

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA

Monday, December 4, 2023 at 5:00 PM
Room 22 Upstairs, Recreation Center

Members:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos
Dr. Dottie Morris
Janis Manwaring
Dr. Mohammad Saleh
Marti Fiske
Hunter Kirschner
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Councilor Catherine Workman
Gina Burke

Staff:

Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager

Alternates:

Todd Benson
Ritu Budakoti
Jennifer Nascimento

Agenda:

1. Welcome and Call to Order
2. Approval of November 6, 2023 Minutes
3. Finance Report
4. Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition Updates
5. Racial Justice Community Safety Report
6. Acceptance of Committee Event Reports
 - a. Martin Luther King Jr. Day
 - b. Black History Month
 - c. Juneteenth
 - d. Keene International Festival
 - e. Indigenous Peoples' Day
 - f. Pride Event
7. New Business
8. Adjourn – Next Meeting January 8, 2023 at 5:00 PM

Tabled: Community Survey

"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."

1 City of Keene
2 New Hampshire

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4
5 HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
6 MEETING MINUTES
7

Monday, November 6, 2023

5:00 PM

Room 22,
Recreation Center

Members Present:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Hunter Kirschner, Vice Chair
Councilor Catherine Workman
Dr. Dottie Morris
Dr. Mohammad Saleh
Marti Fiske
Gina Burke, Alternate
Tedd Benson, Alternate
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate

Staff Present:

Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager
Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation, and
Facilities Director

Members Not Present:

Heidi Schwieger, Alternate
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Jennifer Nescimento, Alternate

8
9
10 **1) Welcome and Call to Order**

11
12 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos read the HRC's statement: *"In our efforts to create a more equal and*
13 *just society, we move forward with the firm intention to value the voices, opinions, and*
14 *experiences of all people. We choose to proceed with the awareness and humility that the*
15 *statements and decisions we make will have a different impact for those with different life*
16 *experiences."*

17
18 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM. Roll call was conducted.
19

20 **2) Approval of October 2, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

21
22 Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of October 2, 2023. Mr. Kirschner
23 seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.
24

25 **3) Finance Report**
26

27 Mr. Bohannon stated that the Finance Report in the agenda packet is wrong, and he apologizes.
28 He continued that somehow it is a finance report from three years ago, not the current one. Chair
29 Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that they will forego the finance report this month.

30
31 Ms. Fiske asked if the check was sent to the panelists from the Indigenous Peoples' Day event.
32 Mr. Bohannon replied no, not yet, and explained how he and others are still working to correct
33 the discrepancies that have happened as a result of the City switching to a new financial
34 software. Payments cannot go out until that is resolved. It will be soon.

35
36 **4) Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition Updates**

37
38 Councilor Workman (chair of the Coalition) stated that she does not have the Coalition's
39 strategic plan to share tonight, as it is incomplete. Portions of it have been approved by the
40 Steering Committee. They meet again on November 20, and she is asking the Coalition's
41 subcommittees to have their portions of the strategic plan completed by then. If that happens, the
42 Steering Committee can finalize and approve the strategic plan at that meeting. Otherwise, it
43 would be ready in December.

44
45 Councilor Workman continued that the Coalition is seeking/has room for many new members. It
46 is a regional coalition, not just Keene, so people from local towns are welcome.

47
48 Dr. Morris stated that the (Coalition) has made a lot of progress. She continued that she is on the
49 Education subcommittee, and if anyone is interested in joining, it meets at 7:30 every other
50 Thursday at Keene High School.

51
52 Dr. Saleh stated that Steering Committee member Pierre Morton hosted a meeting at the Franklin
53 Pierce campus, which had student participation, which was energizing. He asks for HRC
54 members to extend the Coalition's invitation to any young people they know who might want to
55 be involved.

56
57 Councilor Workman stated that the Coalition meetings use a hybrid model; they are in-person
58 and online. The "home base" for meetings is the Savings Bank of Walpole on Marlboro St., but
59 their goal is to have more meetings outside of Keene as well to be more inclusive. The Coalition
60 welcomes ideas for meeting locations.

61
62 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked who people should contact if they are interested in finding out
63 more about the Coalition and about which positions are available. Councilor Workman replied
64 that she is the chair, but any Coalition member would have access to the information about open
65 positions.

