

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 6, 2022

5:00 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Jan Manwaring
Dr. Shaun Filiault, Vice Chair
Marti Fiske, Ex-Officio
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate (via Zoom at 5:09 PM)
Dr. Dottie Morris (at 5:05 PM)
Councilor Catherine Workman
Daniel Aronson
Hunter Kirschner

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities
Director

Members Not Present:

Dr. Mohammed Saleh
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Heidi Schwieger

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Vice Chair Filiault called the meeting to order at 5:02 PM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of May Meeting(s) Minutes

- a) May 2, 2022**
- b) May 9, 2022**
- c) May 23, 2022**

Mr. Bohannon stated that the HRC needs to suspend the rules of order to consider the action on the April 4, 2022 meeting minutes. He continued that the reason is that it is not proper to append a document to a set of meeting minutes that refutes what was documented in the meeting minutes. That creates a record of something that did not occur at the meeting. This explanation was documented at the May 2, 2022 meeting when the comments were made, which will be adopted today.

Ms. Fiske made a motion to suspend the rules to consider action on the April 4, 2022 meeting minutes. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by a unanimous, roll call vote.

Vice Chair Filiault asked for a motion. Mr. Kirschner made a motion to reconsider the adoption of the April 4, 2022 meeting minutes. Mr. Aronson seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Vice Chair Filiault stated that the third step for the HRC to correct its error is for someone to make a motion to adopt the minutes of the April 4, 2022 meeting as originally submitted.

Dr. Morris arrived at 5:05 PM.

Mr. Aronson made a motion to adopt the minutes of the April 4, 2022 meeting as originally submitted. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Vice Chair Filiault asked for a motion to approve the May 2 meeting minutes. Mr. Bohannon stated that he apologizes for getting the draft minutes sent out late; he was ill. He continued that it is okay to table the minutes if need be.

Vice Chair Filiault made a motion to table the approval of the meeting minutes of May 2, May 9, and May 23, 2022 until the next meeting. Mr. Kirschner seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon stated that there has been no change. He continued that everything they see in the Finance Report this month is identical to what was there last month. The City Council will issue their installment, which will be \$1,000 this year if they pass the budget next Thursday night. July's Finance Report will reflect that.

4) Human Rights Committee Purpose

A) Review of City Ordinance

Mr. Bohannon stated that given some of the comments and direction the HRC had at the last meeting, he felt it was important to go back to the HRC's purpose as per the City Ordinance.

Ritu Budakoti arrived via Zoom at 5:09 PM.

Mr. Bohannon read aloud:

"The Human Rights Committee exists to promote the principles of social justice, non-violence, equity, diversity, inclusion, and multi-culturalism through educational programs, community service, and public events."

The Human Rights Committee shall have the following powers and duties:

- *To celebrate and honor the significance of the lives of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jonathan Daniels;*
- *To promote the principles of social justice, non-violence, equity, and multiculturalism through education programs, community service, and public events;*
- *To encourage the elimination of barriers, which may exist within the Keene community that discourage a more diverse and inclusive community;*
- *To reassure and support under-represented groups who may feel unwelcome in Keene;*
- *To educate the community on the advantages of a more diverse and inclusive community.*
- *The committee is authorized to conduct fundraising events to further its goals. All gifts and donations presented to the Human Rights Committee shall be formally accepted by the City Council.”*

Mr. Bohannon stated that most of this is from the original committee, which was the Martin Luther King, Jr./Jonathan Daniels Committee and was renamed the Human Rights Committee. He continued that there was some debate a couple meetings ago relating to whether the HRC should be a commission. There is a NH State human rights commission. If they get into that territory, they become a legal body. The HRC's purpose is to provide education programs, community service, and public events, not to create legal policy. If they were to create policy, it would have to go through the City Council and be adopted by the City Council for that purpose and be codified that way. That is the big difference. If this group feels that they need to go beyond the education programs, community service, and public events, which traditionally has been everything the HRC has done, they need to have a further conversation. However, if the HRC members all agree that their purpose can continue to be as it always has been, and they want to bring something forward, they do have an avenue for that. They have the ability to go through the City Council and work that way, which would be in a public forum. He does not think they need to have a role as a commission. This statement of purpose gives them clear direction. If they wanted to wordsmith the purpose the way they did about 8 or 9 years ago, they could. He thinks the multiculturalism piece was added to the purpose at that time.

