

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

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

**Monday, October 4, 2021**

**5:00 PM**

**Recreation Center, Room 22/  
via Zoom**

**Members Present:**

William Hay, Chair  
Councilor Jan Manwaring  
Dr. Dottie Morris  
Nancy Salwen  
Dr. Mohammed Saleh  
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos

**Staff Present:**

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities  
Director

**Members Not Present:**

Marti Fiske, Ex-Officio  
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate  
Dr. Shaun Filiault

**1) Welcome and Call to Order**

Chair Hay called the meeting to order at 5:11 PM. Roll call was conducted. Heidi Schwieger, Executive Director from the Jonathan Daniels Center for Social Responsibility (JDC), introduced herself. She stated that she is primarily tasked with moving it from its status as a program of the Historical Society to becoming its own non-profit in order to have a more activist role in the community.

**2) Approval of September 13, 2021 Minutes**

Councilor Manwaring made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of September 13, 2021. Dr. Morris seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

**3) Finance Report**

Mr. Bohannon reported that the HRC is up to date on its finances, with the exception of the fact that he paid some recent invoices to the Keene International Festival (KIF), so that line item has changed a little. He continued that he changed in a few things in how he set up the Finance Report, since the HRC does not need to know all the details of the KIF. He tried to make it consistent to show all of the different events. Up top is the \$500 they get from the City of Keene, the donations that come in from the KIF, and he can add another line if they get any

donations related to the HRC. There is an expenses line for each event – KIF, Pride month, Juneteenth, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. There is room if they need to add anything else. Everything has been audited.

Chair Hay stated that since this is informational only, there is no need for a motion to accept.

**4) Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee Report**

Chair Hay initiated a discussion of the Ad Hoc Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee (RJCS Committee) Report.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if it is correct that the expectation is that a portion of this report's recommendations will be the HRC's responsibility to execute. Mr. Bohannon replied yes. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if it is correct that Public Safety and Education are not in their purview, and the HRC is focusing on the Government Leadership section. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, and if there is crossover they could do within any of those categories, they could go for it. For example, if there was a particular event or educational opportunity that would cross over everything, they could go for it. The highlight of his conversation with the Mayor is not necessarily "Stay in your lane," but do what they need to do to move this document forward so it does not just collect dust. It gives purpose to the HRC outside of just planning events. They are the good steward of this particular document and the question is how they can keep it fresh and relevant.

Dr. Saleh asked what the bond is between the HRC and the Monadnock Region Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (MDEIB) Coalition. Mr. Bohannon replied that the MDEIB is a regional group, formed out of the YMCA. He continued that they are looking to use this as a template, but they have been trying to form a job description for a person responsible for the MDEIB at the YMCA and that person would potentially sit on the HRC, although they have not talked about that yet. Having a person from the MDEIB be an alternate on the HRC would be a good opportunity.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she thinks other sections of the report that are within the HRC's purview are Community Education and Public Input. She continued that for this meeting, she suggests they look at each recommendation, starting with 1.A. Others agreed.

**Recommendation 1.A. – "That the City of Keene take a position against racism starting with a strong anti-racist statement."**

Mr. Bohannon stated that he suggests the HRC revisit its purpose, which was last done about eight years ago. He continued that there might be some language within that that can be part of that anti-racist statement. The other piece that might be relevant is to have public statements or proclamations when events occur, such as Pride month, Juneteenth, the KIF. That might be a way to move 1.A. forward.

Dr. Morris suggested that the public statement be read at events created by this body, and at any public event that the City is doing, including prior to every City Council meeting. She continued that at Keene State College (KSC), the Land Acknowledgement statement started with events that her office put on, and now it is for every public event, including commencement. She does not know if that would work for the City. Ms. Salwen replied that it would mean the message would be repeated continuously to various groups of people and it sounds smart to her. Others agreed and discussion continued.

Ms. Schwieger asked if the statement would be specifically to address issues of racism. Ms. Salwen replied that she does not know, but the HRC's work is about racial justice as well as other issues like gender identity. Ms. Schwieger replied that she is not hearing disability included, and people with disabilities are the most marginalized population. Discussion continued. Mr. Bohannon suggested that the recommendation for 1.A. be "a statement of commitment read at every event." The HRC might want to craft that statement or have the City Attorney help them craft it. He continued that the proclamations and Resolutions often come from the City Attorney. The HRC could start working on this statement at the next meeting or another future meeting. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos suggested it would be more efficient to have someone draft a statement that the committee could then edit, as opposed to starting from scratch. Others asked if she would be willing to draft something. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied yes, and she will have it ready at the next meeting. Mr. Bohannon and Chair Hay offered to assist her as needed.