66
67 **5) Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee Report**

68

69 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if this is in the hands of the City Council. Mr. Bohannon
70 replied yes, but that there was no response yet. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that they
71 would leave this section on the agenda for follow-up at the next meeting.

72

73 **6) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

74

75 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she does not think it is working out to have written reports
76 from the subcommittees, since they do not have any, so they will go back to doing it the old-
77 fashioned way.

78

79 **A) Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**

80

81 Rabbi Aronson reported that the subcommittee has a title (for the event) from speaker Father
82 Gregg, "Cherished Belonging: Love in Divided Times." He gave more information about the
83 conversations he has been having with Father Gregg's scheduler, and the plans for the event. It
84 will be Monday, January 15, 2024, in the evening. Discussion ensued about where to hold the
85 event, Heberton Hall at the KPL, or a space at KSC - Dr. Morris will look into both options.
86 Discussion ensued about the preferred time for the event. The group agreed on 6:00 PM.

87

88 Rabbi Aronson stated that the subcommittee needs to talk about how to fund this event. He
89 continued that they have \$500 in the HRC's budget and need to come up with approximately
90 \$3,000 more. Mr. Bohannon replied that he recommends Rabbi Aronson come into the
91 December meeting with those financial commitments. Discussion ensued about donations and
92 sponsors and the process.

93

94 Rabbi Aronson asked Councilor Workman about the meeting schedule for the MDEIB, and
95 Councilor Workman replied that the Steering Committee generally meets the third Monday of
96 the month at 4:00 PM. Rabbi Aronson asked her to put him on the agenda for the November 20
97 meeting, and he will come do a pitch. Councilor Workman agreed.

98

99 **B) Black History Month**

100

101 Dr. Morris stated that she has been in touch with Crys Matthews, for an event Monday, February
102 5, 2024. She continued that there are details to work out, but she hopes that they can do a
103 workshop of some sort and a musical event. The planning is coming along. Discussion ensued.
104 Dr. Morris gave further information about possible workshop topics, such as developing
105 singer/songwriter skills and political music. Mr. Bohannon spoke about how it would be great if
106 Crys Matthews could sing some of their songs and also talk about the meaning behind the songs
107 or about how they developed the songs, like a combination of a workshop and a musical
108 performance. Discussion continued.

109

110 **C) Juneteenth**

111

112 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos reported that the Juneteenth working group had its first meeting (for
113 planning next year's event), which went well. She continued that the event will be the evening
114 of Juneteenth, which is a Wednesday in 2024, in Central Square. There will be music and
115 speakers and they are looking to incorporate youth. There will be other events as well.
116

117 Dr. Morris stated that she connected with singer-songwriter Adrienne Mack-Davis, who is
118 popular in the Manchester and Nashua area. She gave more information about her work, which
119 is centered on Black empowerment. She has reached out to see if she is available for Juneteenth.
120 She will send the HRC a link to her music.
121

122 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the next meeting is January 9. The working group is
123 applying what they have learned, from organizing this event in the past, about the programming
124 and financing processes. Dr. Morris gave more information about other possible speakers and
125 musicians she has been thinking about and talking with. Discussion continued.
126

127 **D) Keene International Festival**

128

129 Ms. Budakoti stated that the organizers prefer to hold the event right before the DeMar
130 Marathon, when people are in town, so they have chosen September 28, 2024 for the Keene
131 International Festival. She continued that they will start working on the lineup soon.
132

133 **E) Indigenous Peoples' Day**

134

135 Ms. Fiske reported that there was a nice turnout for the Indigenous Peoples' Day event. She
136 continued that the documentary, Voices From the Barrens, was beautifully done and they
137 received a lot of positive feedback about it. Two copies are now available for loan at the
138 Library. The documentarian and a member of the board of directors of the blueberry company
139 spoke at the event, and addressed audience questions. Discussion ensued.
140

141 Dr. Morris recommended the film Killers of the Flower Moon, currently playing in Keene. She
142 continued that it is about some of the Oklahoma murders (of indigenous people in the 1920s) and
143 is very well done. Ms. Fiske spoke about indigenous people involved with the movie's creation.
144 Discussion ensued.
145

146 **F) Pride Event**

147

148 Mr. Kirschner reported that the Pride event was a couple of weeks ago, a film screening of
149 Cured. He continued that the audience was smaller than he would have liked, but he felt the
150 film was well-received, and the filmmaker was there to talk about the process of making the
151 film. There is a copy now at the Mason Library at Keene State College.
152

153 **7) New Business**

154

HRC Meeting Minutes
November 6, 2023

155 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if anyone had new business. She continued that the HRC
156 welcomes public input.

