

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, April 4, 2022

5:00 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Jan Manwaring
Dr. Dottie Morris (Zoom)
Dr. Mohammed Saleh (Zoom)
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Dr. Shaun Filiault, Vice Chair
Marti Fiske
Hunter Kirschner
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Catherine Workman, Councilor

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities
Director

Members Not Present:

Heidi Schwieger, Alternate
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 5:02 PM.

2) Approval of March 7, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos noted a typo on page 8: "HDC" should be changed to "HRC." Mr. Bohannon stated that he will correct that.

Mr. Aronson made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 7, 2022, as amended. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon stated that nothing has changed with the finance report. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it looks like the Keene International Festival (KIF) has had some movement but the HRC has not.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the committee does not need to vote on this item. She asked if anyone had questions. Hearing none, she moved to the next agenda item.

4) Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee Report

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos noted that the Racial Justice and Community Safety (RJCS) Committee issued its report almost a year ago. She continued that the HRC has not made good progress on it during that time. Given that the HRC meets once a month for an hour, even if they devoted a quarter or half the meeting to this, it seems unrealistic to keep moving at this pace and expect to be successful. Staff created a spreadsheet to help the committee visualize everything and make the process more accessible. However, she does not think that continuing to work on the report as a function of this once a month HRC meeting is the way to do this. Options she thought of are 1) to devote a substantial time block, such as four hours on a Saturday, a couple times; 2) to devote hour-long meetings to the report a few times over the course of a month; or 3) to create a work group/subcommittee to at least begin digesting the report and come up with action items. However, she thinks this work is worth the attention of the whole group. She asked for others' thoughts.

Discussion ensued, and several members spoke in favor of meeting for a few hours on a couple Saturdays. Others had conflicts on Saturdays, so other days of the week were proposed. Discussion ensued about the logistics. Dr. Morris asked if they would have to notice the meeting. Mr. Bohannon replied yes. Mr. Bohannon offered to create a scheduling poll. He continued that Councilor Workman and Dr. Morris were on the committee and he wants to hear from them about this idea [for the HRC to meet to do this work outside of regular, monthly HRC meetings].

Councilor Workman stated that she thinks it is a good idea. She continued that the Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition (MDEIB) is doing work on this, too, but the recommendation was to give the RJCS Report to the HRC first, before the MDEIB Coalition was even formed, so she thinks the HRC has the responsibility to work on this. They can collaborate and check in with the MDEIB Coalition at some point, but it does not need to stop what the HRC is doing in the meantime.

Dr. Morris stated that she is fine with it, because she thinks the implementation of certain things will need to be more of a City commitment than a commitment of the committee. She continued that she is fine with this direction to come up with what the HRC might call an implementation plan. Determining implementation strategies should be the goal of this committee.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the report has action items intended for the City and ones intended for local businesses. She continued that it does not feel inappropriate to have the HRC and the MDEIB Coalition working on it. She and Mr. Bohannon have discussed how there is not an active interface between the two groups, but two HRC members are also members of the MDEIB Coalition, who can help the HRC understand what is happening with, and how to help,

the MDEIB Coalition. She asked if they should add that as an agenda item, to have a quick download from Dr. Morris and Councilor Workman. Dr. Morris and Councilor Workman replied that that is fine. They both also stated that they plan to attend the next MDEIB Coalition meeting, 4:00 PM on Monday, April 18.

Dr. Filiault asked that the HRC decide now, in this meeting, when to hold the first meeting about the RJCS Report, instead of creating a scheduling poll. He requested that it be held before the HRC's May meeting. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos agreed. Discussion ensued about the date. The group decided upon Tuesday, April 12, from 6:30 to 8:30 PM. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she will defer scheduling the next 2-hour meeting to a different day. Mr. Bohannon replied that they can assess, during the April 12 meeting, whether an additional 2-hour meeting is needed.

5) Committee Programs for 2022

A) MLK Day – Monday, January 17th

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the HRC debriefed this at the last meeting. She continued that she does not think there is anything they need to discuss today. The next MLK Day is far enough away that they do not need to be thinking about the programming now.

B) Holi Festival – Spring

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Holi Festival is not happening this year.

