

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 7, 2021

5:00 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

William Hay, Chair
Councilor Jan Manwaring
Dr. Dottie Morris
Dr. Mohammed Saleh
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos
Dr. Shaun Filiault
Marti Fiske
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, PRF Director

Members Not Present:

Nancy Salwen

1) Welcome and Call to Order

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

2) Approval of May 3, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Dr. Morris made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of May 3, 2021. Councilor Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon stated that he updated the Finance Report to reflect the most current budget. They ordered Pride flags for \$104.85. Chair Hay asked if anyone had questions. Hearing none, he stated that this is accepted as informational.

4) Pride Month

Dr. Filiault stated that the Pride subcommittee put out the letter to downtown businesses, explaining Pride month and the flags they are going to provide for downtown businesses. He continued that he has had some responses, and currently there are eight flags requested. That is less than the 50 they ordered but it is a good selection of businesses downtown. The plan is to deliver them at the end of this week.

Dr. Filiault continued that he is not sure where they are at with the movie. He has not received a response to his email to the Monadnock International Film Festival (MONIFF) about that. Mr. Bohannon stated that he has been working with MONIFF on other movies, but has not seen anything about the Pride movie. They can follow up with her and see what the status is.

Dr. Filiault continued that the Pride subcommittee was thinking about having a Library display of some LGBTQ-themed books. He asked Ms. Fiske if that can be done. Ms. Fiske replied yes, it has been up already for more than a week and the Library has a large selection ready to go onto the shelves as items are checked out. Dr. Filiault replied that is great.

Dr. Filiault continued that the last thing is to put some language before the Mayor and the City Council for a proclamation, which they have usually done in June. People have contacted him to say they hope they can do more, or they would like to try and plan something on their own. He thinks there is a real desire for Pride month events and particularly for them to expand what they are doing next year, which is good to hear. Planning this during COVID-19 meant they were not sure what they would be able to do.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the last communication from MONIFF seems to be May 21, asking if the HRC had any speakers to go with the film. He continued that he will forward that to Dr. Filiault. Dr. Filiault replied that unfortunately, he has been unable to get speakers, because apparently speaking engagements for Pride month fill up a year in advance, for expert speakers, and also because people have Zoom fatigue and no longer want to participate in a Zoom forum, or do not want to participate live, which is a catch-22. Thus, he will be speaking based on his PhD in the field of LGBTQ health. He will still keep looking for a speaker from a local group.

Dr. Morris asked if Dr. Filiault would like Hunter Kirschner's contact information to see if he is willing to help. Dr. Filiault replied yes.

Chair Hay asked what Dr. Filiault meant last month when he said they were really down to one film. Dr. Filiault replied that it just came out that way based on the rights to films. Netflix acquired the rights to one of the films they had been considering. The film they narrowed it down to is Cured.

5) Juneteenth

Councilor Manwaring stated that the Juneteenth subcommittee has been meeting. Mr. Bohannon showed the flyer and clarified that it is a previous version; the committee has since updated it.

Councilor Manwaring stated that the Juneteenth event will be 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM [on June 19]. They hoped for 3:00 PM, but that did not work out. The program is such that they will begin with singing This Little Light of Mine, followed by Steve Cook (America the Dream), and then the Mayor will do his proclamation. Pierre Morton will then read the General Order (emancipation of slaves) and do some poetry, and he has some folks with him who will speak also. Next is Julissa, who will be drumming, and then Edwin Owusu, motivational speaker and rapper. This is at Railroad Square and people should bring their own chairs. The new flyers will be out soon.