Councilor Workman stated that she thinks what they have makes sense right now, as long as the HRC members all know they can still *inform* policy. She continued that they may not be able to create policy, but they can advocate, inform, and try to move the city in the direction the HRC feels is needed on certain issues related to the HRC's work. She thinks the purpose statement is clear that it is about bringing awareness to human rights issues in the community.

Vice Chair Filiault stated that he agrees and thinks the HRC needs to be very clear-eyed as to what they are doing, though, when they say, “We can bring awareness to policy.” They just witnessed that with what they tried to achieve through the RJCS Report. When they try to take on something as broad as racial justice, they can go for six or eight hours and only just scratch the surface. They could go on for another six to eight hours and continue to have only scratched

the surface. They can bring awareness to the issues, but it is beyond the capacity of this committee to completely change key policies to be able to fully address those issues. It is not the role of this committee to fully address those issues; the HRC is not the City Council.

Vice Chair Filiault stated that he does not know if they need to make a motion about this or just accept it as informational. Mr. Bohannon replied that they can accept it as informational, but he wants to make sure everyone feels, as a cohesive unit, that this is the HRC's mission and purpose, and understands that if they want to go beyond it, they have an avenue to adjust it. They can always come back and revisit the purpose. They can wordsmith it and [request to] update the Ordinance at any time. It would take several processes, but it is possible.

B) Statement of Inclusion

Vice Chair Filiault stated that the statement of inclusion is in the back of the agenda packet. Mr. Bohannon replied that unfortunately, he was ill and had to cancel his meeting with Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos and the Mayor (about this statement of inclusion) and it will be at least another week before it can be rescheduled. He continued that however, he wanted to bring the text of the statement back in front of the HRC for discussion and direction.

Discussion ensued about the wording of the statement of inclusion, and how to edit it.

Ms. Fiske made a motion to adopt the following as the Human Rights Committee's statement of inclusion: *"In our efforts to create a more equal and just society, we move forward with the firm intention to value the voices, opinions, and experiences of all people. We choose to proceed with the awareness and humility that the statements and decisions we make will have a different impact for those with different life experiences."* Councilor Workman seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Vice Chair Filiault asked how the HRC wants to use the statement. Should it be read before each meeting, or printed on each agenda, or both?

Mr. Kirschner made a motion for the statement of inclusion to be printed on each HRC agenda and read aloud at the start of each HRC meeting. Ms. Fiske seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

5) Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Coalition Updates

Councilor Workman stated that she was not at the last Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition (MDEIB) meeting, but she has the meeting minutes. She asked if Dr. Morris had any updates.

Dr. Morris stated that she thinks the Education Subcommittee of the MDEIB should be in touch with the HRC so there is better synchrony between the two, since the HRC's mission is largely

about education. She continued that the Education Subcommittee also talked about creating a resource page or some sort of resource document for people, and then questioned whether it should include just NH-based resources, or Monadnock region resources. She is putting someone from the Education Subcommittee in touch with Ms. Fiske, because that is something Ms. Fiske was working on, too. This way they can join forces.

Councilor Workman stated that for the MDEIB itself, the big focus is fundraising for the Executive Director position and then finding someone to fill it. Dr. Morris added that there is a request to the City for \$50,000 for that position. Councilor Workman replied that that request will be at the next City Council meeting. The MDEIB is asking outside agencies for \$10,000.

Discussion ensued about the MDEIB's funding request. Vice Chair Filiault asked about the City's process regarding the MDEIB's request. Mr. Bohannon replied that the Finance, Organization, and Personnel (FOP) Committee will discuss it this Thursday and make a recommendation to the City Council, for the Council's June 16 meeting. Discussion continued. Ms. Fiske spoke about how and why it is highly unlikely that the Council will vote to give the MDEIB its requested amount.

