

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, February 6, 2023

5:00 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Hunter Kirschner, Vice Chair
Jan Manwaring
Dr. Dottie Morris (left at 5:50 PM)
Dr. Mohammed Saleh
Marti Fiske
Councilor Catherine Workman (arrived at 5:05 PM)
Rabbi Daniel Aronson

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities
Director

Members Not Present:

Ritu Budakoti, Alternate
Heidi Schwieger, Alternate
Dr. Shaun Filiault

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos read the HRC's statement: *"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."* She called the meeting to order at 5:02 PM.

2) Approval of January 9, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Dr. Morris made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of January 9, 2023. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by a vote of 6-0. Dr. Saleh abstained.

3) Finance Report

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that it seems like the Finance Report is the same as last month. Mr. Bohannon replied that the only change is that he/the HRC bought coffee for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event. He continued that it was \$45.55.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she noticed the Finance Report does not have each event's budget listed. Mr. Bohannon replied that he can put the number in if the committee wants him to. Discussion ensued and Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked him to put the numbers in parentheses in the titles, so people know what the events' budgets are.

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

Dr. Morris reported that she and others from the MDEIB will meet with the Keene High School principal on February 14 to discuss matters related to the high school.

Councilor Workman arrived at 5:05 PM.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the next MDEIB meeting is Monday, January 20. He continued that their request to the City for additional funding was granted. Momentum is beginning to build.

Mr. Aronson stated that Dan Smith from the YMCA/MDEIB called him today, to go over Jewish holidays for scheduling purposes. He continued that regarding the upcoming meeting with the principal that Dr. Morris mentioned, a parallel process is happening with anti-Semitism work, with one of the parents who has been convening many meetings. Good work is being done there.

5) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the HRC probably needs some structure for this agenda item. She continued that perhaps it would be helpful for the chairs of event subcommittees/working groups, which includes herself, to have a deadline each month for when to submit reports to be included (in the agenda packet). Discussion ensued. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos suggested the deadline be the 15th of the month. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the HRC also needs to identify a chair for each of the working groups, although she does not know what the process for that looks like. Discussion ensued.

Ms. Fiske stated that the chair of an event's working group might not have anything to report sometimes, such as two months after an event happens (which is 10 months before it will be happening again). Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that is fine; they can set an expectation that in the, say, three to six months leading up to the event, the HRC will be given information as appropriate. She continued that there is no expectation that every chair will rigorously submit updates every month. However, having a structure is a good place to start, such as a monthly deadline for needed updates to be submitted, and identifying a person from each group to be the one giving the updates.

Discussion ensued about working group chairs and members. The following were identified:

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event: chaired by Mr. Aronson

Pride Month: chaired by Mr. Kirschner
Juneteenth: chaired by Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos
Indigenous People's Day: chaired by Ms. Fiske

Mr. Kirschner asked about the structure of the updates. What specifically should be included? Discussion ensued, and the HRC members suggested the following information be included in the reports, when known and when applicable:

- Event date, time, location, and what it will be.
- Financial implications, such as the event's budget, what the working group plans to spend, and their plan for how to make up the difference (if needed).
- Request for volunteers/more working group members
- Any other asks for the HRC

A) Black History Month – Movie “Till” February 15 and 16, 7:00 PM Colonial Showroom

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the agenda packet includes the flyer for this event, which came together very quickly and very nicely. She continued that her one question is whether people wanting to attend the movie need to register. Mr. Bohannon replied no, they can just show up.

Dr. Morris stated that she contacted Harvey Keye, a former legislator who pushed the State of New Hampshire to recognize Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as a holiday. She continued that he is now in his 80s and has many stories to tell. He will most likely lead a post-film discussion on one or both nights. Discussion continued about Mr. Keye's work. Dr. Morris shared more information about him.

Ms. Fiske stated that she was not aware of this at the time when the HRC was planning its showing of Till, but the Library will also be showing it the following week, February 22 at 6:00 PM. She continued that it is part of their “Movies You Might Have Missed” series. Discussion continued.

Dr. Saleh asked about the publicity for the film. Mr. Bohannon shared information about locations of the flyer/event listing. He continued that the Monadnock Food Co-op has a sign, and the option for customers to “round up” their purchase total to the nearest dollar, with the difference going to a local organization/cause, and this month that “round up” money is going to this. It will cover the expense of the movie license. Savings Bank of Walpole is covering one night and Bensonwood is covering the second night.

