

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, January 3, 2022

5:00 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

William Hay, Chair
Councilor Jan Manwaring
Dr. Dottie Morris
Nancy Salwen
Dr. Mohammed Saleh
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos
Dr. Shaun Filiault (remote)
Marti Fiske, Ex-Officio

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities
Director

Members Not Present:

Ritu Budakoti, Alternate

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Hay called the meeting to order at 5:01 PM. Roll call was conducted. Dr. Filiault stated that he is home alone, participating remotely due to COVID-19 concerns. Mr. Bohannon stated that (soon-to-be-member) Hunter Kirschner is also participating remotely. He welcomed Rabbi Dan Aronson, also a soon-to-be member. Members welcomed Rabbi Dan Aronson and introduced themselves.

2) Approval of December 6, 2021 Minutes

Dr. Morris made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of December 6, 2021. Ms. Fiske seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon explained, for the sake of the two new members, that this committee is different from some others because it has a budget. He continued that the funds shown in the Finance Report are due to the committee's fundraising in the past. He explained the report's categories and acronyms. He continued that the Keene International Festival (KIF) is a subcommittee of a group that uses the HRC as a fiscal agent. The HRC currently has \$3,891.88. That is up to date from the previous meeting.

Dr. Morris made a motion to accept the Finance Report. Councilor Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

4) Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee Report

Mr. Bohannon stated that in March 2020, the City created the Ad Hoc Racial Justice and Community Safety (RJCS) Committee, which created an in-depth, thorough report covering many subjects. He continued that members included Dr. Morris; Councilor Workman, who will be joining the HRC; and Dr. Saleh's daughter. A recommendation that came from that was for the HRC to continue the efforts of the RJCS Report, which the HRC has been doing. He has not yet spoken with the Mayor [regarding the statement the HRC drafted], but he will do that tomorrow. The HRC has started to tackle pieces of the Report but conversation is still encouraged about that. The HRC will need to figure out how to balance its work on this Report as well as all of the HRC's programs.

Dr. Morris stated that she thinks the Monadnock Region Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition (MDEIB) will be relying heavily on the HRC to be the events arm of the group. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if that means the MDEIB would have funding to share with the HRC. Dr. Morris replied that the answer would probably be that they are fundraising. She continued that she is on the MDEIB but not its fundraising committee, which is fundraising specifically for the Diversity Officer position. Mr. Bohannon asked if the MDEIB has been meeting regularly. Dr. Morris replied that they meet on the third Monday of each month, previously at 8:00 AM but soon to be 7:00 AM. Meetings are virtual.

Chair Hay asked Dr. Morris her opinion about what in the RJCS Report is most actionable for the HRC. Dr. Morris replied that that is a good question. Chair Hay replied that he has read the report a few times but gets bogged down, because it is a lot. Dr. Saleh stated that they have mostly focused so far on the first section, Government Leadership. He continued that Section 3 is off limits to the HRC, but there are Sections 2, 4, and 5 to look at. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos had recommended they make a spreadsheet because there are so many action items in each section and it is hard to figure it all out. He was going to try to create a spreadsheet that helps the HRC process the information more easily. Mr. Bohannon gave him a template, but he has not had time to do this yet; it is a lot. He welcomes others' input on what the action items could be.

Discussion ensued. Mr. Bohannon asked if there might be college students' who could be given the document to work with, and a template. Dr. Morris replied that the Keene State College (KSC) students will not be back until about Jan. 17; she does not know if the HRC wants to wait that long. Discussion continued about the logistics of engaging with college students. Dr. Morris stated that she will think more about it. Mr. Bohannon stated that Hunter Kirschner will also be joining this committee, and there may be someone in his realm who could help. He continued that he knows the plates of everyone at the table today are quite full. He will talk with Mr. Kirschner about the possibility of engaging students.

Dr. Saleh stated that even without the spreadsheet, they could continue this conversation. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she sees value in continuing the conversation, because they have had to put it off for a few meetings. She continued that on the other hand, waiting to have a systematic approach appeals. Without that, they might waste time spinning their wheels.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he will ask his administrative staff if they would be willing to take this on. He continued that it would probably be quicker than trying to work with students. The HRC agreed. Mr. Bohannon stated that he will have something ready for the HRC at the next meeting.