**Recommendation 1.B. – "That the City work with community stakeholders to establish clear community racial equity and inclusivity goals and that the goals be widely adopted by the City and Keene agencies and businesses."**

Dr. Morris stated that this is what the MDEIB is working on. Mr. Bohannon agreed. He continued that the HRC should tag team with them on this, related to events. He spoke with Dan Smith, YMCA CEO, about how the HRC and the Y were both working on Juneteenth events and tried to join together but did so too late in the planning process. If they want to work together, the conversation should start in December or January. There is opportunity there. Recommendation 1.B. could be the MDEIB and reporting back from that. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if he means the MDEIB would take on 1.B. and the HRC's role would be to check in with them and see how to support them and coordinate efforts. Mr. Bohannon replied yes. Ms. Schwieger replied that there might be a role for the JDC in that, too.

Councilor Manwaring asked if the MDEIB is addressing other topics as well as racism. Dr. Morris replied that they are still forming and norming and she does not think that has been clearly defined. Dr. Saleh replied yes, they are still focused on the steering committee formation. Discussion continued. Mr. Bohannon stated that the MDEIB's public meetings should begin soon. He will keep everyone updated.

**Recommendation 1.C. – “That the City continue its commitment and efforts toward racial justice and community safety whether via an existing committee such as the Human Rights Committee, a new equity and inclusion task force, or a joint effort of multiple community organizations and agencies.”**

Councilor Manwaring stated that the report frequently talks about the need for surveys and data collection. She asked if there is data, or if they are mostly talking anecdotally. Dr. Morris replied that it depended on the topic, but the RJCS Committee heard testimonials from people talking about their experiences; that was the main modality of information gathering. Some committee members thought the survey was important to get a baseline, to be able to determine whether changes are being made.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if they are talking about posting a survey on the City of Keene’s website for people to fill out anonymously. Dr. Morris replied that the RJCS Committee did not get that far. She continued that they planned on doing that to collect data for their report, but the timeline was too short and they recommended another group take that on. It could be a combination of surveys and focus groups. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that other actions include public forums. A survey may be appropriate but she wants to speak about the scope. They need someone who knows how to formulate this and pose the right questions. She loves the idea of annual data collection, going forward, but they would need a budget and qualified people; it is thus a bigger project. Councilor Manwaring replied that it would be a big but exciting project. She continued that it could include data collection about the LGBTQ community, disabilities, homelessness, and other topics.

Discussion ensued about who might be qualified for this work and how to find them. Dr. Morris stated that there is a team of people at Antioch University of New England (AUNE). She continued that perhaps this could be a project for students of Pierre Morton, but it depends. Councilor Manwaring stated that maybe there could be grant money. Ms. Salwen stated that this could get so complicated that it just does not happen. She continued that she wonders if there is a simpler way, similar to how Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos is going to draft the [anti-racist statement] and then get feedback. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she would rather put it in the hands of someone genuinely qualified. Ms. Salwen expressed a desire to really make this an action item and get moving with it. Discussion continued about methodology, budget issues, who is “qualified,” and what data sources may already exist through KSC, AUNE, the Keene Police Department, the School District, and so on and so forth.

Mr. Bohannon asked: what is the purpose of the data? He continued that before they focus on the budget issues and who will collect the data, the HRC should determine what data they want to collect and why, and whom they are collecting it for.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she thinks they should be forming subcommittees. Chair Hay replied yes, in multiple arenas, such as education, which they have not yet covered. He spoke about misinformation he received from teachers many years ago as a student. He stated that

currently, there are teachers who do not know how to handle it when their students are victims of racism.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that before they move on to the next recommendation, she would like to have the action item for 1.C. to at least be to come back to this. Others agreed. Councilor Manwaring suggested they write down thoughts to bring to the next meeting.