157
158 Ed Tomey and Maich Gardner introduced themselves. Mr. Tomey stated that they are from
159 Covenant Living/Hillside Village, which is an all-white community of all older people. Many of
160 the residents are very interested in the kinds of things the HRC is doing. January 2024 will be
161 Covenant Living's fifth celebration of Juneteenth and their third year celebrating MLK Day.
162 Most years, he and Ms. Gardner have chaired the activities, but this year they have formed a
163 committee. It is great to hear about how the HRC spreads out the work and responsibilities
164 amongst its members, for each of its events. Covenant Living needs something similar.

165
166 Ms. Gardner stated that she and Mr. Tomey are here listening to how the HRC does its work,
167 now that she and Mr. Tomey have a committee to help them put on events at Covenant Living,
168 and they hope there are opportunities for the HRC and Covenant Living to collaborate and do
169 some things together. Covenant Living has a great facility/performance space that holds about
170 100 people. Mr. Tomey added that if they do not collaborate on events, they can at least provide
171 additional audiences for each other. Ms. Gardner stated that Covenant Living residents have
172 been eager to participate in the events they have done in the past, so if they do collaborate, she
173 thinks there would be a good response.

174
175 Ms. Gardner and Mr. Tomey shared more information about past events they have hosted. They
176 thanked the HRC, and thanked Dr. Saleh for inviting them to attend tonight. They welcome the
177 HRC members to contact them via phone or email. Mr. Tomey spoke of how he and Ms.
178 Gardner and their newly formed committee are struggling to add events in addition to ones that
179 focus on Black citizens, to go beyond that to other people of color, issues of gender, issues of
180 social justice, and so on. They are looking at a variety of issues and struggling with what to
181 name their committee, which had been the "Juneteenth Committee" until now. When they held
182 an event to honor George Floyd, 60 people attended, and Covenant Living only had 80 residents
183 at the time, so it was quite a showing. All of the events he and Ms. Gardner have hosted have
184 had 80 people or more. They expect it to increase, now that there are more residents than ever.
185 There is a lot of interest in social justice issues. Ms. Gardner stated that they want to maintain an
186 open dialogue with the HRC, given that they have shared values and interests.

187
188 Ms. Fiske asked if there is a bus/transportation available for Covenant Living residents to attend
189 events downtown. Mr. Tomey replied that their current bus will soon expire but a new one is on
190 order. He continued that they have two vans. Residents are in their 60s-90s, so anywhere they
191 go needs to have quick access to restrooms. Ms. Fiske stated that if transportation is available
192 for Covenant Living folks to attend the HRC's events, the HRC can include Covenant Living in
193 their advertising/outreach. Discussion continued. Councilor Workman stated that she is Chair of
194 the MDEIB and they could definitely be in contact with/collaborate with the Covenant Living
195 group. She continued that she was at the candidate forum that was hosted at Covenant Living a
196 couple weeks ago, and the energy was palpable – Covenant Living residents had a lot of
197 impassioned discussion. Mr. Tomey agreed and spoke of how people who live there do not want

HRC Meeting Minutes
November 6, 2023

198 to be thought of just as “Covenant Living residents,” but as citizens of Keene as well. They want
199 to be involved in things that are happening in Keene. Mr. Bohannon stated that he will put Mr.
200 Tomey and Ms. Gardner on the HRC’s distribution list, so they will receive the committee’s
201 agenda packets and meeting minutes and can stay involved.

202

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

204

205 Rabbi Aronson stated that Thursday, November 9, is *Kristallnacht*. He continued that the
206 ceremony that had at one time been at the Colonial was scheduled for Central Square and has
207 now been moved to the Library. The Library had been the Plan B in case of inclement weather.
208 It was moved there partly at his suggestion because many folks in his community are feeling
209 very vulnerable and traumatized. He personally does not feel that the Jewish community here is
210 at risk of any physical harm. Other people have different feelings. However, he thinks that
211 anything that is outside and Jewish-related is inviting protests from pro-Palestinian groups,
212 which most likely would be imported from outside of Keene. That is one consequence of the
213 war that is happening in Israel and Gaza. In addition, the public menorah lighting, which they
214 started last year, is also moving indoors. It will be Thursday, December 14, at the YMCA at
215 5:30. He hopes the HRC members attend. He wants to talk with Dr. Saleh about including
216 someone from the Muslim community for that.