C) Pride Month – October

Dr. Filiault stated that he and Mr. Kirschner spoke at length after the HRC's meeting with the people from the self-identified Keene Pride group. He continued that they determined that the HRC might not be able to constructively work with Keene Pride at this time, for a number of reasons. Keene Pride's vision of the scope of what they wanted for Keene seemed more akin to a New York City-style Pride event, and while he congratulates them for their vision, he does not think Keene would be able to accommodate such an event, at least not for the first time. In addition, Keene Pride's plans seemed rather alcohol-oriented, which the City might not want to sponsor. A large component of the LGBTQ community is concerned with sobriety, so having an alcohol-focused event could be problematic. The Keene Pride group also does not have much awareness of the cultural issues and the history of Pride, which, from a human rights angle, would need to be the center of it. For a variety of reasons, he does not see a working relationship at this time between the HRC and Keene Pride.

Dr. Filiault continued that he and Mr. Kirschner discussed a productive way to go forward, and thought October, LGBTQ History Month, would be a good time to have an event. They discussed a potential schedule and theme: Connection and Reconnection. It is a way to connect the community to LGBT history and awareness, and a reconnection for LGBTQ persons in the

area, after disconnecting from each other during the pandemic. They talked about what it would mean to create an LGBTQ Pride event that is specific to Keene and has the Monadnock region in mind, rather than trying to impose a Boston- or NYC-style event onto the area. They propose a one-day event that is more modest in scope and uses local resources without trying to use a ton of City funding, and trying to involve local businesses. They envision starting the day with a Fun Run/Rainbow Run, which is connected to the region; then having a brunch; a BBQ block party on the Rec Center lawn; and a showing at Keene State College (KSC) of Before Stonewall. That is a documentary that talks about connection and community prior to the emergence of the modern LGBTQ rights movement. Later in the evening there would be two events, a lock-in at the Library for youth, with films related to the experiences of LGBTQ youth; and a more adult event in the Mabel Brown Room with possibly a cash bar. The advantage of having it at KSC would be the lack of over-serving. The alcohol would be incidental to the drag event. This is a more modest scope of event, with a connection on community throughout the entire thing, with speakers and events related to community and connection and LGBTQ history.

Mr. Aronson asked if something significant about October makes it appropriate for Pride events. Dr. Filiault replied that it is LGBTQ History Month, but he does not know why October was selected for that. Mr. Kirschner replied that Coming Out Day is in October, too. He continued that LGBTQ History Month came from a high school teacher in the Midwest who wanted to be able to focus on that education, understanding the history and context of the LGBTQ community.

Dr. Filiault stated that they could continue to connect with local businesses by distributing the Pride flags, and talk with the City Council about potentially running a Pride flag up the flagpole downtown for the weekend. They could move the issuance of the proclamation from June to October. In addition, one of the rugby teams that plays in the area's league is a Boston-based, all-gay team. They could see if the game against that team could be in October, to bring another event to the area, without having that grand scope. Mr. Bohannon had a conversation with Keene Pride and they seemed to be regretful about the way they came across, but [he, Mr. Kirschner, and Mr. Bohannon] have had multiple iterations of the conversations and they seem to go through the same cycle again and again. At this point, he thinks it is worth the HRC taking the lead, and telling Keene Pride that they are welcome to follow if they would like.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the program seems amazing. She asked how Dr. Filiault and Mr. Kirschner plan to get all of that done by themselves. Dr. Filiault replied that a lot of it is mild in scope. He continued that Pathways for Keene (PFK) is very good at organizing fun runs. If they work with PFK on that, it creates a local partnership connection and they could split the proceeds between PFK and an LGBTQ charity such as the Trevor Project. For the brunch, they would work with Brewbakers or other local businesses, asking to use their space. The heaviest lift would be the block party. Part of it would involve getting relevant organizations and non-profits to do tabling, and getting a DJ and food vendor. That is why they need to start working on this now. The other difficulty would be getting a performance for the Mabel Brown Room; they need to start looking for performers soon. It might not be very difficult, but they need to

actually start, which was the challenge last year – they kept going back and back and back. There is a point where they have to say, this has to happen.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked about the budget. Dr. Filiault stated that the largest cost would be the block party. He continued that they would obviously need to pay the performer, but the advantage of not doing a NYC-style Pride event is that they will not be hiring a major, expensive performer. The theme of Connection and Reconnection could mean choosing local, amateur performers who are connected to the community and even do a workshop talking about what drag is, why they choose to do drag, and so on and so forth.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she is not questioning their choices; she is just trying to get an idea of how much they propose spending. Dr. Filiault replied that last year they allocated \$500 to a Pride event and never spent it. He continued that he thinks the initial ask would be \$500, and the advantages of making this a community event means they can ask for small amounts from local businesses. They could ask to adjust the \$500 if needed, but since the event will be modest and realistic, he does not think it is a particularly heavy lift.

