

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, July 11, 2022

5:00 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Heidi Schwieger, Alternate
Jan Manwaring
Hunter Kirschner
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Dr. Shaun Filiault
Marti Fiske
Catherine Workman, Councilor (arrived
around 5:17 PM)

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities
Director

Members Not Present:

Dr. Dottie Morris
Dr. Mohammed Saleh, Vice Chair
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate
Daniel Aronson

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM. She stated that today Ms. Schwieger is a voting member.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos read the HRC's statement aloud: *"In our efforts to create a more equal and just society, we move forward with the firm intention to value the voices, experiences, and opinions 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."*

2) Approval of Minutes

A) May 2, 2022

Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the HRC meeting minutes of May 2, 2022. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

B) May 9, 2022

Mr. Kirschner made a motion to approve the minutes of May 9, 2022, from the special meeting about the Racial Justice and Community Safety report. Ms. Fiske seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

C) May 23, 2022

Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the minutes of May 23, 2022, from the special meeting about the Racial Justice and Community Safety report. Mr. Kirschner seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

D) June 6, 2022

Ms. Manwaring made a motion to approve the HRC meeting minutes of June 6, 2022. Mr. Kirschner seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that there have been changes to the finance report, since some of the HRC's funds were spent on the Juneteenth event. Mr. Bohannon replied that those invoices are not yet reflected in the finance report, but what has changed is the increase in funding from the City of Keene. He continued that what was typically \$500 is now \$1,000 from the City Council.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that this is not on the agenda and could be addressed under New Business or next time, but the HRC needs to be intentional about how they divide funds between the different events. She continued that until now it has been rather haphazard, and they need a system.

4) Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition (MDEIB) Updates

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the HRC members who are members of the MDEIB are not present tonight.

Dr. Filiault made a motion to table this item until the next meeting. Mr. Kirschner seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the HRC had talked about having Ms. Fiske reach out to the MDEIB's Education Subcommittee. Ms. Fiske replied that she has the person's contact information and will reach out soon. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos added that the HRC had also encouraged Rabbi Daniel Aronson to reach out to the MDEIB as well, but he is not here tonight, so they will check in with him next time.

5) **Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that there are no committee event reports.

Ms. Fiske asked how the Juneteenth event went. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it was well received. She and Mr. Bohannon gave a brief update. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos continued that there was a good turnout, considering the limited marketing. The Juneteenth subcommittee had a “lessons learned” meeting after the event and discussed how to make it even more successful next year.

6) **Community Outreach**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the HRC is indeed a “well-kept secret,” which ties into how big the HRC wants their scope to be. She continued that she would like to find a way for people to join and share their concerns with the HRC, but she is not sure how. It is good to have this minimum of a one-hour meeting each month, which the public can join and give input at, and they can talk about whether to have more or longer meetings. But how do they get the word out?

Dr. Filaault stated that it is great to get public input at the meetings, but the HRC has to be mindful of its role, which is education and programming. He continued that when listening to concerns from members of the public, the HRC has no authority and cannot act. They do not want to open the doors and give the false impression of hope that the HRC can do something. The HRC does events, which can be powerful, and education is a powerful tool. It is good to get public input, as long as the HRC is careful and clear-eyed about its limitations. Public input will make the HRC more aware of what issues they need to educate the public about, but the only action they can take is to create events and they are short-handed and have a limited budget.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that his points are well taken. She continued that her personal preference is to make it clear to the public that the HRC’s scope is limited but they want to hear about what is happening in the community and what the concerns are. She understands the pitfalls and knows the public might misunderstand and be frustrated.

Mr. Kirschner stated that he agrees with Dr. Filaault about specificity and clarity. He spoke of how people are looking for specific ways to engage, and suggests inviting the public to volunteer to help with event coordination.

Ms. Manwaring spoke of the need to start by updating the HRC’s website, which currently is not inviting and barely has any information about the HRC’s work or the events. Mr. Bohannon replied that the City is going through a website refresh and has a new Communications Director. He will talk with Rebecca Landry. Ms. Fiske stated that they are also doing a graphics refresh, and it would be great to have photos of past events the HRC has done.

Ms. Fiske stated that writing a letter to the editor would be a good way to get the word out about the HRC's work. She continued that they could carefully craft something that invites people to attend and share their thoughts and concerns, so they can help build events or educational programs that address them. They could put this message on the Facebook page, too, to reach different audiences. Yes, they need to be mindful of their scope and ask the public, "Educate us about the issues so we can help educate others."

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she likes the idea, and asked if Ms. Fiske would be willing to draft something that the HRC could then edit together.

Councilor Workman arrived around 5:17 PM.

James Rinker of 34 Cottage St., Community Engagement Journalist from the Keene Sentinel, stated that a letter to the editor can only have one or two authors. He continued that something written to promote the HRC's work would be for the "community news" section, which would carry the same weight. He encourages the HRC to draft something. Discussion continued.