Dr. Morris stated that Section 5, Education, might be out of the HRC's [realm]. She continued that it seems to her that at this point in time, the education community is really ready to do this type of work, in a way that they have not been in the past. The question is whether they have the resources, given that there are thousands of other things going on.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he questions whether the education community can do this work, not because of the resources, but because of the new State Law: Right to Freedom from Discrimination in Public Workplaces and Education. Dr. Morris replied that that is a whole different story they could do some type of education on, because it is confusing to people and there is so much misinformation. School districts are trying to get clarity on this law. She continued that a lawyer came in to do some work with K-12 teachers (regarding this law), and there is a lot that educators can still do. She spoke more about what teachers are and are not allowed to say about race and racism, and how teachers can engage with students. Discussion continued.

Councilor Manwaring stated that maybe the HRC could invite someone from Keene High School (KHS) to a meeting to talk about how the HRC could support KHS, such as with events the HRC does. Ms. Salwen asked Dr. Morris if the lawyer that she is talking about could meet with the HRC and someone from the Keene School District so they could all get educated together. Dr. Morris replied that some Keene teachers were a part of it already. She continued that she will try and have a contact of hers reach out to teachers who were a part of that, to tell them that the HRC would like to be supportive and invite them to an HRC meeting.

Dr. Saleh stated that the RJCS Committee made seven recommendations in the Education category, and according to the report, the Superintendent was part of the conversation. He continued that it looks like some of the groundwork has already been done. The HRC probably needs the Superintendent to be part of this conversation about how to implement the recommendations. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if he is saying that although it is not the HRC's responsibility to implement the Education recommendations, if the HRC is going to have the conversation about how to be a resource to the education community, the HRC should be having that conversation with the Superintendent. Dr. Saleh replied that he thought that the HRC could help with implementation of every section other than Public Safety.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she does not recommend they start with the Superintendent; he is too high up. She continued that they should start with people on the ground floor, such as the Principal. Others added or the school board, counselors, and so on and so forth. Councilor Manwaring stated that maybe they could get the schools to participate in HRC events, if they started with people on the ground floor.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she likes the idea in principle, but they have to approach this thoughtfully, because the HRC does not have any authority over people in the schools. The HRC is very strictly just offering support as a resource. Others agreed. Discussion continued about who to reach out to and how. Dr. Morris stated that it might be good to first offer support to the Superintendent and ask him who he would like the HRC to reach out to. Councilor Manwaring replied that they could have someone (who is connected to the Superintendent) talk to him for the HRC, instead of taking up the Superintendent's time, and do just what Dr. Morris is saying.

Discussion continued about how to support Keene schools. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they had been talking about taking a "climate survey" for the City, and they could see if the schools are interested in having similar data. Maybe the HRC could assist or be a resource in that sense. Dr. Morris stated that the school district might already be working on some of these things. Councilor Manwaring replied that if the HRC can talk with some key people from KHS and/or Monadnock High School, they can ask those people how the HRC can support them, instead of trying to guess what the HRC thinks they need.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he will reach out to Superintendent Malay and let him know the HRC has been having this ongoing conversation and would like to invite either himself or a representative of the school district to update the HRC on where they are and what they have done. He continued that he will say that the HRC is happy to offer support. He continued that he thinks it would be similar to when the HRC invited the Police Chief a couple years ago, when this conversation started, to give an overview. Then the HRC can gauge whether the schools are familiar with the Report and whether they have done something with it. Discussion ensued about the importance of approaching it in a way that does not make the Superintendent or others in the education community feel defensive, so that they can work together.

5) Committee Programs for 2022
A) MLK Day – Monday, January 17

Dr. Morris stated that they are all set but need to have a meeting. She continued that she contacted Karen Jennings, who is facilitating, and she (Ms. Jennings) will send some times that work for her and then she (Dr. Morris) will get the other panelists to join in. They are all on board and looking forward to doing this. Once she gets that date for the meeting she will send it to the HRC, so others who are interested can join the meeting.

