to
305 move forward with the purchase of the tablecloth. Discussion continued about the options. Ms.
306 Fiske proposed a slim banner or sign that could be attached to the edge of a tent. Ms. Bender-
307 Jesse replied that she will look into that.

308
309 The HRC decided to move forward with a tablecloth. Ms. Bender-Jesse asked questions about
310 color and size preferences, which the HRC answered. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos thanked Ms.
311 Bender-Jesse and stated that the HRC still owes her an answer about the banner.

312
313 Councilor Workman stated that last fall, she had asked the Mayor if she could step down from
314 the HRC to give more time and energy to the Coalition. She continued that she had agreed to
315 stay on the HRC until another City Councilor was able to join it, which had not happened until
316 just recently. She recommended Councilor Kris Roberts as her replacement, and he said he
317 would be honored.

318
319 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos thanked Councilor Workman for her service to the HRC.

320
321 **8) Adjourn – Next Meeting October 7, 2024, at 5:00 PM.**

322
323 There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 6:03 PM.

324
325 Respectfully submitted by,

HRC Meeting Minutes
September 8, 2024

326 Britta Reida, Minute Taker
327
328 Reviewed and edited by,
329 Alyssa Bender-Jesse, Youth Services Manager

7/1/22- 6/30/23	HRC	KIF	7/1/23- 6/30/24	HRC	KIF	7/1/24- 6/30/25	HRC	KIF
Balance 7/1/22	\$ 2,991.88	\$ 3,985.44	Balance 7/1/23	\$ 2,692.50	\$ 5,951.74	Balance 7/1/24	\$ 3,192.50	\$ 7,368.32
Income			Income			Income		
City of Keene	\$ 1,000.00		City of Keene	\$ 2,000.00		City of Keene	\$ 2,000.00	
donations TILL	\$ 1,800.00		Donation MLK	\$ 750.00				
donations Juneteenth	\$ 3,150.00		MLK Book Funds	632.65				
Donations KIF		\$ 8,312.00	Donations KIF		\$ 4,300.00	Donations KIF		\$ -
			Donations - Juneteenth*	\$ 11,944.77				
subtotal	\$ 5,950.00	\$ 8,312.00	subtotal	\$ 3,382.65	\$ 4,300.00	subtotal	\$ 2,000.00	\$ -
Total Income	\$ 5,950.00	\$ 8,312.00	Total Income	\$ 3,382.65	\$ 4,300.00	Total Income	\$ 2,000.00	\$ -
Expenses			Expenses			Expenses		
			Extra			Extra	\$ 150.00	
Martin Luther King Day	\$ 45.55		Martin Luther King Day	\$ 331.90		Martin Luther King Day	\$ -	
500.00			500.00	\$ 1,550.75		500.00		
Black History Month TILL	\$ 1,800.00		Black History Month	\$ -		Black History Month	\$ -	
Juneteenth	\$ 3,098.58		Juneteenth	\$ 500.00		Juneteenth	\$ -	
500.00			500.00			500.00		
			Expenses - \$11,707.96*					
International Festival		\$ 6,345.70	International Festival		\$ 6,339.06	International Festival		
Indigenous Peoples Day	\$ -		Indigenous Peoples Day	\$ -		Indigenous Peoples Day	\$ -	
500.00			500.00			500.00		
			Pride Event - Story Clear Film	\$ 500.00		Pride Event	\$ 238.06	
			500.00			500.00		
						2024 Pride Festival		
Total Expenses	\$ 4,944.13	\$ 6,345.70	Total Expenses	\$ 2,882.65	\$ 6,339.06	Total Expenses	\$ 388.06	\$ -
Net 22-23	\$ 1,005.87	\$ 1,966.30	Net 23-24	\$ 500.00	\$ (2,039.06)	Net 24-25	\$ 1,611.94	\$ -
Balance on hand	\$ 3,997.75	\$ 5,951.74	Balance on hand***	\$ 3,192.50	\$ 3,912.68	Balance on hand	\$ 4,804.44	\$ 7,368.32
Correct Balance	2692.5		*Keene YMCA was fiscal agent of Juneteenth					