

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, May 3, 2021

5:00 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Dr. Mohammed Saleh, Vice Chair
Dr. Shaun Filiault
Jan Manwaring, Councilor
Marti Fiske
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos
Dr. Dottie Morris
Nancy Salwen

Staff Present:

Andrew Bohannon, Parks, Recreation, and
Facilities Director

Members Not Present:

William Hay, Chair
Ritu Budakoti

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Vice Chair Saleh 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. He called the meeting to order at 5:05 PM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of April 5 and 12, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Councilor Manwaring made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of April 5 and April 12, 2021. Dr. Morris seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon stated that regarding the Finance Report, they did an audit, because there are three accounts for the HRC. He continued that first is the HRC account, and then there is the Journey to Freedom account, which was a program in the early 1990s that received quite a bit of money. That got transferred and they closed that from the Kingsbury fund over to the HRC. Then, they created the Keene International Festival. Thus, there are accounts A, B, and C, and with the closure of B, that was done a long time ago but there was an invoice that was incorrectly coded

to Human Rights and not to the KIF. They have done an audit. What is presented to the HRC tonight has everything correct. The balance in the HRC's account is \$4,096.73. Even though it is in the HRC's account, the \$2,861.89 is for the KIF and cannot be used for the HRC. The HRC is just the fiscal agent for the KIF.

Vice Chair Saleh asked what the number highlighted in yellow is. Mr. Bohannon replied that is the combination of the two balances.

Vice Chair Saleh asked if it is correct that this is to be taken as informational and the HRC does not need to vote to approve this. Mr. Bohannon replied that is correct. Vice Chair Saleh stated that if there are no further questions or comments, the Finance Report is accepted as informational.

4) Pride Month

Vice Chair asked for an update from the Pride subcommittee.

Dr. Filiault stated that he reached out to their contact at the Monadnock International Film Festival (MONIFF) and watched the films that were suggested and thought two were appropriate for Pride Month, given their content and timeliness. One of those is apparently a Netflix-exclusive now, so the HRC is unable to stream that, which brings them down to one film. They will hear back soon regarding what the cost will be. The contact at MONIFF also said they might be able to show the Netflix-exclusive one if they do it through the Colonial Theater, but he does not think it is realistic to try to arrange something with the Colonial Theater with six weeks' notice.

Dr. Filiault continued that he and Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos are working on drafting a letter to the Keene Downtown Merchants Association to see which merchants would put Pride flags in their windows for that week or month. They are ready to send that letter out, if they have the HRC's approval.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she emailed the letter to Mr. Bohannon late last week. She asked how they could best share the letter with the committee. She continued that she and Dr. Filiault discussed that if they are asking businesses to display the flag, they should offer those businesses the flag, instead of asking the businesses to buy the flags themselves. That is something to be coordinated. The flags, 3'x5', are about \$5 or \$6 each online.

Discussion ensued about flag sizes, prices, logistics, and what is reasonable to ask/expect of businesses. Dr. Morris asked about the specifics of the flag colors and symbolism, and whether it is the older or newer Pride flag. Dr. Filiault replied that they are the traditional rainbow flag, and each stripe represents a different branch of the LGBTQ community and explained the colors. Dr. Morris replied that there is a newer one with the rainbow stripes plus black and brown stripes. Dr. Filiault replied that that is the progress flag, and they could do that as well. They are

all available online for between \$5 and \$6. Flags for 10 businesses would be \$60 or less.
Discussion continued.

Mr. Bohannon shared the letter Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos drafted on the screen. He suggested they take the opportunity to share the mission of the HRC with the businesses they are contacting, and a link to the HRC's website in case they want to learn more.

Discussion ensued about how many businesses they will be asking to display the flag and how many participants they should expect. Dr. Filiault asked Ms. Fiske if the Library will participate by, say, having an LGBTQ-themed display in the lobby. Ms. Fiske replied yes.

Vice Chair Saleh asked how the letters would be distributed. Dr. Filiault replied that Judy Rogers from Prime Roast has offered to take that on.

Dr. Filiault stated that they need two approvals from the HRC – first, an approval of the wording of the letter, contingent on adding the HRC's mission and contact information; and second, the expenditure for the flags.

Dr. Filiault made a motion for the Human Rights Committee to adopt this language, contingent upon adding the HRC's mission and contact information to the letter, to be printed on City of Keene letterhead and distributed to the Keene Downtown Merchants Association. Dr. Morris seconded the motion.

Ms. Fiske stated that she is hopeful that more than 10 businesses would participate. She asked if they should consider spending more money to purchase more flags, maybe smaller ones. Ten might not be enough. Dr. Filiault suggested a cap of \$120, for flags for 20 merchants. Discussion ensued about what defines "downtown," how many businesses there are, and how many businesses are likely to participate and which ones.