Dr. Morris asked if it is correct that they cannot have a quorum present. Mr. Bohannon replied that it is okay if there is a quorum, since they will just be discussing an event. He asked Dr.

Morris to send him the panelists' contact information. He continued that all HRC members, unless they tell him otherwise, will be "panelists" on the MLK Zoom, but not one of the panelists that Dr. Morris is talking about. He will put the event information out on social media tomorrow.

Dr. Saleh asked if the event is open to all, since it is on Zoom. Mr. Bohannon replied that the Zoom can host 100 people. He continued that last year they had 65 people. Ms. Salwen asked if it will be streamed to Facebook, in case there is overflow. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will look into that. Dr. Morris stated that KSC is going to do a repeat presentation a week later, because the students will not be here for the MLK event. She continued that if people cannot get into the Zoom, they could be notified about that. Mr. Bohannon replied that the City will be recording it as well.

Mr. Bohannon asked if Chair Hay could welcome people to the event and introduce Karen Jennings. Chair Hay replied yes, he would be glad to.

B) Holi Festival – Spring

Mr. Bohannon stated that he does not have an update. Rabbi Aronson asked what Holi Festival is, and Dr. Saleh explained that it is an Indian festival of colors, with dance and music, and the big attraction is that people throw color at each other. He continued that it is primarily an Indian festival but has become more of a cultural phenomenon. Councilor Manwaring asked if the Historical Society does this event. Mr. Bohannon replied that it is a partnership between the Historical Society, KSC, and the City. He continued that it started with KSC and grew. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented it from happening in 2020 but they still have the materials and will do it on the front lawn at the Rec Center this spring. He will check in with Ms. Budakoti and Jenna Carroll to see if they are still hosting it.

C) Pride Month – May/June

Mr. Bohannon stated that although it is not in the agenda packet, they have here a spreadsheet. He continued that Dr. Saleh had asked for a spreadsheet for the events, so he sent it to Dr. Saleh to see if it would be of interest to the group. He explained the layout of the spreadsheet to the committee. He continued that he thinks it will be helpful, especially for the Juneteenth event when there are multiple people and some costs associated. The HRC can use this spreadsheet if it is helpful, or it can be adapted. He can make it a monthly part of the agenda packet. HRC members thanked him.

Someone asked if Mr. Krischner wanted to work on the Pride Month event. Mr. Bohannon replied that Mr. Krischner is no longer present in the meeting. Dr. Morris stated that June is a busy month for Mr. Krischner but she could help with orientation.

Dr. Filiault stated that he volunteers himself and Mr. Kirschner to be co-chairs for the Pride Month subcommittee. Chair Hay asked if he has anything in mind yet. Dr. Filiault replied no, and it will be COVID-dependent. He continued that he would like to try and do something

similar to what they were trying to do last year, as a block party on either the Rec Center lot or the parking lot of the Cheshire County building. Chair Hay asked about the film component. Dr. Filiault replied that it was difficult to coordinate with the Monadnock International Film Festival (MONIF), because they have their own thing going on. He continued that he would like to have something more visible to the public. Pride is typically an outdoor event like a block party. Hopefully by June that will be possible.

Ms. Salwen stated that she thinks Railroad Square would have better visibility. Dr. Filiault replied that it is up the air right now, but it would be an outdoor event in one of these public places in the city. He continued that he and Mr. Kirschner have connections at KSC and they will try and start working together on this.

Dr. Morris stated that the committee had been talking about the Pride flags going beyond the [businesses] and also being put on the [poles sponsored by] the Rotary Club. She continued that they had been talking about how there is a lot going on that month, including Juneteenth. They also talked about visiting Pride events in other communities. Ms. Fiske replied that she forgot to check in with Public Works Director Kürt Blomquist about the flags, but she will do that.

