

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

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

**Monday, September 12, 2022**

**5:00 PM**

**Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Jan Manwaring  
Dr. Mohammad Saleh (arrived at 5:09 PM)  
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair  
Marti Fiske, Ex-Officio  
Daniel Aronson  
Hunter Kirschner

**Staff Present:**

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation &  
Facilities Director  
Amanda Palmeira, Assistant City Attorney  
Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager

**Members Not Present:**

Heidi Schwieger, Alternate  
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate  
Dr. Shaun Filiault  
Dr. Dottie Morris  
Councilor Catherine Workman

**1) Welcome and Call to Order**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 5:06 PM. She 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, 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."*

Mr. Bohannon stated that present tonight is Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager. He continued that he will not be present next month, and Ms. Bender will be the staff liaison. Amanda Palmeira, Assistant City Attorney is also present, just to get to know the HRC. She has been attending various City meetings.

**2) Approval of July 11, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of July 11, 2022. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Dr. Saleh arrived at 5:09 PM.

3) **Finance Report**

Mr. Bohannon stated that he will update the Keene International Festival (KIF) side at the next HRC meeting. He continued that the KIF has received some donations and has multiple expenses coming up in two weeks. The HRC's budget has not changed. The current (balance) is \$4,391.88. He owes some folks related to Juneteenth.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that neither HRC member who would be reporting on the MDEIB is present.

Ms. Fiske stated that she can give a small update. She continued that she had been asked to contact the MDEIB's education group about joining forces and searching for training for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

5) **Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

Ms. Fiske stated that she had asked Mr. Bohannon to send everyone an update on the challenges of finding an Indigenous People's Day event, because she was afraid they were not going to be able to pull it together. However, through the dogged persistence of their Engagement and Youth Services Director, Gail Zachariah, they have an event confirmed. It is called Woven Through the Sweetgrass: Memories of a New England Abenaki Family. A rather contentious argument is occurring with the Abenaki tribe in Quebec not recognizing the tribes that have been recognized by the states in VT and NH, and she and Ms. Zachariah felt it was a bad idea to get involved in that. They did not contact any local members, and are trying to contact someone from the tribe in Quebec, because they are federally recognized and they felt it was safer. [Suzie] O'Bamsawin is a member of the Odanak tribe in Quebec, as is Joyce Heywood. They will give a historic perspective on the Abenaki experience in the greater Quebec/New England area. The event will not be on Indigenous People's Day, because Ms. O'Bamsawin and Ms. Heywood did not feel comfortable with that. It is a day of mourning for many tribes. The event will be Wednesday, October 12, not the day before as originally planned, so that it does not conflict with the Keene Pride event at the library on October 11.

Mr. Bohannon asked if this information is on the website. Ms. Fiske replied yes, and it will go out through all of the normal channels, such as the Shopper News, communication to all library cardholders who subscribe to the email list, and so on and so forth.

Ms. Fiske added that the Library is paying for this event, so the HRC does not need to. Mr. Aronson asked if the event will be recorded so that people who are unable to attend can see it.

Ms. Fiske replied that she does not know if they have permission to do that. She continued that the Library has the ability to put events on Facebook Live but she would have to get permission first. She will ask.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos thanked Ms. Fiske. She reminded subcommittee chairs to submit their updates, if they have any, in writing each month.

6) **Community Outreach**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Ms. Fiske drafted a request for community input, and her understanding is that what Ms. Fiske wrote is exactly what the HRC wanted, and it just has not been released yet. Mr. Bohannon replied that is correct.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that James Rinker (digital community engagement specialist with the Keene Sentinel) has offered to be a point of contact and a resource for the HRC. She continued that the HRC is looking to work on this, and they hope to have community members attending the HRC meetings. That is what they are trying to achieve, with the request that Ms. Fiske put together. Advertising HRC events is something else for the HRC to improve on.

Ms. Manwaring stated that she has not seen what Ms. Fiske wrote, but she thought there was concern about what kind of input the HRC is looking for. She asked if the HRC resolved that. Ms. Fiske replied yes, they are asking the community what they would like more education about and what the HRC can develop more programming around.

Mr. Bohannon distributed copies of what Ms. Fiske drafted, and HRC members read it. Dr. Saleh asked where this statement is intended to go. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that they intend to put it in the Keene Sentinel. Ms. Fiske replied that she also recommends the Monadnock Shopper, and putting it on the website would be great, too. Mr. Bohannon agreed.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked for committee members' thoughts on the draft. Discussion ensued, regarding wordsmithing grammar and spelling. Mr. Aronson offered to do some editing. Ms. Fiske replied that she can do editing and/or rewriting as necessary. Mr. Bohannon replied that he and Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos had intended to give Ms. Fiske feedback on the document but that feedback did not occur. Discussion continued. Mr. Bohannon stated that he will send it to Mr. Aronson as an attachment.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Dr. Filiault was tasked with drafting the executive summary to submit to the City Council. She continued that he is not here tonight and thus cannot give an update. Ms. Manwaring replied that she thinks Dr. Filiault has a scheduling conflict this semester with the HRC meetings. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she can

check in with him. Mr. Kirschner replied that he can check in with him about that, as he was going to talk with him about something else anyway.