Mr. Bohannon stated that if they create the anti-racist statement from 1.A. it will flow into 1.D., and they are already taking care of 1.E. Dr. Saleh replied that 1.A. is a statement, which does not automatically lead to recommendation 1.D., “That the City promote diversity in its boards and commissions membership and responsibilities.” That implies representation, not just in spirit. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that Mr. Bohannon is suggesting that the anti-racist statement be shared at the beginning of events and also, as Dr. Morris suggested, be spread to something shared at the beginning of City Council and other meetings, but Dr. Saleh is right – the spirit of this item suggests that it should be represented in the makeup of the boards. She is not sure what power the HRC has over that. Mr. Bohannon replied that is correct. He continued that the Mayor is working on this and has asked staff liaisons for the boards and commissions to keep aware of the groups’ diversity and try to bring people in. Every email notification about board and commission meetings ends with a statement saying “If you want to volunteer [or serve on a City of Keene Board or Commission], click here.” He created that about a year ago when the conversation began. Councilor Manwaring stated that the Mayor also talks about boards and commissions having more alternate members, so more people can be included.

Ms. Schwieger stated that regarding 1.D., “...build sensitivity to and eliminate implicit bias,” those are action words. She asked if there is training around implicit bias available to City employees. Examining one’s own implicit biases is tough work. Mr. Bohannon replied that there have been conversations about it, and the HR Department would need to spearhead that training. The HR Department has been working on it but they have had some turnover. He participated in the L2E2 Program [Leadership Learning Exchange for Equity] through the UNH Cooperative Extension, and he recommends it. Dr. Morris stated that the HRC attempted some trainings a few years ago, which were well attended. It would have to be a lot more organized. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if it would be appropriate for the HRC to check in with the HR Department and see what the status is and offer support if needed. Mr. Bohannon replied that he can check in with HR.

Councilor Manwaring stated that it would be great if someone who is a good writer could do a regular column in the Keene Sentinel or the Shopper, because, for example, she is not sure people really know what terms like “equity” or “inclusion” mean. Others agreed and discussion ensued. Mr. Bohannon stated that this is how the MDEIB group initially started – Cheshire Medical Center was writing an op-ed related to the subject, and it became a bigger thing. Dr. Morris spoke about how she and Mary Gannon conducted trainings for municipal employees in Putney and Brattleboro in VT, at the request of the HR Departments there. Discussion continued about the logistics of trainings and financial compensation for the trainers. Ms. Salwen asked if

Dr. Morris would be open to doing similar trainings for the City of Keene. Dr. Morris replied yes.

Mr. Bohannon noted the time and the need to move on in the agenda. He asked everyone to read through sections 2 and 4 of the report again in preparation for continuing the discussion next month.

5) **Committee Programs**

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked what the HRC had decided about doing something for Indigenous People's Day. Others replied that it is this coming Monday, so the HRC will not be doing anything. Chair Hay added that Mayor Hansel is going to read a proclamation at 9:00 AM in front of City Hall. Councilor Manwaring added that he will read it at the City Council meeting on Thursday as well.

a) **MLK Day**

Mr. Bohannon stated that he reformatted the HRC's agenda to show each event in "Committee Programs," so they are present in committee members' minds. He continued that Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is definitely on the horizon and they need to start the planning now.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked for Indigenous People's Day to be added to the events list on the agenda. She asked for the dates to be put next to the names as well, to help with planning. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will add that, for the events that have dates.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she thinks for MLK Day, they should do what they did last year. She continued that they could have a speaker at Heberton Hall or another location. Ms. Salwen replied that she liked what they did a couple years ago with the music. Chair Hay agreed. Discussion continued. Mr. Bohannon stated that at the next meeting they should come in with ideas about who to have at the event, and whether it will be a Zoom or live event, and be ready to execute funding for a speaker, and so on and so forth.

Ms. Salwen asked if others would still be interested in potentially inviting the author of Raising White Kids to speak at the MLK Day event. She continued that she had expressed interest last time. Discussion ensued about budget issues.

b) **Holi Festival**

c) **Pride Month**

d) **Juneteenth**

e) **Keene International Festival**

6) **New, Other Business**

Chair Hay asked if there is any new business. There was no response.

7) **Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, November 1, 2021 at 5:00 PM**

Chair Hay stated that the next meeting is Monday, November 1, 2021 at 5:00 PM, here in Room 22 of the Recreation Center.

There being no further business, Chair Hay adjourned the meeting at 6:08 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Andy Bohannon, PRF Director