

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, November 7, 2022

5:00 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Jan Manwaring
Dr. Dottie Morris
Dr. Mohammad Saleh
Marti Fiske
Hunter Kirschner
Rabbi Daniel Aronson

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities
Director

Members Not Present:

Ritu Budakoti, Alternate
Heidi Schwieger, Alternate
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Dr. Shaun Filiault, Vice Chair
Councilor Catherine Workman

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Mr. Bohannon called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM. He asked for someone to nominate an HRC member to serve as Chair tonight in the absence of Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos and Dr. Shaun Filiault.

Dr. Morris nominated Dr. Saleh for Chair for tonight's meeting. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

2) Approval of October 3, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Ms. Manwaring made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of October 3, 2022. Dr. Morris seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon stated that an updated balance sheet is attached to the agenda. He continued that he went through and organized everything chronologically and everything is up to date with the Keene International Festival (KIF), and everything should be up to date with the Juneteenth

event. Upstream Sound was paid. Upstream Sound had not sent him an invoice until just after the KIF. He apologized to Jalissa (Rodriguez), but he did get that check out to her and she has been paid. He does not believe there was anyone else they owed money. He asked Dr. Morris if she recalls anyone else that they owe. Dr. Morris replied no.

Chair Saleh asked what the second sheet is. Mr. Bohannon replied that since they will cross over to a new calendar year, the second sheet is the current fiscal year and the three-year projection. He continued that the current balance on hand is \$3,991.88. It is not shown on this month's finance report, but going forward, the HRC will see that he changed the spreadsheet to show the HRC's events in chronological order.

Chair Saleh asked – accounting for future events' cost, is the projected balance at the end of 2023 \$3,391? Mr. Bohannon replied that that is the current balance right now. He continued that the HRC has not spent anything this year.

Chair Saleh asked if anyone else had questions. Hearing none, he stated that since the finance report is informational, no vote is needed.

4) Budget Development

Chair Saleh stated that they discussed this at the last meeting, and he believes that Mr. Bohannon and Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos were working on it. He asked Mr. Bohannon for an update.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he does not want to go too far with this tonight without Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos being here, but he and Alyssa Bender met recently and discussed it. At this time, the City will be providing \$1,000 to the HRC annually. He recommends to the HRC that if they want more, they can direct him, as the HRC's staff liaison, to write a memorandum to the City Manager asking for additional funding. The HRC has the events for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Juneteenth, Pride month if they continue to do something for that, and Indigenous People's Day, and the KIF is self-sustaining. How the HRC would divvy up the money from the City would be approximately \$500 per event, and for anything beyond that, the subcommittee/working group for each event would have the responsibility of raising that money.

Discussion ensued about the budget. Mr. Aronson proposed the HRC request another \$1,000, given the four events. Ms. Fiske asked if the committee loses money that they do not spend. Mr. Bohannon replied no. Ms. Fiske questioned whether they can ask for \$2,000 per year given their current balance. Mr. Bohannon replied that he thinks they can, because it is specifically for events, and the committee could use the small balance it has for something like bringing in a speaker whose fees are beyond the committee's typical capabilities. Their current balance is not big, compared to ten years ago, when the committee had \$14,000 in its account.

Chair Saleh stated that Mr. Bohannon and Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos have put a lot of thought into this and she may have other ideas, so he thinks the committee's discussion about the details

of the proposal should wait until Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos is here. Mr. Bohannon replied that they have time for that. He continued that he wants budget requests before early January. Chair Saleh replied that unlike other committees that often skip their December meetings, the HRC meets early in the month so they should have a quorum for their December meeting and can discuss this more then.

5) Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition (MDEIB)

Dr. Morris stated that the MDEIB has been meeting at a time that conflicts with her teaching schedule, so she will rejoin the MDEIB [later].

Mr. Bohannon stated that he sent an email asking about the newsletter, which someone from the MDEIB sent to him, and they wanted to meet with him to go over their agenda. He continued that they received \$7,500 for marketing materials and are still looking for additional funding. They are looking to broaden their campaign a little. He is now on the board of the Chamber of Commerce, and the Chamber will also be doing some things related to DEIB. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos has been asking about him connecting with Luca Paris, and now is a good time for that. The focus is on the Racial Justice and Community Safety (RJCS) Report. He hopes they can get more information from Councilor Workman at the next meeting and start to collaborate more.