Mr. Aronson spoke in agreement with Mr. Bohannon, stating that he has been thinking about this duplication of work, and questioning whether the HRC is needed if the MDEIB is moving forward, or if there is a way to consolidate. He asked if the MDEIB envisions itself becoming independent from the YMCA and doing its own fundraising, or if its relationship with the YMCA is permanent. Dr. Morris and Councilor Workman replied the latter, to the best of their understanding. Councilor Workman stated that the question of the extent of the City's involvement is not something she can discuss in full at this meeting, but she encourages Mr. Aronson to contact the MDEIB about his questions and concerns. She also encourages anyone/everyone to share their thoughts about the MDEIB's funding request with the City Councilors.

Vice Chair Filiault stated that in the interest of time and in staying with the HRC's mission and purview, he would like to accept this as informational and move on with the agenda.

6) **Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

Mr. Bohannon stated that there are no committee event reports.

7) **Community Outreach**

Mr. Bohannon stated that Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos wanted to bring this forward as an agenda item. He suggests they table it since she is not here.

8) **Racial Justice and Community Safety Report**

Vice Chair Filiault stated that the question is what the HRC will decide to do, based on their many hours of discussing this report, but given that Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos led those discussions and she is not here, he suggests tabling this agenda item until the next meeting.

Ms. Fiske stated that she wanted to closely read the meeting minutes from those long meetings, and make notes on them. She continued that she recalls that those notes say what the HRC had decided regarding each item. She encourages everyone else to read those meeting minutes, too. Vice Chair Filiault replied yes, everyone should read those so they can have a focused discussion next time.

Ms. Fiske made a motion to table this agenda item. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

9) New Business

Mr. Bohannon stated that Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos is not able to attend the Juneteenth subcommittee meeting via Zoom, and asks that they reschedule it to June 13 or 14. He continued that the event is very soon. Discussion ensued, and Dr. Morris stated that they can still meet tonight, as best they can. Councilor Workman stated that they should also schedule another one. Mr. Bohannon replied that the Juneteenth group can figure that out after the HRC meeting.

Vice Chair Filiault asked if there was any other new business. Mr. Aronson stated that a couple meetings ago the HRC had talked about homelessness and how it could become in the HRC's purview. He continued that he celebrates the new port-a-potty at the skate park. The listserv for the Monadnock Interfaith Project (MIP) has had a flurry of activity today, talking about how citizens can support the upkeep of that, because the City is limited in terms of policing it and cleaning it. MIP might be able to play a role in supporting things like this, getting citizens involved in the process of maintaining things that they fight for.

Vice Chair Filiault asked for comment from the public.

James Rinker of 34 Cottage St. stated that he represents the Keene Sentinel. He continued that at the last meeting, he made an appeal of community outreach and talked about the Keene Sentinel wanting to partner with the HRC in some way to make the "well-kept secret" of the HRC's work and events not so secret, and to promote the education initiatives the HRC is working on. He has a handout of three different ways of contacting the Sentinel – one is for news/press releases, the second is for letters to the editor, and the third is how to upload events into the community calendar. He also has his business card, as the Digital Community Engagement Journalist. A big part of his role is outreach, like what he is doing right now. He will be back in July. HRC members thanked Mr. Rinker.

Bill Bradford Hutchinson, of Marlboro St., stated that he wants to bring to the HRC's attention the "anti-homeless signs" that are on the Jonathan Daniels Trail. He continued that the recently

posted signs say “No camping, no alcohol,” which is targeted at the homeless population. The bottom has a phone number for homeless people to call for assistance. He finds it hypocritical that such a sign is on the “Jonathan Daniels Trail.” The sign seems to be sending the message of “Go away, homeless people.”

Mr. Bohannon stated that the Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Department put up these signs, to be eye-catching, so people understand that per City Ordinance, there is no camping on City property and alcohol cannot be consumed in City parks. He continued that the signs are not targeting homeless people; they target people who use the parks without following the guidelines, and do not know the rules and Ordinances.

Mr. Hutchinson asked how many of these signs were put up. Mr. Bohannon replied ten, in various locations such as Robin Hood Park, Goose Pond, Wheelock Park, and more.

Vice Chair Filiault stated that there are other bodies in the City that deal with the issues Mr. Hutchinson is speaking of. Mr. Hutchinson could also speak to City Councilors.

10) Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, July 11, 2022 at 5:00 PM

There being no further business, Vice Chair Filiault adjourned the meeting at 6:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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