Regarding the potential cost of the film, Ms. Fiske stated that if Dr. Filiault or Mr. Kirschner gives her the title, she can see if it would be covered under the performers' rights the Library has already. Dr. Filiault replied "Before Stonewall." Dr. Morris replied that she can check with John [Scagliotti, the film-maker] to see if he has any control over that, if the Library does not have it covered. She continued that she is a board member of the Kopkind Colony. Dr. Filiault replied yes, that is another local connection, as Mr. Scagliotti is local. Ms. Fiske asked which films they wanted to have screened at the Library. Dr. Filiault replied films related to LGBTQ youth, preferably more popular ones, but whatever they could actually use without paying licensing fees. Ms. Fiske replied that she will start going through what the Library already has the rights to with the licenses they have, and then go from there. Dr. Filiault stated that also, similar to last year, they would like a curated display at the Library of LGBTQ-themed books. Ms. Fiske stated that she will look at more teen-oriented LGBTQ films, but first needs to check with the program staff to make sure they could do that. Part of that would be choosing which day, without bumping up against Indigenous People Day or Halloween. Mr. Aronson added that there is also Yom Kippur in October. Discussion continued about the dates, and Dr. Filiault stated that the weekend of October 1 would be ideal.

Mr. Bohannon asked if Dr. Morris and/or Mr. Kirschner would have access to an intern who could help recruit the different agencies to come in. Mr. Kirschner and Dr. Morris replied yes, they could look into that.

Dr. Filiault stated that they also need to think about a keynote speaker for the block party, such as Chris Pappas, who is an openly gay Congressman from NH. He continued that it is an election year so Congressman Pappas would probably be happy to speak, but he is partisan, and does the HRC want to bring a partisan element to the event? They would potentially then have

to open it up to everyone else who is running for office. They could ask Congressman Pappas to talk about his experience of being an openly gay person growing up in NH. Discussion ensued.

Mr. Bohannon stated that they will have to change venues, because the Parks and Rec space is booked. He continued that Railroad Square is available. Dr. Filiault replied that Railroad Square would work. Mr. Kirschner agreed that downtown visibility is good. Mr. Bohannon replied that they can use the grass belt for the tents and service providers. He continued that he will reserve the space.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that of course, there are still questions and this is still an open event they can continue to discuss, but they will move on in the agenda for now. She continued that she will note that the Finance Report is going to start being more relevant, as they start to have more events looking to use a piece of the funds. The HRC will need to discuss how to go about that, which is something she will bring up under New Business.

D) Juneteenth – June 19th

Ms. Manwaring stated that the Juneteenth committee decided to go ahead with planning an event without worrying about what the YMCA is doing for Juneteenth. She continued that the Juneteenth committee would like to have the HRC's feedback about having the event on June 18th, so that hopefully more people would be available to come and speak, dance, and so on and so forth. Last year they used three words – Recognize, Celebrate, and Educate – and the focus was on education. This year they decided to follow that theme, with five words this year, thanks to Dr. Morris. [They are Heal, Repair, Recognize, Celebrate, and Educate]. Last year they did some good education about what Juneteenth is and why it is important, and this year it will be more about action, healing, and caring.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that another reason to have the event on the 18th is because June 19th is Father's Day. She continued that they decided that the footprint would be the same duration, 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM. They have the structure ironed out and they have tentative programming they need to go out and confirm.

Ms. Manwaring showed the event poster, and asked who came up with the beautiful design. Mr. Bohannon replied that his staff designed it. He continued that this poster is the preview, with two different versions – one is a promotional one like a “save the date.”