Ms. Fiske asked when she should have the draft completed by, and when the HRC is meeting again. She asked if the Pride event is happening in October. Dr. Filiault replied that he and Mr. Kirschner believe that in the interest of not stepping on the toes of the Keene Pride group, and of not confusing things by having multiple Pride events, it is better to let Keene Pride spread their wings and do their event. Then the HRC could revisit whether to have a Pride event next year. Discussion continued.

Ms. Manwaring asked if Ms. Fiske is still leading the charge for Indigenous People's Day. Ms. Fiske replied yes, but she does not have much to report right now. Gail has been trying to reach out to Dartmouth College and UVM to do something on the legal sovereignty of indigenous peoples, and is having a hard time reaching anyone. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked Dr. Filiault if he knows of anyone at UNH to contact. Dr. Filiault replied that he would recommend the ACLU instead; indigenous sovereignty law is such a narrow area of law that it is hard to find experts. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that if Ms. Fiske needs an extra set of hands for anything related to the Indigenous People's Day event, she would be happy to help. Ms. Fiske replied that they have enough people helping, but the topic was something they thought was important, because there is unfortunately a lot of animosity around the whole idea of sovereignty. It seemed like an important educational point. Discussion continued.

Ms. Fiske stated that she can try to complete a draft (of the community outreach piece) by the end of the month, but she will not be here for the August HRC meeting. She could send it to Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos agreed. She stated that as she has shared in the past, she is interested in expanding the scope beyond issues of race, religion, and so on and so forth, and a good, organic way of doing that is for people in the community to share their concerns with the HRC. That is better than the HRC trying to invent new directions to go in.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Ms. Fiske had suggested everyone read the previous meeting minutes, and she herself has not had a chance to review the last two sets. Dr. Filiault stated that he has a suggestion – they could create an Executive Summary, and move it on to Mayor Hansel, who can choose what to do with it. For example, he could submit the material to department heads or whatever committee he wants. The HRC does not have any authority to do anything with what they have created, so creating a one- or two-page Executive Summary is probably the best they can do. He continued that he has probably just volunteered himself to write it.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it sounds like a good, straight-forward path. Others agreed.

Mr. Kirschner made a motion for the HRC to direct Dr. Filiault to draft a one- or two-page Executive Summary of the HRC's recommendations regarding the Racial Justice and Community Safety Report. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Discussion ensued about when Dr. Filiault should complete the draft by, and the HRC's meeting schedule. They chose October 3, 2022. Noting that the first Monday in September is a holiday, Mr. Bohannon asked when the HRC wants to meet next. They agreed on Monday, September 12.

8) **New Business**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that a reasonable and intelligent request was made for the HRC meetings to be run a little differently – going forward, anyone who wants to speak is asked to raise their hand and wait for the Chair to recognize them. She continued that this makes the meetings more organized and gives everyone the chance to speak.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she also wants to discuss the budget. She continued that until now, the process has been that if there is money in the budget and an event is coming up, money gets spent on that event. They have been lucky to usually have the money, due to people generously giving their time without pay, but there are costs, and every event has a right to basic infrastructure. She suggests that at the beginning of the fiscal year (July 1), the HRC divides the money in the bank by the number of events. That gives each event a starting budget, and if an event needs funds beyond that, they would have to do fundraising. She asked if that sounds fair.

Dr. Filiault suggested a subcommittee look at the budget and what has previously been spent on events, to create a line item budget for each event, looking at previous years' allocations. Mr. Bohannon replied that the spreadsheet already does that, looking at a three-year window at a time. He continued that he can print it off for the HRC going back to 2010, if they want him to.

In the past, the HRC has always received \$500 from the City, and this time they asked for an additional \$500. He goes back to the conversation at last month's meeting – there is an opportunity, if this is something they are going to dive into; it is not all that much to ask for double for the next cycle. To make the request to the City Council they need to be clear about what they are doing. He can follow up with that; they have a few months to figure it out.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that it sounds like the first action is to examine what has been spent historically on each event. Dr. Filiault replied yes, and to predict what events they have coming forward. He continued that for example, if they are doing a Pride event in 2023, and/or Holi Fest, they should put together a prospective budget for those. It sounds like they are planning new events for next year. They also have had two years of Juneteenth events, so they can start to get an idea for that. It would be nice to pay the event speakers. If they are going to ask the City Council for an increased amount, they will at least have a reasonable proposal to say why they need it. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos agreed. She continued that she knows everyone is a volunteer with limited time, but in any event, they should have a proposal for what the event's content will be and what its budget will be. That should be standard with every event. They can create a template to make it as easy as possible, but they definitely need to be more rigorous about this, going forward.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if anyone else had new business.

Mr. Rinker spoke about thinking about different ways to communicate with younger audiences. He continued that he is a 20-something person who works at a newspaper and within social media, he is unaware of a City of Keene social media presence and how the HRC could utilize that to their advantage, and have younger voices involved with the educational programming. He encourages partnering with a vast variety of people. They have his contact information and he is happy to help, especially with connecting with people in the community who are traditionally underserved and underrepresented in media.

9) Adjournment – Next Meeting Monday, August 1, 2022

Ms. Fiske made a motion to cancel the August 1, 2022 meeting of the HRC and to move the September meeting to September 12, 2022. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reid, Minute Taker

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