Vice Chair Saleh reminded the group about the motion on the floor. Councilor Manwaring stated that the motion on the floor is to approve the wording of the letter. Dr. Filiault replied right, there needs to be two motions, and first is the motion to adopt the language of the letter. The second motion is regarding the expenditure.

Vice Chair Saleh called for a vote. By a roll call vote, the HRC unanimously adopted the language of the letter, contingent upon adding the HRC's mission and contact information to the letter, to be printed on City of Keene letterhead and distributed to the Keene Downtown Merchants Association.

Dr. Filiault made a motion for the HRC to allocate \$150 to purchase Pride flags for downtown businesses and those in the downtown area. Councilor Manwaring seconded the motion.

Dr. Morris stated that they need to decide which flag. Dr. Filiault replied yes, they need to decide on the size, and whether to use the traditional design that has the six stripes of the rainbow or the newer one that has triangles on the sides with other colors to represent other facets of the community. Vice Chair Saleh replied that they can have that discussion if and when they approve the motion for the expenditure.

Dr. Morris made a motion to amend the motion to \$200 instead of \$150. Dr. Morris stated that in case they end up needing more flags than the \$150 would buy, it would be better to add more money to it now, instead of having to come back and make another motion. She hears that more businesses might want to participate.

Dr. Filiault stated that the amended motion is to allocate \$200 to purchase Pride flags for participating downtown businesses. Councilor Manwaring seconded the motion to amend. The amended motion passed by a unanimous, roll-call vote.

Vice Chair Saleh asked if there is anything else to discuss about Pride month. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there is already-written information about the HRC's mission that she should copy into the letter. She asked who puts it on the letterhead. Mr. Bohannon replied that she can send it to him and he will put it on the letterhead. He will follow up with her, regarding the language.

Ms. Fiske asked what the date is for the movie showing and what the movie's title is. Dr. Filiault replied that the date is contingent upon when they can actually get that from MONIFF, but they are probably looking at the latter half of June. He continued that the movie is Cured, which is about conversion therapy. Ms. Fiske replied that she saw it and it is excellent.

Vice Chair Saleh asked how they will distribute the movie link to a broader audience. Dr. Filiault replied that MONIFF knows how to do that and will walk the HRC through the process when it is time.

Dr. Morris asked if they will have to meet again to approve the cost of the film. She asked if there is a ballpark figure the HRC could approve up to. Discussion ensued. Dr. Filiault stated that they could set a cap today, and if the film MONIFF is recommending is beyond that, they could move to their third choice. Councilor Manwaring asked if an email vote would be allowed. Mr. Bohannon replied no. Discussion ensued about whether and how the HRC could hold an "emergency meeting" to approve the cost of the film once it comes in, and about what the cost of the film might be and what the HRC's funds are.

Dr. Morris made a motion for the HRC to approve up to \$1,000 (for a film for Pride). Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos seconded the motion, which passed by a unanimous, roll call vote.

5) **Juneteenth**

Vice Chair asked for an update from the Juneteenth subcommittee.

Councilor Manwaring showed on the screen an image of the “save the date” advertising for Juneteenth, designed by Beth Wood. She continued that the emphasis is on teaching people about what Juneteenth means. The image has the City of Keene’s logo, but she suggests they change it to something like “sponsored by the Human Rights Committee of the City of Keene.” Discussion ensued regarding the “save the date” advertisement. Dr. Morris stated that the Juneteenth colors are red, black, and green. Councilor Manwaring replied that she will bring that up to the Juneteenth committee tomorrow night.

Councilor Manwaring stated that as they said last time, the event is about food, music, and history. She continued that Gail Zachariah from the Library has a possibility of having Edwin Owusu speak; he is a rapper and motivational speaker from Vermont and from Ghana originally. Ms. Zachariah might have some money.

Councilor Manwaring stated that regarding how to approach the restaurants downtown, Gail Somers, owner and chef at the Jamaican restaurant, suggested they focus on macaroni and cheese. She (Councilor Manwaring) thought it would be nice to have more choices, especially for people with food limitations. Through the internet she found a list of Juneteenth foods, including spiced collard greens with bacon, honey jerk shrimp, crockpot smoked red beans, and more. They will talk with the restaurants about how this is about educating people about foods that were important when June 19, 1865 occurred, with some modern touches. It is an educational process. Hopefully, that will resonate with the restaurants.

Vice Chair Saleh asked about Ms. Somers’ role. Councilor Manwaring replied that the YMCA has asked to join the Juneteenth event, and Ms. Somers is part of that. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Ms. Somers is sort of the facilitator for area restaurants who want to participate in this. Discussion continued about the food the restaurants will make. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos clarified that the intent is for each restaurant to choose a food from the list to make, knowing it will not be completely historically authentic; it will be the restaurant’s take on it.