Councilor Manwaring continued that the subcommittee is also working with restaurants. They provided a list of foods that would be typical of Juneteenth, and asked if they would offer something from the list that would appeal. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that as of last week, they had four or five restaurants, and are waiting to hear from a couple more.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that regarding the budget, they have not had to pay for as much as they had expected to. She continued that they have also had a lot of turnover in the program. She put together a budget based on giving each person who plans to speak or present a \$200 honorarium and they are still only at \$1,800. The budget maximum was \$2,000. She does not think they will necessarily be offering everyone \$200; there are people who are volunteering. It is not clear how it will all go, but worst-case scenario, they are still under budget.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos continued that there is an open question about the sound system. Steve Cook will not only be a presenter but has joined the planning committee, and he brought to their attention that the City's sound system is not enough for the music they are trying to present. He may have a sound system he is willing to provide but it is an outdoor event and there are more risks around that and the long extension cords could be problematic. Those details need to be worked out and she does not know if they will need to spend some money on the sound system. That is the only variable that is still hanging out.

Councilor Manwaring added that Yves Gakunde is the emcee for the event.

Mr. Bohannon stated that when he spoke with Mr. Cooke, he said he would be bringing the sound system and was fine with setup and the logistics. Power-wise he would be in one general location. They will talk more at tonight's subcommittee meeting about setup and what that will look like. It is a small but important logistic.

Councilor Manwaring stated that the subcommittee has a question for the HRC. June 19 is the Keene High School graduation, all day. Mr. Bohannon replied that the evening of June 18 is graduation and if it rains, it goes into June 19. Regardless of whether graduation goes into June 19, Project Graduation and the prom occur, which will not really affect the Juneteenth event for anyone except him, since he has a child walking this year. He has two people who will be helping with the Juneteenth event, so they will be in good hands that day. Councilor Manwaring replied that it would still be nice to have someone who could help get people seated, greet

people, and so on and so forth. She and a friend are designing/making nametags for volunteers. She asked for HRC members to let the subcommittee know if they are available to help at the event, either the whole thing or just part of it. They can email her or Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos.

6) Racial Justice and Community Safety Report

a) Speaker – Mr. Bryan Stevenson

Mr. Bohannon noted that due to a typo, Bryan Stevenson's name is spelled incorrectly on the agenda. He continued that Dr. Morris was a Co-Chair for the Ad Hoc Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee (RJCS Committee), which met for almost a full year. At the same time, Sandra MacDonald has come forward and wants to bring [Mr. Stevenson to Keene as] a collaborative effort. There are two pieces of this conversation. One, the HRC needs to dive into the RJCS Report and identify which items the HRC can latch onto, be aware of, advocate for, and so on and so forth. The RJCS Committee did an amazing job. He hopes the HRC members have read the report so they can move forward. He continued that Ms. MacDonald can talk about her initiative and thought process, if Chair Hay wants to have her speak.

Chair Hay stated that the RJCS Report is comprehensive and amazing and represents so much work and assiduous attention. He welcomed Ms. MacDonald and asked her to speak.

Ms. MacDonald thanked the committee for all of the work that they do. She stated that she appreciates the work of the RJCS Committee as well, which resulted in many things to think about, one of which was her idea to invite Bryan Stevenson to the area for a speaking engagement. He is a noted civil rights attorney and the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative and the Legacy Museum. The Equal Justice Initiative is an organization that involves itself in trying to overturn cases where people have been wrongly adjudicated as guilty. The Legacy Museum is dedicated to the history of lynchings in the country. Mr. Steven has also written books, such as Just Mercy, which left quite an impression on her. He is very involved in issues of social justice and restorative justice. He would be a great speaker to invite to the area.

Ms. MacDonald continued that she would like to involve the HRC in that effort. Having the HRC's input and expertise would be critical. To date, others on board with this effort are Franklin Pierce University, Pierre Morton, and John Greabe, Director of the Warren B. Rudman Center for Justice at the University of New Hampshire (UNH). Mr. Greabe's wife, Martha Madsen, is the Director of the NH Institute for Civics Education, and she is on board, too, because one of the components they are hoping to see by inviting Mr. Stevenson is to get information/literature to the college, high school, middle school, and elementary students. That aspect of it is very important to her, personally. The overall focus of this project is to have a conversation around social justice and restorative justice, and the division in the country that has deepened over time. That overall theme is large. They want to have that go along the lines of having this conversation, bringing the surrounding Monadnock area into the conversation, which would align with what the RJCS Committee had been doing and align with what the HRC is tasked to do. She would like feedback about how the HRC members feel about it, and whether

they are willing to be involved. There will be a Zoom meeting at 1:30 PM on June 11. The next step is to form a planning committee, and they would like some or all HRC members involved in that. She is not well versed in this type of thing. This was just an idea she had and she wants to see it come to fruition but definitely needs help. The June 11 Zoom will include Mr. Stevenson's representative who handles his speaking engagement requests and she can answer people's questions.