D) Juneteenth – June 19

Dr. Morris stated that Councilor Workman did a great job last year. Discussion ensued. Mr. Bohannon stated that he thinks this was one of the committee's better events. Councilor Manwaring stated that they should get together and plan. She continued that she can write a grant proposal to the Savings Bank of Walpole. She is willing to co-chair the subcommittee. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she will co-chair as well. Discussion continued, and the group determined that the action item for this month is to contact the people who worked on this last year and see if they want to do it again. Others are welcome to join. Councilor Manwaring stated that they also talked about meeting with the YMCA/Dan Smith to see if they can merge their efforts. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she would reach out to him, if she can get his contact information. Dr. Morris suggested they reach out to Gail Somers, too. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied yes, she was instrumental last year.

Discussion ensued about the costs/budget, and Mr. Bohannon stated that they should be able to do Juneteenth with \$1,500.

E) Keene International Festival – September 24

Mr. Bohannon stated that he works closely with Ms. Budakoti and others on this; it is a whole separate committee. He continued that he will keep the HRC posted.

Chair Hay stated that last week he met with Becky Fields, who has done two photo books on immigration in NH. He continued that they met with Eric Swope from the Keene Immigrant and Refugee Partnership, and went to the Historical Society. Jenna Carroll loved the idea of bringing

Becky Fields and her work here to hang, in conjunction with the KIF. The primary venue would be the Historical Society, but there is a possibility at KSC, and maybe a couple storefronts, like the International Market. He gave more information.

Mr. Bohannon replied yes, the KIF is exploring this as a possibility – having a display at the KIF and at the Rec Center, like they did a few years ago. Chair Hay replied that if it does not work out to have it as a part of the event, it could be around the same time. Mr. Bohannon agreed. He continued that the Library was involved last time, too. Chair Hay spoke more about Becky Fields.

F) Indigenous People's Day – October 10

Ms. Fiske stated that she would be happy to chair the subcommittee for this event. She continued that the Library could be a location and host for this. HRC members thanked her. Chair Hay stated that it would be great to have more for this event beyond just having a proclamation read in front of City Hall, and others agreed.

Ms. Fiske asked if the HRC would be comfortable with having an event the day before, if they have trouble booking an event. For example, often you cannot get an Irish band on St. Patrick's Day, but a band might be available a few days before. Others agreed that having an event a day or two before the date would be fine.

Dr. Morris suggested connecting with Vicky Pittman, Director of Education and Community Engagement, at the Colonial Theater, because she is working on some projects for Indigenous People's Day. She continued that she thinks Ms. Pittman would appreciate working with Ms. Fiske. Mr. Bohannon stated that Ms. Pittman is instrumental to the KIF and will possibly be bringing in a major drumming event for that. Discussion continued.

6) New, Other Business

A) 2022 Meeting Calendar

Mr. Bohannon stated that the proposed meeting schedule for the rest of the year is in the agenda packet. He continued that since the Fourth of July is a Monday, the HRC's meeting will be July 11 that month. Brief discussion ensued about the schedule.

Ms. Fiske made a motion to accept the meeting schedule as proposed. Ms. Salwen seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Dr. Saleh stated that today the HRC discussed Section 5, Education, of the RJCS Report. He asked if next month they will discuss Section 4, which they have not discussed yet. Having the spreadsheet will help, but having the kind of conversation they had today is also helpful. Discussion ensued, and Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos suggested everyone's homework be to review Section 4 prior to the next meeting and be ready to talk about it. Others agreed.

Dr. Saleh stated that his second comment is that in looking at the HRC's events, he sees that the events support and promote certain marginalized members of society, but one thing they do not address is people with mental health challenges. He continued that he is not suggesting they add another event, but he wanted to bring that to everyone's attention. Mr. Bohannon stated that last July, the Youth Services Department's summer youth put on a community event, which he imagines they would do again this year, inviting all of the local mental health agencies. The event was for people to learn about the different agencies and to promote mental health awareness. There was a band, too. They did a good job, for 14- and 15-year-olds. There is a new Director in that department and he hopes this event happens again. If something already exists, he would let them roll with it, rather than taking on something new. He can report out to the HRC on whether this is still happening. He agrees with Dr. Saleh that mental health is important to address, especially during these times.