Chair Saleh asked if the DEIB work the Chamber is doing is independent of the YMCA's work or in collaboration. Mr. Bohannon replied independent.

Chair Saleh stated that the HRC had talked about having someone from the Chamber come talk with them. Mr. Kirschner stated that he suggests inviting someone from the Chamber to one meeting and someone from the MDEIB to another, to give the HRC first-hand updates. Mr. Bohannon replied that Councilor Workman is the Chair of the MDEIB, so having her here would be helpful. He continued that it might be a good idea to have Councilor Workman and someone from the Chamber here together.

Chair Saleh stated that he is a member of the MDEIB and is also having problems with the meeting time. He continued that he has attended a few meetings and is glad they are moving forward.

6) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports

Ms. Fiske reported on the Indigenous People's Day event at the Library, which had about 77 attendees, some in person and some online. She continued that the event started late due to technical problems but it ultimately turned out very well, and there was a nice article in the newspaper about it.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the letter to the editor has been published recently. He continued that he has not yet received any communications as a result of it. Chair Saleh stated that a Keene Sentinel journalist who knows him reached out to him for some clarification, and he told the journalist to contact Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos. He continued that the journalist did not follow up with him and he hopes to get an update from Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos.

Mr. Bohannon stated that on November 1, the Sentinel published an article from Hunter Oberst. Chair Saleh replied that that is the journalist he was referring to. Mr. Bohannon replied that Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos did connect with the Sentinel, and that article was published from that. Chair Saleh asked if Mr. Bohannon could share the article with the committee. Ms. Fiske stated that the Sentinel published the letter and then a short article the very next day. Chair Saleh replied that they have good support from the Sentinel, generally speaking.

7) **Community Outreach**
A. **Outside Agency Networking**
i. ***Kristallnacht***

Chair Saleh reported that Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos communicated with Tom White. He asked if Dr. Morris could speak to this.

Dr. Morris stated that Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos will be representing the committee, but she hopes the rest of the committee attends. Chair Saleh stated that the event's agenda is not public, but Mr. White sent it to him. Part of the agenda is to give credit to local organizations that are working to represent human rights, including the HRC. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos will read the HRC's mission statement. He, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos, and Dr. Morris have been allocated seats. If anyone else wants to participate, they can ask the organizers. It is not a walk-in event. Mr. Bohannon added that it is this Wednesday at 7:00 PM. Mr. Aronson stated that he is part of the event. He continued that he did not think people needed tickets to attend.

Discussion ensued about whether the event is open to all or requires tickets or registration. Ms. Fiske noted that it appears to be open to all, given what is stated on the website. Chair Saleh replied that he stands corrected. Discussion continued about the event. Chair Saleh encouraged the committee to attend.

Mr. Bohannon stated that Ritu Budakoti will be representing the KIF and is listed in the program as a member of the HRC. They are well represented.

8) **New Business**

Mr. Bohannon stated that the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event is coming up. He continued that previously, Ms. Manwaring had suggested the HRC might work with the Cheshire Historical Society. Jenna Carroll was going to be working on the history of Cheshire County's Black population. Ms. Manwaring has been working on this project alongside Ms. Carroll, who has

offered to host the event at the Historical Society. The HRC can be a co-sponsor. He asked how the committee feels about that, and if Ms. Manwaring has additional information. This will not be fully completed by January, but it would be Ms. Carroll's research up until that point. There are several people working on this project. Ms. Manwaring replied yes, and they all send their materials to Ms. Carroll, who is putting it all together. There are many interesting stories.

Chair Saleh stated that since there is only one meeting before the event, it would be helpful to discuss the event now. He continued that he would like to hear more about the layout and the plan for the event other than the presentation of the historical documentation. Ms. Manwaring stated the Historical Society has a big hall, and parking. Mr. Bohannon replied that the Historical Society can host about 100 people, which is a good amount of space. He continued that he thinks there would be another exhibit there at the same time, which coincides with the theme, art on the walls, and so on and so forth. Ms. Carroll is still waiting to hear from the HRC but is ready to move this project forward. Ms. Fiske added that the Historical Society has installed grant-funded equipment that will allow them to do live streaming, which would be wonderful for this event to increase the turnout. Others agreed. Ms. Manwaring added that downstairs at the Historical Society is the Jonathan Daniels Center, and they might be involved somehow as well.