Ms. MacDonald continued that she also wants to involve Keene State College (KSC) and had reached out to Tom White and Peter McBride when he was still the head of the Cohen Center. Mr. White was very enthusiastic but she understands that Mr. McBride has resigned and there is a new Interim Director. She has not spoken with Mr. White in a while. They would love to have KSC on board. They want this to be as inclusive as possible. Dr. Morris replied that she can definitely count KSC in. She continued that this goes hand-in-hand with the conversation she was just having with the person who has taken over for Mr. McBride in the interim position. She asked Ms. MacDonald to send her (Dr. Morris) the Zoom link, which she will pass along to the Cohen Center staff.

Ms. MacDonald asked for further feedback from the HRC. She continued that the event is in the very preliminary stages, and again, she hopes they can engage the schools in the area with this speaking engagement. There was some talk about maybe even having a field trip down to the Legacy Museum at some point. It would be great for education and a great way to open up the conversation. She is open to suggestions.

Dr. Morris stated that several of her family members went to the museum and said it was amazing. She continued that they were comparing it to the African American Museum in Washington, DC, and said both museums were great but the Legacy Museum in particular was remarkable. She likes the idea of a potential field trip there. She is planning to go this summer.

Ms. MacDonald stated that probably many local high school and middle school students are not familiar with the topics Mr. Stevenson speaks about, and our collective history. She thinks that a lot of history has been pushed under the rug. We cannot move forward and solve issues without knowing what the issues are and being able to speak about them and learn about them. This could be a way to get that conversation rolling.

Chair Hay stated that as he was reading the RJCS Report, one thing that kept coming up for him was that it is like preaching to the choir, in the sense that people who have some notion of history are the least of need of the information/education. He continued that a good example is the Tulsa Massacre – it is a good thing the centennial of that came up so more people learned about it. He is pretty woke, but he did not know about it until about 14 months ago. He does not know any white person who knew about it before he did. What are schools teaching? Some of what he learned in school in PA was completely wrong. One of the jobs of education is to say, “No, that is just not true” and prove it, and reeducate in a gentle way so people stop operating on bad information.

Ms. MacDonald replied that she had the same conversation with Martha Madsen, and they, too, talked about not wanting to preach to the choir. They want to move the education and the conversation out. They want to reach the people who have opposing views and ideals. That may entail some backbreaking work, she knows. She really meant it when she said she wants to make this inclusive, and figuring out how to do that is difficult. People sometimes are not willing to engage the other side. However, it is hard to move forward without that. Keene and the surrounding area is a great area to have this sort of thing go on in, and she sees this as on-going work, not a one-time event.

Dr. Saleh stated that he would like to participate in the Zoom meeting on Friday. He continued that he agrees with Chair Hay's comments. He did not know about Tulsa, either, and did some research. He is from an immigrant background. His research showed that in general, people are ignorant about it. People sometimes dismiss it as "identity politics" and they should be ashamed to say such things, because if anything, we are still not doing enough. He wanted to emphasize that.

Chair Hay stated that he wants to join Friday, too. Mr. Bohannon stated that it is great that a few HRC members are interested in joining the Zoom on Friday. This is something that certainly the HRC is interested in. He does not think they can provide all of the heavy lift but it will take a lot of people at the table. He suggests they give themselves some realistic timelines to work with, because of course, there is going to be a cost to bring Mr. Stevenson here and they need to figure out how to achieve that and start with that right up front. Those will be the two key pieces. He personally is excited to see where this goes. He can put this on next month's agenda if Chair Hay wants him to. Chair Hay agreed.