Dr. Saleh stated that he encourages everyone to think about what else falls into the category of "human rights" that the HRC should consider. Dr. Morris replied that Heidi Schwieger, Executive Director from the Jonathan Daniels Center for Social Responsibility (JDC), has been attending the HDC's meetings. Councilor Manwaring replied yes, Ms. Schwieger speaks frequently about the importance of including people with disabilities.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked, regarding the definition of "human rights," if they should also be looking at issues like housing and health care. Dr. Saleh replied precisely, that is the kind of broad umbrella he was referring to. He continued that Dr. Morris wisely included this in the MLK event; "human rights" is a broader term for them to explore.

Discussion continued. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos suggested they get input from the public on what topics the HRC should be addressing. Dr. Morris suggested the HRC volunteer to do the climate survey. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that they would have to consider the budget. Dr. Saleh asked about the HRC's charter. Could they ask the public, via Facebook, what they think the HRC should focus on? Mr. Bohannon replied that they would have to do that very carefully. He continued that he thinks it is possible, if well thought out and delivered in a way that might tag on to the HRC's existing events, so that people who are already coming to the events could respond to a survey about how the HRC is meeting the needs of the community and whether they have other ideas. Discussion continued. Dr. Saleh stated that these are public meetings but the public does not come. He continued that maybe they could have a comment box on the HRC's website. He is just thinking about how to gather people's input, so the HRC does not feel like an island. Dr. Morris suggested allowing people to submit anonymous, private comments, so that public comments are not met with negative comments in response. Ms. Salwen replied that if a Facebook post says "Send a private message" and has comments turned off, that could work. Ms. Fiske replied that there could be an email address for people to send comments to. She continued that with the City's social media policy, if someone puts an inappropriate comment (on the Facebook page), there is a whole process to go through in order to delete that comment. Dr. Morris replied that she was not sure if they would be allowed to receive people's comments in

private like that, since it is a City thing. Ms. Fiske replied that it would be considered a survey in essay form instead of check-box form. Dr. Saleh suggested the whole committee have access to read the emails. Mr. Bohannon replied no, then they would be invoking a quorum. He continued that they would have to work through the details of this and the process. They may be able to go on the radio doing some campaign or maybe write a letter to the editor. If they want the public to be engaged, the HRC needs to reach out to them. They could also write a message on the website and promote the website. There are various ways of doing social media posts, such as through the Library, City, and Parks and Recreation. It will begin to get traction. Yes, they can start to ask the question Dr. Saleh brought up; it is a good question to ask.

Discussion continued about Zoom and Facebook events, the Facebook algorithm, how to best reach people, and how to avoid bots, spam, and ill-intentioned people from joining.

Dr. Saleh stated that today is the last meeting for Ms. Salwen before her membership term ends. Ms. Salwen replied that she did not think her term was ending so soon. Discussion ensued and Mr. Bohannon explained the Mayor's process for appointing committee members and the term limits. He continued that Ms. Salwen is welcome to continue participating in the committee as a non-voting member. Discussion continued about the length of people's terms. Chair Hay reflected on how he joined the committee and his experiences as Chair for the past six years. He stated that it has been an incredible pleasure, an honor, and a privilege. He continued that he will continue coming to meetings as a non-voting member [when his term expires]. HRC members thanked Chair Hay.

Dr. Morris spoke about the "Tea Talks" that the Black Heritage Trail hosts and stated that she will send the information to Mr. Bohannon to send to the HRC members in case they want to attend.

Rabbi Aronson stated that he is a part of the interfaith clergy team through the Monadnock Interfaith Project (MIP), so he will share the MLK event information with them. Mr. Bohannon replied that is fantastic, because that is where the event originated. He continued that they would love to have that partnership back at some point in time.

7) **Adjournment – Next Meeting Monday, February 7, 2022 at 5:00 PM**

There being no further business, Chair Hay adjourned the meeting at 6:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director