

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 1, 2021

5:00 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

William Hay, Chair
Dr. Shaun Filiault
Jan Manwaring, Councilor
Ritu Budakoti
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos
Nancy Salwen
Marti Fiske

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation, and
Facilities Director

Members Not Present:

Dr. Mohammed Saleh, Vice Chair
Dr. Dottie Morris

Chair Hay read a prepared statement explaining how the Emergency Order #12, pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04 issued by the Governor of New Hampshire, waives certain provisions of RSA 91-A (which regulates the operation of public body meetings) during the declared COVID-19 State of Emergency.

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Hay called the meeting to order at 5:04 PM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of February 1, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Councilor Manwaring made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of February 1, 2021. Ms. Salwen seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon stated that there has been no change. Chair Hay stated that this is accepted as informational.

4) Keene State College Alumni Outreach

Mr. Bohannon stated that he has been playing phone tag with Dr. Morris; he knows there is a lot going on at the college right now. He continued that he heard Keene State College (KSC) President Treadwell's recent presentation and they mentioned something about doing community outreach in Dr. Morris's remarks, so he will wait for that to come back. As far as the alumni outreach, he has not been able to connect with Dr. Morris on that front. The HRC can choose to keep this on the agenda or bring it back when it is ready to move forward. Chair Hay replied that they can keep it and see what happens next.

5) Pride Month

Dr. Filiault reported that they are still working with MONIFF to finalize the film list and determining what the films will be. He continued that unfortunately there is not a lot of progress yet to report.

Chair Hay asked if there is information about any kind of pre-screening. He continued that they had talked about having a few committee members screen the movies. Mr. Bohannon replied that he posed that question to MONIFF and has not had a chance to follow up about this, because two thirds of the month of February he is so engrossed in his budget and then playing catch up with everything else that this slipped through the cracks. Chair Hay replied that they have time to work on this. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will definitely be following up with this and will have information for the committee.

Dr. Filiault stated that he reached out to an organization that he works with on these issues and has not heard back from them yet, but when he does, he will let the committee know. He continued that he also could speak to these issues (as part of the film screenings), since gay men's health is what he did his PhD on.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he just looked at the email he sent to MONIFF and that he received a reply to, and MONIFF is waiting to hear back from people to get information about the costs of screening the movies.

Chair Hay asked if there is any information or clarification on whether they could have the films for 72 hours or a window of time. Mr. Bohannon replied that it is quite possible and just depends on which movies they get.

6) Juneteenth

Councilor Manwaring stated that she and Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos have been working hard and now have a committee, including Beth Wood (who works for the City and previously was the Downtown Coordinator) and Sarah Benning (who has come to some HRC meetings) and Councilor Workman. They have decided the event will be 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM. She continued that they have questions for the HRC. One of the things that came up was: Juneteenth is about the end of slavery, and freedom. Do they want to totally focus on Juneteenth and that Black experience, or do they want to make it broader and include other minorities and other folks who have dealt with discrimination and oppression?

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the event is being put together by the HRC and the committee chooses the direction, but the Juneteenth subcommittee recognized that there is a problem in representation, in that the five subcommittee members are white women. They would like to address that. They discussed talking with USNH and affinity groups on campus, to get their input on the plan so far, and see if someone from there would be willing to join the subcommittee. She understands that they need to get an answer on (the question Councilor Manwaring posed) before they go much further, but she recommends they wait for that input from USNH and affinity groups before they make any decisions.

Councilor Manwaring stated that her concern is that the subcommittee does not meet again until April, and they are looking at music, and food, and she is not having any luck yet tracking down reenactors but is working on that, and time becomes important. She continued that she just would like a sense of what the HRC members think, even if it is not a total decision here. The subcommittee by itself should not make that recommendation.

Ms. Salwen stated that since it is Juneteenth, she thinks the main focus should be on Black people. She continued that it does not mean that every single performer or food vendor has to be Black, but they should try to go as much in that direction as possible. She asked, is this an opportunity to support certain policies? For example, she is thinking about the movie Thirteen and issues with voting rights. Would this be an opportunity to have a table that talks about making voting accessible in NH? Are there ways to pull in educational, policy-change kinds of things?