Ms. Manwaring stated that last year some people suggested they have a Juneteenth program to hand out so people knew what was coming, and they will be doing that this year.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos and Ms. Manwaring asked the HRC what they think of the poster versions and program, and if they have strong preferences for the one with yellow or with white. Discussion ensued and the group decided on yellow. Ms. Manwaring asked if anyone objects to having the event on the 18th instead of the 19th. Hearing none, she stated that the next planning meeting is tomorrow evening on Zoom if anyone wants to attend. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it is at 5:00 PM and is not a public meeting.

E) Keene International Festival – September 24th

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she does not think any input from the HRC is needed at this point. She continued that she thinks last month the request was for volunteers and potential board members. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, they got a couple board members, and they met last week. He continued that they have a great program lined up. If anyone wants to help plan and organize, or do some fundraising, they can contact him. They anticipate a fundraising effort of about \$8,000 this year. They have a thought process of sustainability, so he thinks they will be in better shape than they were in the last couple years.

Regarding a committee member's question, Mr. Bohannon replied yes, there will be food trucks and other, smaller food vendors. He gave examples and added that customers pay cash or credit to the particular vendors (as opposed to buying a ticket for the overall area).

F) Indigenous People Day – October 10th

Ms. Fiske stated that she is working with program staff at the Library to look at the budget, because they already had some stuff budgeted for Indigenous People Day. She continued that one option was the humanities grants that are available. They are looking to see if any particular speakers lined up with the humanities grants program are available for that weekend. She has a meeting with a staff person on Wednesday to talk about this.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that if Ms. Fiske needs anything for the budget, she can let the HRC know. Ms. Fiske replied that at this point she thinks they can find a way for the Library to handle this event so it does not need to come from the HRC's budget. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that is great news and thanked Ms. Fiske.

6) New, Other Business

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there was any public input.

Christina "Teeny" Wold, of 32 Carroll Street, stated that she is impressed with what the HRC has done. She continued that the City is lucky to have this group. She is not sure if what she has to say fits with the group's procedure. Mr. Bohannon and Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos encouraged her to share her questions or thoughts. Ms. Wold stated that she would like to talk about understanding mental health issues, and the position that people with mental health issues are in in the city. She continued that she has benefited a lot lately from [Monadnock Area] Peer Support Agency and feels like the city needs some education about it.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked Ms. Wold to tell the HRC more about that. Ms. Wold replied that people with mental health issues are very capable of contributing a lot to the community. She continued that there is interest in the Peer Support Agency, where she spends quite a bit of

time, and she wants to see it out there a little more. She does know where to begin, for how that would happen, but she is just putting it out there.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she would love to talk more with Ms. Wold about what her experience has been and how the HRC can get the Peer Support Agency more involved. She continued that maybe they can talk outside of this meeting.

Mr. Bohannon thanked Ms. Wold for her input. He continued that he knows this is not a full response by any means, but he wants to say that the Youth Services Department runs a City youth program. Last year, that youth program started a community mental health awareness night. They invited vendors to the front lawn, bringing all the community partners together for the awareness of mental health. Monadnock Area Peer Support is part of that particular group, but there might be other opportunities to make more awareness happen.

Dr. Filiault stated that related to that, it is important for the HRC to remember that their mission statement is about social justice, nonviolence, equity, diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism, and mental health awareness and preserving the equity and dignity of people who work with mental health issues is part of that mission as well. He continued that they can include it under the umbrella of the HRC's work.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that that touches on some of what she wanted to bring up as New Business, but she knows they are short on time. She asked Dr. Filiault what his item for New Business was.

Dr. Filiault replied that the HRC's budget is trying to do a lot right now, and they are spending more now than they are bringing in each year from the City. He continued that this may be a very tough lift, for the City, but it may be time for the HRC to ask for more than the \$500 that they traditionally receive each year. They have expanded the scope of their mission from beyond just the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day breakfast to now doing Juneteenth, the Pride festival, and so much more, which is costing more than \$500. Budget season is approaching. Mr. Bohannon replied that the public part, at least, is still ahead. Dr. Filiault stated that if they were to double their request to \$1,000 it might pass, particularly since the Mayor has indicated that he likes the work the HRC is doing. He thinks it is also time to look at grants to fund the HRC's work, because \$500 will be depleted quickly.