**8) New Business**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she was approached by the Cohen Center. She continued that the Cohen Center would like the HRC to participate in their Kristallnacht Commemoration in November, talking about what their goals are for Keene and what has been accomplished already. The program is in flux and the HRC might have the opportunity to do more, or if they are not comfortable with that, that is okay. She asked committee members if they want the HRC to participate in this. Discussion ensued about the event. Mr. Bohannon stated that the event is well done and quite moving, and it would be a great honor for the HRC to be part of it.

Mr. Aronson stated that he is always a part of the ceremony. He continued that he thinks the HRC should accept, but they should be sure they understand what the HRC's role is, in terms of education and programming. He wonders if the Cohen Center will also extend an invitation to the MDEIBC, whose mission is complementary but also very different from the HRC's in many ways. The issues the Holocaust Center deals with in their Kristallnacht Commemoration lend themselves more to the activism of the MDEIBC than the education and programming that the HRC does. The Cohen Center needs to know that the HRC is not a commission that is authorized to act.

Ms. Fiske asked if the Cohen Center had a specific ask of the HRC. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it is a fairly broad ask, but the intent would be for the HRC to share its mission and what has been accomplished in Keene already. She continued that they could talk about the RJCS Report and the existence of the HRC and its work. Ms. Fiske asked if the HRC would be part of a panel presentation or something similar. Discussion ensued about the format of the Kristallnacht Commemoration.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if they should take a vote on whether or not to participate. Ms. Fiske replied that she does not feel like she has enough information yet in order to vote. For example, would it be one HRC member speaking, or a group of them? Discussion continued. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she can follow up with the Cohen Center and try to get more information. Mr. Kirschner stated that he agrees with Ms. Fiske that they need more information before saying yes or no. He continued that they could say yes, conditionally, the HRC is interested in having more conversations with the Cohen Center about how they could work with them and support the event. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she agrees that is an appropriate next step. Mr. Bohannon replied that this can be on the HRC's agenda at their next meeting in three weeks.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if everyone is comfortable with the HRC's interest being expressed, and getting more information about it. Others replied yes.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that something the HRC was going to put on the agenda but did not fit their budget. She continued that they need to discuss it. For example, for Indigenous People's Day they are lucky to have the budget covered, but they need to figure out a system for how to use their funds. Maybe she and Mr. Bohannon should discuss it first and come up with a proposal to bring to the HRC, or if people have strong opinions and want to propose something, that is fine, too. [Hearing no objections], she continued that she will come up with a proposal and email it to Mr. Bohannon by Thursday morning for his feedback. Mr. Bohannon agreed. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that for the record, the HRC is receiving \$1,000 from the City each year.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there was any other new business.

Mr. Aronson stated that Keene is in the middle of its first ever Pride festival. He continued that the extent of his involvement is that his kid is at the open mic tonight. He does not know what else is going on, or whether there is some official acknowledgment from the City or the Mayor, a thank you to Keene Pride, or something like that. He continued that maybe the HRC could send a letter or ask the Mayor to say something. He asked if anyone else has information about whether/how the City has officially acknowledged Keene Pride.

Mr. Bohannon replied that outside of accepting Keene Pride's protocol and being in front of the City Council, and the City Council wishing them luck with their event, he does not know of anything formal beyond that. He continued that it would be up to [Keene Pride] to request a proclamation from the Mayor; he does not know if they did that.

Ms. Fiske stated that Keene Pride is booking events in September and October, and the library will be the location for several. She continued that Keene Pride might become a very active group, which is great.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that for the record, the HRC has a Pride event subcommittee that is pursuing its own programming at this point. She continued that she thinks the last conversation the HRC had about this was about pursuing programming for next year, to give room to Keene Pride this year to do their events.

Ms. Manwaring stated that something for them to think about, regarding the HRC supporting a group/event like Keene Pride, is that it would be easy to write a letter to the editor. She continued that it might be too late now, but an HRC member could write one, sign their name, and add "Member of the Human Rights Committee." The HRC should support this whether the Mayor does or not. She thinks the Mayor would support it, but Keene Pride probably did not know to ask for a proclamation.

Discussion ensued about the letter to the editor idea, and how the HRC would have had to draft/approve/edit such a letter during a regular meeting, since City committees are not allowed to conduct such business over email.

Ms. Manwaring stated that the HRC could write a letter in support of the KIF, which is in two weeks. Ms. Fiske replied that if Keene Pride will be doing events into October, the HRC would even have time to write a letter in support of that, too. She gave examples/ideas of what to include in the letter. Mr. Bohannon suggested just having one letter, which could include a congratulatory message to Keene Pride. Discussion continued about the idea, and about the question of who/what else the HRC should potentially be writing letters in support of, and what the process and protocol could be. Dr. Saleh suggested having organizations that are supporting causes to set up a meeting with the HRC to discuss what they are doing and how the HRC could help.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that an agenda item for the next HRC meeting can be a discussion of how to recognize and support other organizations. Others agreed. Mr. Bohannon stated that “Community Outreach” is an agenda item. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked for something like “Recognizing and Supporting Other Organizations” to be a sub-bullet, so the HRC can be sure to address the topic. Ms. Fiske suggested that “Kristallnacht” be A) under “Community Outreach,” and “Recognizing and Supporting Other Organizations” be B).

**9) Adjournment – Next Meeting Monday, October 3, 2022 at 5:00 PM**

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:47 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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