Ms. Fiske stated that she agrees that the focus should predominantly be on the Black experience. This is the reason for the holiday. She continued that she wonders if there are some things they can do to set some parameters so exact items can be filled in later. If they know, for example, that it is going to have two performance spaces, then they can work on filling those. Or they can determine that they will have food vending in a particular area. That way, when it comes time for filling them in, there is some structure and it can be done more quickly. It would also give them more opportunity to tell people what they are looking for.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she agrees, and something they are thinking about, food-wise, is asking restaurants/vendors to have one meal that is representative of the Black experience – not necessarily all 1860s food, though. She bought some Juneteenth flags and thought they could put the flags out at the restaurants that are doing that and it would let people know. Also, some might want to do cooking demonstrations. The food is coming along much nicer than any other part so far.

In response to the question of whether they have spoken with the owner of the Jamaican restaurant on Main St., Councilor Manwaring and Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied no, but the subcommittee member who is focusing on food has, and they are excited to participate in community events and it is on the agenda to make sure to include the Jamaican restaurant in this.

Mr. Bohannon stated that Mary Jensen is an attendee at this Zoom meeting, from the Historical Society, so if there is something the Historical Society could help the Juneteenth subcommittee with, Ms. Jensen is the “Jonathan Daniels curator” and might be a great resource. When Jenna Carroll left the HRC she expressed that if there are events the Historical Society can help with, they would be

glad to, if the HRC reached out. That is kind of their specialty. They might be able to help connect the group with the Black Heritage Trail from Portsmouth, for example. Councilor Manwaring replied that she is meeting with Ms. Carroll tomorrow.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she likes Ms. Salwen's idea of tying in some modern voting rights activity and information; that was something the group had not talked about. Their next meeting is March 15 and she will be sure to include that in the discussions. Others are welcome to attend.

Ms. Budakoti asked if there is a way they could put information out to the local schools. She continued that it would be good to inform people, and hopefully increase turnout for the event. If the subcommittee agrees, she can take on coordinating with the schools and providing a flyer or other form of information. Chair Hay and Councilor Manwaring replied that is a great idea. Councilor Manwaring asked when school ends. Ms. Budakoti replied June 23. Mr. Bohannon stated that the flyer would have to go through the Superintendent's Office, which takes about two weeks, so they should keep that in mind. The distribution could take about two weeks after that. They should make sure the flyer gets in their hands well before the event.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she met today with Gail Zachariah, who had some suggestions about a movie, aimed at students, that people could stream through the Library. She continued that there are a lot of tentacles out there. Ms. Fiske stated that the Library could also help with displays on topics such as southern cooking, history, and children's books as well. They could easily tie that in with reading lists online, and so on and so forth.

Ms. Salwen stated that she recently came across a traditional African dance ensemble group out of NH and will email the information to Councilor Manwaring.

Ms. Fiske asked if the group is amenable to reaching out across the border, since they are so close to VT and MA. Some of their best resources might be just across the border. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that regarding music, they have already discussed reaching out to the Boston area and the Pioneer Valley. Ms. Fiske added that the Boston area has historical reenactors.

Chair Hay stated that they should inform libraries in the area that they are doing this Juneteenth event. He continued that certainly as far as schools are concerned, there is a dreadful lack of information. There is so much history that people have no idea about. The Thirteenth Amendment was just the very beginning of it and it goes on from there. The Nazi regime studied the US's caste system to nail down what they wanted to do, and ruled out some things that they thought were too outrageous for them to do. Our State Representatives are trying to not even teach the fact that there is racism in the country, and are saying it is not there. Education is needed, and they need to double up on efforts.

Mr. Bohannon stated that another idea is that Sandra Neil Wallace might be able to read one of her historical books for children, because her books are based on that. They could have a children's reading session with her, maybe, or have someone read one of her books. She has a couple related to Black history, and that could be really powerful for the community to see what an amazing author we

have right here in our own community highlighting these subjects. He will get the information to Ms. Fiske. Ms. Fiske stated that might easily fit with a library program – an author visit.