217

218 Rabbi Aronson continued that he wants the HRC to know that many folks in the Jewish
219 community are feeling incredibly isolated. People who have deep commitments to social justice
220 have found that they are not welcome in certain circles of groups where social justice is done,
221 because they are Jewish and care for the state of Israel. Even within the Jewish community,
222 incredible tensions are coming up. He himself has done a lot of soul-searching in recent days.
223 They are getting support from a lot of corners and are grateful for all of it.

224

225 Mr. Tomey asked if there will be security for *Kristallnacht*. Ms. Fiske spoke about the Cohen
226 Hall space and stated that to her knowledge, the organizer has not requested any additional
227 security. Discussion ensued. Rabbi Aronson spoke about the coordination with KPD.

228

229 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there was any other new business. Mr. Bohannon stated that
230 he will be stepping down as the staff liaison for the HRC, and Alyssa Bender will be the new
231 staff liaison. He continued that she is a growing leader within the City, doing great work, and
232 has now been participating in HRC meetings for quite a while and absorbing everything like a
233 sponge. It is time for him to transition, and in fact, Ms. Bender should have taken over a year
234 ago, but he has stayed because he loves this group’s work and its members and mission, and how
235 they change the community and open so many doors. He feels passionate about the work and
236 will still be present in certain ways. The HRC will be in great hands with Ms. Bender.

237

238 The HRC members thanked Mr. Bohannon for all of his work, and welcomed Ms. Bender in her
239 new role.

240

241 **8) Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, December 4, 2023 at 5:00 PM**

242

243 There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 6:06 PM.

244

245 Respectfully submitted by,

246 Britta Reida, Minute Taker

247

248 Reviewed and edited by,

249 Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager

7/1/22- 6/30/23	HRC	KIF	7/1/23- 6/30/24	HRC	KIF	7/1/24- 6/30/25	HRC	KIF
Balance 7/1/22	\$ 2,991.88	\$ 3,985.44	Balance 7/1/23	\$ 3,997.75	\$ 5,951.74	Balance 7/1/24	\$ 5,497.75	\$ 3,985.44
Income			Income			Income		
City of Keene	\$ 1,000.00		City of Keene	\$ 2,000.00		City of Keene	\$ -	
donations TILL	\$ 1,800.00							
donations Juneteenth	\$ 3,150.00							
Donations KIF		\$ 8,312.00	Donations KIF		\$ 4,300.00	Donations KIF		\$ -
subtotal	\$ 5,950.00	\$ 8,312.00	subtotal	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 4,300.00	subtotal	\$ -	\$ -
Total Income	\$ 5,950.00	\$ 8,312.00	Total Income	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 4,300.00	Total Income	\$ -	\$ -
Expenses			Expenses			Expenses		
Martin Luther King Day	\$ 45.55		Martin Luther King Day	\$ -		Martin Luther King Day	\$ -	
500.00			500.00			500.00		
Black History Month TILL	\$ 1,800.00		Black History Month	\$ -		Black History Month	\$ -	
			500.00			500.00		
Juneteenth	\$ 3,098.58		Juneteenth	\$ -		Juneteenth	\$ -	
500.00			500.00			500.00		
International Festival		\$ 6,345.70	International Festival		\$ 1,040.00	International Festival		\$ -
Indigenous Peoples Day	\$ -		Indigenous Peoples Day	\$ -		Indigenous Peoples Day	\$ -	
500.00			500.00			500.00		
			Pride Event - Story Clear Film	\$ 500.00		Pride Event		
			500.00			500.00		
Total Expenses	\$ 4,944.13	\$ 6,345.70	Total Expenses	\$ 500.00	\$ 1,040.00	Total Expenses	\$ -	\$ -
Net 22-23	\$ 1,005.87	\$ 1,966.30	Net 23-24	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 3,260.00	Net 24-25	\$ -	\$ -
Balance on hand	\$ 3,997.75	\$ 5,951.74	Balance on hand	\$ 5,497.75	\$ 9,211.74	Balance on hand	\$ 5,497.75	\$ 3,985.44