Mr. Bohannon continued that as a result of his conversations with Ted Benson, the owner of Bensonwood, he will now be joining the HRC as an alternate member. HRC members replied that that is great news. Mr. Bohannon continued that that is in process with the City Council and

he should be confirmed by the next HRC meeting. Mr. Benson will not be able to attend all of the meetings, but he is very interested in the work the committee is doing and is pleased to join.

B) Juneteenth

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the event will be June 17, because Juneteenth is a Monday. She continued that it will be 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

Councilor Workman stated that her friend from Badger Balm attended the last two Juneteenth events the HRC has held, and last year, her friend approached her to say that Badger Balm would like to help. She continued that the Juneteenth working group welcomes them; they had some good ideas. They likely will be able to bring in a podcaster from the Black Cowboys podcast who does a performance similar to a TED Talk. The Gaslight Tinkers will likely also join the event, which they look forward to. They do Afro funk and reggae music. Mr. Bohannon spoke positively about Black Cowboys and the Gaslight Tinkers. Discussion continued.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the Juneteenth working group is meeting again tomorrow at 6:00 PM, if anyone wants to come.

6) Racial Justice and Community Safety Report

Mr. Bohannon stated that prior to the HRC meeting, he sent around the executive summary that Dr. Filiault wrote about the RJCS Report, so everyone could prepare thoughts for it for this meeting. He continued that Ms. Fiske sent some input around for the committee to consider. It is open to discussion.

Ms. Fiske stated that her feedback is regarding the last page of the document. [In response to "*It is recommended that the City review Cheshire TV programming and encourage additions and changes that promote diversity and inclusion,*" Dr. Filiault wrote on the HRC's behalf, "*Since the time of the report, Cheshire TV went off the air.*"] She continued that when the HRC was discussing the RJCS Report, no one was doing the public access station, so the HRC did not have any recommendations. Now the City does have a public access station again. Does the HRC want to make a recommendation before they send out this executive summary? Others replied yes. Ms. Fiske replied that she proposes the executive summary say: "*The HRC recommends that the City consider making minimum requirements for inclusive and diverse programming a condition of future contracts with public access television providers.*" Others agreed.

Mr. Aronson made a motion to include Ms. Fiske's recommendation in the final executive summary. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the next step is for him to contact Dr. Filiault to ask for the executive summary in Word Doc format instead of PDF, and to incorporate Ms. Fiske's addition.

Ms. Manwaring stated that she has an addition as well. She continued that she is not sure where to put it, but she thinks there should be a comment about the HRC. She would like the City to support the HRC more. She drafted: *“to support the Human Rights Committee and its efforts to educate the community with events focused on these issues: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Juneteenth, Indigenous People's Day, LGBTQ and Pride, and the Keene International Festival.”* She does not see many City officials at the HRC's events. The HRC's new webpage looks nice but does not talk about what the committee is doing, other than MLK Day. It should include information about Juneteenth, Indigenous People's Day, and so on and so forth. She thinks the HRC needs to promote itself more and be included somewhere in the recommendations in the “Community” section, such as 1.B. [*“It is recommended that the City work with community stakeholders to establish clear community racial equity and inclusivity goals and that the goals be widely adopted by the City and Keene agencies and businesses.”*]

Discussion ensued. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that listing the specific events might not work, because the HRC might do more events in the future. She continued that in addition, there is opportunity for the City to support the HRC more broadly, beyond attendance at events.

Mr. Kirschner asked if they want to amplify the work of the MDEIB, the work the Chamber is doing, or the work of other groups. Ms. Fiske replied that they might want to make a separate statement about the HRC, because they are asking for financial support, support in advertising, and so on and so forth. Then they could make another statement about amplifying the missions and work of other community organizations, and list them.

Dr. Morris replied that Ms. Manwaring is making a point that is critical to not lose: are they supporting the already-existing City committee? She continued that they could have a statement about increased financial support for the HRC to do some of the items in the report. The HRC does educational events, thus, they are providing some of the educational foundation that people would need. Yes, recommendation 1.B is about “stakeholders,” but as Ms. Manwaring says, there needs to be a specific statement about the existing City committee.

Ms. Manwaring stated that a different issue is that it is difficult for people to find the HRC's agendas and meeting minutes on the City's website, due to the layout and the way the boards and commissions are listed. Discussion ensued. Mr. Bohannon showed the different paths on the website that lead to the boards and commissions, noting that the most direct route would be the “Residents” tab at the top, and then choosing the “Boards & Commissions” link under the “My City Government” category.