Dr. Morris asked if anyone knows if the movie "Till" will be showing anywhere nearby, because she was hoping to do an educational piece, if it was around during that timeframe. She will reach out to Keene Cinema. It is not yet being shown anywhere north of Greenfield, MA. She has heard that it is exceptional. Mr. Bohannon stated that something to think about is that he thinks this committee needs to dive a little deeper, and he sees this as a potential additional event. Dr. Morris replied that that is what she means. Mr. Bohannon replied that the more they can provide the community with educational opportunities, the stronger they will be. It is good to go beyond the same four events each year and do more to engage people in meaningful conversation. An event with this movie would be fantastic. Dr. Morris replied that she will check with the Colonial and Keene Cinema. Discussion continued.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he thinks the HRC needs to give Ms. Carroll some direction this month so she can begin to prepare. He continued that he can take a lot of the onus for this, but the HRC has not done great marketing for its previous events. If they can tell Ms. Carroll soon, they can begin to get the word out through the holiday season and the beginning of the New Year. He asked Ms. Manwaring to explain the work she has been doing. Ms. Manwaring replied that she and others started looking at the census, starting with 1790 and going through 1940. She continued that they have not worked with the 1950 census yet because it was recently released. After the census, they look at other sources at the community level, like annual reports, personal writings, and so on and so forth. She has been focusing on Keene, while others are doing other towns in Cheshire County. Chair Saleh replied that it is an opportunity to have a forum discussion of the history of the local African American community, how it is now, and how we as a community can make it a better community. He asked if there is an opportunity to talk about that, or if the information will just be presented factually. Ms. Manwaring replied that she is not sure what Ms. Carroll is going to do. She continued that her sense is that the community was not

very friendly towards Black people, and she wonders but has not yet found information on whether Keene was a “sundown town” where Black people were expected to be inside by sundown. Some murders occurred. Ms. Fiske replied that it sounds like it will be a historical perspective of what has happened to date, although the research is not complete. Ms. Manwaring replied yes, it is the history of what has happened, and what we are carrying with us. Dr. Morris added yes, what we are carrying with us, and what impact it has on us today. Discussion continued. Chair Saleh stated that it looks like they have two decisions – one, whether the HRC wants to be at the Historical Society and be part of this; and two, the details to finalize. He asked for a motion.

Ms. Manwaring made a motion to agree with the plan of having collaboration with the Cheshire County Historical Society for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event. Ms. Fiske seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he wanted to note, with much gratitude, that this is the first year during Dr. Morris’s time on this committee that this event has not been placed on her. He continued that for every year that the HRC has done something for this day, it has fallen on her shoulders, and he thanks her for all of her work. Others thanked Dr. Morris as well. Chair Saleh thanked Ms. Manwaring for her work.

Chair Saleh asked if anyone else had new business. Hearing none, he stated that he has old business – there was a lot of discussion at the last meeting about the RJCS Report and the executive summary of it to the Mayor. He continued that Dr. Filiault was working on that. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, and he is working with Dr. Filiault to make that happen. He continued that he recognizes that Dr. Filiault is not here tonight due to running for State Representative, which is fairly consuming right now, but Dr. Filiault has told him he is committed to seeing that (executive summary) through. There will be an update at the next meeting. It is on the City Manager’s radar as well.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he has new business – there is an event coming up held by the Endowment for Health and Marnita’s Table. He continued that it will be a community conversation at the high school, with food involved; it might be worth exploring. He will send all of the details to the community.

Mr. Aronson stated that he received an email today from the Monadnock Interfaith Project (MIP), who was forwarding something from Project Home, which he sent to Mr. Bohannon to email out to the HRC. He continued that asylum seekers are coming into the area and need hosts to live with for up to a year, to provide food and shelter, supported by a coordinated team of Project Home volunteers. The Project Home volunteers help with rides, tutoring, healthcare, shopping, and so on and so forth. Ms. Fiske asked where the asylum seekers are coming from. Dr. Saleh replied that he is part of Project Home, and most asylum seekers come from south of the border, such as Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador. Some people are also coming from Afghanistan on a temporary status and are not technically in the category of asylum seekers. The

asylum seekers from south of the border, while waiting for their cases to be decided, have a legal right to be here, but cannot work for the first year. If their cases extend beyond a year, they get work permits. Project Home has successfully hosted six families and a couple of them got legal status and became independent. He is happy to answer more questions.

9) **Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, December 5, 2022 at 5:00 PM**

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

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Andy Bohannon, PRF Director