Ms. MacDonald stated that that the items Mr. Bohannon mentioned are at the top of the list. She continued that they are looking a little ways down the line at this. Next year seems to be most likely, given the planning that needs to go into this as well as considering Mr. Stevenson's schedule, which she briefly looked at on the Equal Justice Institute's website. He is very busy. She will email the Zoom link to Mr. Bohannon to distribute to whoever is interested.

7) **New, Other Business**

Chair Hay stated that he was unable to attend the previous two meetings, and feels in the dark on many things, since HRC members are not allowed to talk with each other individually about what is going on. He continued that until the meeting minutes come out a few days before the next meeting, he does not have any idea what is going on. He asked if there is a way to stay informed without violating City procedures. Councilor Manwaring replied that they are allowed to talk with each other individually; they just cannot talk in a group outside of meetings. Dr. Morris replied that she thought they just were not allowed to create a quorum. Mr. Bohannon replied that is correct. Councilor Manwaring replied that one-on-one conversations are fine.

Dr. Morris left at 5:55 PM.

Chair Hay asked if the Keene International Festival (KIF) is happening next month. Mr. Bohannon replied that they meet tomorrow and they are ready to roll for September. He continued that excitement is starting to build, especially after how successful the food festival was downtown this past weekend. Ms. Budakoti and the crew really shine and have a lot of things lined up. Ms. Budakoti stated that it will be September 18, if they want to put that on the calendar.

8) Adjourn – Next Meeting is Monday, July 5, 2021 at 5:00 PM

Mr. Bohannon stated that July 5 is actually a City holiday. He continued that in previous years, the committee has taken the summer months off, but they do not necessarily have to. They have a lot on their plate, especially regarding trying to tackle issues from the RJCS Report. They could reschedule the July meeting if they want. He will not be available for the August meeting.

Discussion ensued about the July meeting. The group decided on Monday, July 19, in person at the Vincent Miller meeting room at the Library.

Dr. Saleh asked if it is possible to maintain a remote option, to make it more likely that they will have a quorum, in case someone is out of town but could attend remotely. Ms. Fiske replied that that would require equipment that the Library is currently not able to provide. She continued that to have a good quality hybrid meeting system, they would need a remote camera and a good, strong microphone to pick up everyone's voices. Her experience with trying to run it off of just a laptop or conference telephone is that people on the opposite ends of tables will not be able to hear what is being said by the person on the computer, and vice versa. It has been working for the City Council because they have invested a lot of money into equipment, like individual microphones for every person.

Councilor Manwaring stated that the City Council is looking at the question that Dr. Saleh has raised. She continued that they are not sure where it will go; they are still exploring it. Mr. Bohannon stated that the Recreation Center may be a "Zoom room site," so they would be able to facilitate those types of meetings. He continued that for the time being, they will plan on being in the Vincent Miller Room at the Library on July 19, but if technology provides, it may get moved to the Recreation Center if they need to have a hybrid meeting. He fully agrees with Dr. Saleh that this should be the way they go forward, so if someone is not able to be physically present but they can attend remotely, there is no reason why technology cannot make that possible. Councilor Manwaring stated that maybe they could think of doing a hybrid meeting at the Recreation Center. Ms. Fiske replied that the Library is looking into grant funding, but it would not be available until the winter.

Dr. Filiault asked if public meeting laws allow for hybrid meetings and for someone to be remote while everyone else is [in person]. Mr. Bohannon replied that they are exploring that right now.

He continued that the City Attorney weighed in on that a little bit this afternoon, related to the Zoning Board of Adjustment. They will get some clarification on that front. There are some definite requirements and they will make sure not to break any State or local laws.

Ms. Fiske stated that her understanding is that as long as the quorum of the board is in person, they could have the smaller amount of people attending remotely. She continued that they will have to state why they are remote and where they are, and as long as the quorum accepts those reasons, they can participate. There is still legislation in the legislature that has not gone through yet, based off previous laws.

There being no further business, Chair Hay reiterated that the next meeting is Monday, July 19, in the Miller Vincent Room at the Library and adjourned the meeting at 6:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Andy Bohannon, PRF Director