Ms. Salwen asked about the idea of having a Drum Circle. She continued that the group she sent them information about does drum and dance. It might be more performance, but if they are interested in having a facilitated drum circle, there is someone else she knows of who might be a possibility. Ms. Fiske stated that there is an African dance group in the Burlington, VT area as well and they might be willing to come down. Discussion continued.

Ms. Budakoti stated that as a member of the Keene International Festival (KIF) committee, she can see this being done in June and then the KIF is planned for September, so that is great. She is happy this is coming along. She thinks they should look at volunteers and start thinking about that. There may be people who want to be part of this event, share their stories, or perform, and they need a way to be able to find this information. It would help if they could share the information on the HRC's Facebook page or the City website, and HRC members could start spreading the link so the information gets out as early as possible. Also they can make an announcement for people to come together and be part of this. The more people can gather for this, the better.

Ms. Fiske asked about Facebook events for City events. Mr. Bohannon replied that they did that for the Martin Luther King, Jr. event, so they can certainly create a Facebook event for Juneteenth and post it on various platforms. He continued that if they do an event they can tag the KIF, and share it with the Historical Society, and KSC and the KPL can share it, too. There are multiple ways for them to spread the word. He asked if the subcommittee has someone with graphic design abilities to create a flyer. If not, City staff could work on it a bit as soon as the subcommittee has more details. The sooner they get information out, the better.

Councilor Manwaring replied that they do have someone who can do the graphic design, once the subcommittee figures out more details. She continued that one website she saw had “the three Es” for Juneteenth – “Education, Entertainment, and Empowerment.” She thought that was a good way to go. They will talk about it on March 15, and maybe they can get something out – she is a big believer in save-the-date. Ms. Budakoti suggested a 4th E – “Equality” or “Equity.”

Chair Hay stated that for the record, the Minute-taker took him seriously at the last meeting when he said he was going to portray Frederick Douglass, but he really is not.

Councilor Manwaring asked Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos if there was anything else to add. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she thinks they covered everything.

7) Library ALA Grant

Mr. Bohannon stated that this is something they talked a little bit about last time and wanted to get on the agenda. He continued that at the time, Ms. Fiske and Ms. Zachariah had just submitted a grant. He asked Ms. Fiske for more information.

Ms. Fiske stated that she does not have any more information about it at this time. She continued that she is meeting with Ms. Zachariah tomorrow, and this is one of the items they will discuss. She is not sure where the grant falls right now. She knows Ms. Zachariah plans to do the discussions (on race relations) no matter what, it is just a matter of how many she would end up doing, based on funding available through the grant sources. She will have more information at the next HRC meeting.

8) New or Other Business

Mr. Bohannon stated that the Ad Hoc Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee (AHRJCS) is wrapping up their work and he has been told that many items from that committee might be coming the HRC's way. He does not know what those items are, but the HRC will have an opportunity to review the items when they come. The HRC has done a great job with an events focus, and he loves the direction they are going in, trying to bring in the education component to everything. The HRC has done one event here and there, and to have four events in a year is fantastic. At a time when they really need it, it is happening, which he is so thankful for. He is looking forward to seeing what comes their way from the AHRJCS.

Chair Hay stated that he feels kind of left out from that group. He continued that he thought the HRC would be getting more of a heads up on things, to be able to attend the AHRJCS's meetings. He always finds out about these things after they are done. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, it is a public process, and he would not disagree with Chair Hay. It is just part of the nature of how things work.

Chair Hay stated that tomorrow at 10:00, WMUR is starting a series of race on NH, which should be interesting if anyone else wants to check it out.

Chair Hay thanked the group for their great work. He continued that as their tendrils go out, he thinks they are going to get a lot more participation from all over the place, and find even more opportunities for them to jump into.

9) Adjourn – Next Meeting is Monday, April 5, 2021, at 5:00 PM

There being no further business, Chair Hay adjourned the meeting at 5:46 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Edits respectfully submitted by,
Andy Bohannon, Staff