Mr. Bohannon replied that this conversation has not come up before, so he cannot address it this time, but there could be some last minute political will to address that, and he can certainly add [the increased request] next year, within his recommendation. This year, it would definitely have to come from the floor of the public or the City Council. Discussion continued. Mr. Bohannon stated that at the end of this year, if the HRC does all that it has set out to do, they will have a good idea of how much all of their [programs] cost each year, by the next budget season.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that more broadly, she has some existential questions for the HRC members to think about. First of all, she thinks Ms. Wold's presence here is fortuitous, because although it is part of the HRC's remit and in the RJCS Report that the HRC create programming around holidays, "human rights" is a broader umbrella than that. They talked about it in the language that they developed [in the statement they] sent to the Mayor, but they are not actually addressing, in this committee, topics such as mental health, housing and homelessness, healthcare as a human right, and other issues that do not have a holiday. There are ways the HRC can make sure the City is more inclusive on a simple, experiential level for citizens interacting with the City. Mr. Bohannon and his team have been thinking about this, and one of the questions he mentioned is why, for co-ed programs, does the [Rec Center's] interface for the registration require you to tell the gender of your child? Why is that relevant? That is an excellent point. There are many ways in which the City touches the community, where there is that interface, which are maybe turning people off or making it harder to access. Maybe that is an appropriate thing for this committee to examine. She was reading the HRC's purpose again, and part of it is, to paraphrase, encouraging the breaking down of barriers for people to participate in the City and the community. The HRC needs to think about that. They are doing great with events, and in the past two years, have come a long way with that. But what else can they be doing to make the City more accessible? What about HR training for staff on these issues? They do not necessarily have the remit to stomp their feet and demand certain things, but they should think about how to draw attention to needs and encourage and support those needs being met.

Mr. Kirschner stated that he thinks the HRC's work with the RJCS Report will also help exactly what she is speaking about. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos agreed.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the other issue is that the HRC still seems to be a "well-kept secret." That is another reason she is excited to see Ms. Wold here, because it is great that she knows they are there. How can the HRC go about making themselves more visible to the community?

Dr. Filiault replied that he thinks part of the reason is because there is a month between meetings, and it seems to take 15 minutes at the beginning of each meeting to reassemble themselves and get back into the headspace of what they do. They may need to meet more than once a month for an hour, to be able to achieve the type of heavy lift Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos is suggesting, and the type of heavy lift the community may need to achieve the work that needs to be done, and the work that this report suggests needs to be done. Part of the reason they are not as visible is, as much as he loves the Rec Center, this might be a committee that needs to be downtown or at City Hall to be visible to the community.

Mr. Bohannon replied that they met for a while at the Library. He continued that they originally met at the Rec Center and then moved to the Library. The reasons for moving back to the Rec Center were more space-related, regarding COVID-19. If it works out for the Library, he is okay with having the meetings there. He does not care where the group meets.

Ms. Fiske stated that she wonders if there are other ways to advertise the HRC. For example, she continued, are there other organizations that could add the HRC's meetings to their calendars? Unfortunately, the Library cannot, because it is not a Library-sponsored program, but maybe they could make sure it is in the Shopper News, the community events listing in The Keene Sentinel, community housing bulletin boards, and so on and so forth.

Dr. Saleh asked if the Library has the ability to host hybrid meetings with an online option. Ms. Fiske replied yes. Discussion continued about the sizes of various spaces and the size needed, and the Library hours and meeting time.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that in the interest of time, she suggests they add a couple items to the agenda for discussion, one around making the HRC more visible and perhaps changing venues, and one around expanding the scope of the HRC's work. Mr. Bohannon suggested it be "review of committee charge."

Mr. Bohannon stated that he notices the HRC's meeting through the Parks & Recreation Department's MailChimp to about 3,500 people. He continued that he could find out what the click rate is on that. They could also put it out through the City's MailChimp, which reaches another couple thousand people. That could be a start. He can give a report next month related to the click rates, and some ideas for further exposure. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos thanked him.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the HRC will meet next month in this same location, and will discuss a future meeting venue that would allow them to include the public, not have to end at 6:00 PM (when the Library closes), and be accessible. Brief discussion continued about meeting spaces. Mr. Bohannon stated that he and Ms. Fiske will look at possible locations.

7) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 6:13 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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