Vice Chair Saleh asked about the history part of the event. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that the plan is to have an introductory speaker; a proclamation by the Mayor; another speaker; a musical act, youth choir; and another speaker, a poetry group that Councilor Workman made contact with; and a closing speaker. She gave more information about including QR codes that people can scan with their phones to access websites that educate people about certain aspects of Juneteenth and related social justice. There is one reenactor still as a possibility. The YMCA is looking at doing a history walk. They also plan to distribute Juneteenth flags to participating restaurants. She also reached out to NH Senator Melanie Levesque but has not heard back. Discussion continued about budget details. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they will keep the HRC posted as things develop.

Vice Chair Saleh asked about advertising and the location. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it will all be in Railroad Square. She continued that they will keep the flyer fairly generic until more of the event details are finalized and they will release more information as the program gets solidified. They will print flyers and they have a tried-and-true list of where to post them.

6) Library ALA Grant

Vice Chair Saleh asked if there is an update on the Library ALA Grant. Ms. Fiske replied that the next event is Wednesday, May 5, at 5:00 PM, a discussion based off the book “The Black Friend: On Being a Better White Person,” by Frederick Joseph. She continued that he offers reflections on how to be an anti-racist and how to educate newcomers to the cause. The next two events are documentary film discussion. There will be one more community discussion with a group, happening a little later as this starts wrapping up.

Vice Chair Saleh asked if the HRC members can share the link on social media. Ms. Fiske replied yes, that would be wonderful. Mr. Bohannon asked if Ms. Fiske can have Ms. Zachariah send him the new link and he will forward that to the group as informational.

Vice Chair stated that to back up a bit, he forgot to ask during the Juneteenth agenda item: Councilor Manwaring said that Ms. Zachariah might have some money. Is there any paperwork or approval needed for that? Ms. Fiske replied that it is money they have set aside from the Friends of the Library, who sponsor Library programming. It will come from the regular program budget.

7) New, Other Business

Vice Chair Saleh welcomed public comment. Sandra McDonald, Keene resident, stated that she thinks what the HRC is doing for Juneteenth is wonderful. She continued that she has an idea, as a result of the work of the Ad Hoc Racial Justice and Community Safety (AHRJCS) Committee – she suggests inviting Civil Rights and Human Rights Attorney Bryan Stevenson for a speaking engagement. She wonders if the HRC is interested. She got the interest of Pierre Morton, newly appointed Chief of Diversity at Franklin Pierce University. The Whittemore Center at the University of New Hampshire is also on board. This event is at the initial planning stages, but she hopes they can put forth an invitation to Mr. Stevenson, whether it is virtual or in person, which is still up in the air. The goal is toward the end of the year or beginning of next year. She spoke with Mayor Hansel about it and he suggested she get in touch with the HRC.

Vice Chair Saleh thanked Ms. McDonald for coming today and sharing her feedback. He continued that Dr. Morris was part of the AHRJCS Committee and the report. He asked if she has a response.

Dr. Morris stated that she thinks it would be great, and maybe Mr. Stevenson could be the speaker for the Martin Luther King, Jr. event. She thinks it is something that could be very productive, because there was a good response when the film about his life was shown at the Colonial Theater. There was a really productive discussion afterwards, so she imagines that if he actually came here in person, that would lead to some very fruitful, productive discussions. She asked Ms. McDonald to get in touch with her at Keene State College, because she is sure they would want to be a part of it, too.

Ms. McDonald thanked Dr. Morris and added that people from The Cohen Center have expressed interest as well. She wants to get as many interested parties on board with this as possible to further their chances of getting Mr. Stevenson to do this speaking engagement. He receives a lot of requests for speaking engagements and can only accept a few. The more people and groups in the area come together and make this an opportunity for education, the better. She hopes to get Mr. Stevenson's message into local high schools and colleges, too. She continued that she will call Dr. Morris.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he will call Ms. McDonald later this week to talk more about this.

Vice Chair Saleh stated that Ms. McDonald's call reminded him of something else to bring up: the HRC probably wants to pay attention to the report that the AHRJCS Committee put out. He asked that they put it on a future agenda. Mr. Bohannon replied that he meant to put it on today's agenda, and he apologizes for it not being there. He will add it to the next. Now that the Pride and Juneteenth events will be happening soon and thus not requiring such a large portion of the HRC's agenda, the HRC can really focus on the AHRJCS Committee's report over the next several months. There is a lot of information there. He will also follow up with Ms. McDonald regarding Mr. Stevenson and put that on a future agenda as well.

8) Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, June 7, 2021 at 5:00 PM
More Time: Keene State College Outreach

There being no further business, Vice Chair Saleh adjourned the meeting at 6:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,
Andy Bohannon, PRF Director

Additional edits by,
Katie Kibler, Clerk's Office