Discussion continued about editing the executive summary of the RJCS Report. Mr. Bohannon stated that Dr. Filiault wanted it to be no longer than three pages, but given tonight's feedback, he thinks they should go on to four pages. He continued that they can include a statement about the HRC's purpose, its events, and so on and so forth. He will send this revised draft back out to the HRC members for review and they can adopt it at the next meeting.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she noticed a couple typos and missing words. She asked if there is a method for collectively working on this, without accidentally creating a quorum. Mr. Bohannon replied that he just needs the Word Doc from Dr. Filiault. Mr. Aronson asked if HRC members should email Mr. Bohannon if they see edits to be made. Mr. Bohannon replied yes. Discussion continued about technology/software available to allow collaboration. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that for now, people can send their edits to Mr. Bohannon for him to incorporate, and if he has to create a bunch of duplicate drafts, that is the price they have to pay to ensure they are not accidentally creating a quorum. She continued that Mr. Bohannon can consolidate the changes into a revised draft and bring it to the next meeting. Mr. Bohannon replied yes.

Mr. Kirschner stated that 1.C in the RJCS Report says, *“It is recommended that the City continue its commitment and efforts toward racial justice and community safety whether via an existing committee such as the Human Rights Committee, a new equity and inclusion task force, or a joint effort of multiple community organizations and agencies.”* He continued that 1.C is not in the executive summary, but this could be an appropriate place to include the statement about the support for the HRC.

Mr. Kirschner stated that the executive summary entirely removes the RJCS Report’s Education section, which is strange. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she thinks that is because the HRC concluded that they did not have the [authority to do anything about Education]. Mr. Kirschner replied that that may be true, but the way the executive summary is written, one would not even know that Education was part of the RJCS’s report. He continued that the HRC is also not making comments about Public Safety, but it at least is listed as part of the report.

Dr. Morris left at 5:50 PM.

Mr. Kirschner stated that he thinks the executive summary should at least include Education as a category. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos agreed.

7) **Community Survey – <https://tinyurl.com/DiscrimSurvey>**

Mr. Bohannon stated that he has been trying to connect with the two folks from the group in Lebanon, NH that is the equivalency of the HRC. He continued that they are still trying to find a time to meet, so he can give the HRC a report of what Lebanon has done. What he has learned so far is that the Lebanon group has surveyed people who come into Lebanon about their experiences there. The link gives people a place to report their experiences, both positive and negative. When he is able to schedule a meeting with these folks, if anyone from the HRC is interested in joining, they are welcome to do so. He will keep them informed about the date and time.

Councilor Workman stated that she looked at the link Mr. Bohannon sent to the survey Lebanon has, and she really likes the concept. She continued that the RJCS Committee had talked about

how it would be possible to collect data from folks living in Keene who may have unsavory experiences, and how to document those. The big question, though, was what to do with the data if they collect it. She likes seeing that another municipality was looking at the same thing and taking it on.

Ms. Fiske stated that she appreciated that the Lebanon group talks about their community's demographics. She continued that it would be interesting to have a drill down on the demographics for Keene residents. It would be helpful for residents to be aware of what their community demographics are, as education for the people who say, "*We don't even have [XYZ] people here, what's the problem?*"

8) New Business

Mr. Aronson stated that they did not have a debrief about the MLK Day event. He continued that he thought there was great attendance, and the event was incredibly well presented. Mr. Bohannon replied that there were 74 people there. Discussion ensued and HRC members spoke positively about the event. Mr. Bohannon complimented the work of Jennifer Carroll, former HRC member, and thanked Ms. Manwaring for bringing this to the HRC's attention. He continued that Ms. Carroll will be presenting to Dr. Morris's class (at KSC) this month.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she attended a meeting at the Cohen Center and heard a presentation from the New Hampshire Center for Justice and Equity (NHCJE), a new organization in the same line of work as the HRC. She continued that they appear to be a resource the HRC may be able to engage with and tap into. Their website is nhcje.org. They offer trainings, and have done many already with police departments. Councilor Workman replied that she is in conversation with someone from the NHCJE to come present to the MDEIB Coalition. She continued that maybe when that is scheduled, they could do a joint meeting with the HRC and the MDEIB. Discussion continued.

9) Adjournment – Next Meeting Monday, March 6, 2023 at 5:00 PM

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:58 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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