

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

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

**Monday, March 6, 2023**

**5:00 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair  
Hunter Kirschner, Vice Chair  
Jan Manwaring  
Dr. Dottie Morris (until 5:50 PM)  
Dr. Mohammed Saleh  
Marti Fiske  
Rabbi Daniel Aronson

**Staff Present:**

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

**Members Not Present:**

Dr. Shaun Filiault  
Councilor Catherine Workman  
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate

**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."*

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

**2) Approval of February 6, 2023, Meeting Minutes**

Mr. Aronson made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of February 6, 2023. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

**3) Finance Report**

Mr. Bohannon reported that he has not had a chance to reflect the Till event. He continued that they received some of the funding but not all of it. He will update that and pass along the

invoice total as well. He has not received a bill from Vicky Pitman. He will send her a reminder about that.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Dr. Morris and Councilor Workman are both members of the MDEIB and the HRC. She asked if they had an update. Dr. Morris replied that she did attend the most recent MDEIB meeting but does not have much to update the HRC on today. Mr. Aronson asked if she was at the meeting with the high school administrators. Dr. Morris replied yes, and it was very good. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked her to share more about that during the “New Business” agenda item.

5) **Todd Horner – Multimodal Transportation**

Mr. Bohannon reported that Todd Horner is ill and thus not joining the meeting today. He continued that he would like to come in April, if appropriate. Mr. Horner works for the Southwest Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC). He asked Mr. Horner to come related to the Downtown Infrastructure Project that is happening and talk about access availability for all of the multimodal transportation options that should be part of the conversation and what the HRC might be able to offer the City in relation to issues of human rights, access, and equitable opportunities. He will put this on the HRC’s April agenda. Mr. Horner will talk for about 20 minutes but wants a conversation with the HRC, not just to give a presentation. The HRC can ask questions and hear about the input the SWRPC has been able to provide to the Downtown Infrastructure Project.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos thanked Mr. Bohannon. Mr. Bohannon stated that the reason he brought this to the HRC’s Chair and Vice Chair is because the current downtown corridor has the Cheshire Rail Trail, and Hundred Nights is moving to Water St. but will still be connected to the rail trail, and there is a lot of infrastructure changing with various improvements and amenities. It is a major thoroughfare for individuals who utilize the shelter as well as individuals coming into Keene and looking to find where to go, and they want to make sure that whatever the City builds is a successful model for all. That is part of Mr. Horner’s conversation.

Ms. Fiske asked if there has been conversation about sidewalk levels for the (downtown) stores that have steps leading up. Mr. Bohannon replied that that has been part of the conversation, yes, but the challenge is that those are private property. Access into various storefronts is definitely a concern. For example, a few years ago, Citizen’s Bank had steps, and they made a ramp. Some people were asking how big the ramp would be and how much it would “infringe on the existing sidewalk,” but they came to a fair solution. Discussion continued. Mr. Bohannon stated that this is a good question they should be asking.

6) **Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**  
A) **Black History Month – Movie “Till”**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos congratulated Dr. Morris and Mr. Bohannon. She continued that this was a wonderful event and a wonderful example of partnering with others in the community. Mr. Bohannon reported that there were 72 attendees the first night and 92 the second night, very good representation. He continued that Harvey Keye presented after the movie on the second night and it was an engaging, moving conversation. The pre-conversation on the first night was dynamic as well. He, Mark Belden, and Dan Smith from the YMCA met the morning after and talked about how well it went. Dr. Saleh spoke positively about the event and shared that the theater location was a little hard to find/confusing to some people. Others agreed. Ms. Fiske stated that a comment she heard from a member of the public was that she “didn’t think there was a dry eye in the place.”

**B) Juneteenth**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the agenda packet includes the Juneteenth subcommittee report, but there is nothing in particular to highlight or for the HRC to discuss today. She continued that if anyone has questions, they can let her know. Ms. Fiske asked what “first pass program identified” means. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that the subcommittee has identified what they would like the program to be (like a “rough draft”), and then they will be in communications with the various people they are hoping can participate, to see who is actually available and who is not. They probably will have to come back to the drawing board, e.g., if they find out someone cannot participate, they will try someone else.

Dr. Morris stated that a topic that came up in the MDEIB meeting was whether Juneteenth was coordinating more with the YMCA this year. She continued that that will be discussed more at the next meeting – how to align better with the YMCA and any other groups doing something for Juneteenth. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that the HRC’s Juneteenth subcommittee has also been discussing this, as someone from Badger Balm has joined the subcommittee and Badger Balm is also doing a Juneteenth event after the one the HRC is doing. They discussed that it makes more sense to tie all these things in and work together to make it a broader/all community set of events, rather than working in silos. The subcommittee meets tomorrow. She asked if Dr. Morris is the correct liaison between the Juneteenth subcommittee and the MDEIB. Dr. Morris replied no, Councilor Workman is, because she is the MDEIB chair.

Mr. Bohannon stated that in his meeting with Mr. Smith and Mr. Belden, he proposed facilitating a better opportunity marketing-wise. He continued that each group could do their own thing but market the events together. Feedback they received in the past was that promoting events together would help the community understand that the groups are unified and give the public options for which event(s) to attend based on their availability. He heard from Mr. Smith that the YMCA had not started planning a Juneteenth event yet and told Mr. Smith the HRC would

have a Juneteenth plan in place by April 1, and at that time, they could begin to collaborate on the marketing efforts. Mr. Smith and Mr. Belden are happy about that.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the HRC members were going to send any edits they had (for the executive summary of the HRC's recommendations regarding the RJCS report) to Mr. Bohannon. Mr. Bohannon replied that he received them. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the edits are in the process of being incorporated. Mr. Bohannon replied that he did not get to it yet, due to having been in budget mode, but he can make that turnaround time. He received edits from Mr. Kirschner. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that if anyone has edits, they had not sent in yet, they still have time.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked Mr. Bohannon about this. Is this about the work Lebanon, NH is doing? Mr. Bohannon replied that the plan had been for him to reconnect with the folks in Lebanon, with HRC members invited to (the meeting/conversation) that was set up, but that conversation did not happen. He continued that he can try again to make this happen.

9) **New Business**

Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager, stated that April is Genocide Awareness Month, and the Cohen Center is having Omar (Ndizeye), a survivor of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, come do a discussion, talking about his history and his book. She continued that the day after, the Cohen Center wants to do a community group presentation around restorative justice. The director of the Cohen Center reached out to her and others in the community who do restorative justice work. They have been meeting, planning a two-part event for April 13, a panel discussion with Mr. Ndizeye in the morning, then lunch, and community building circles in the afternoon. She and the Cohen Center want to know if the HRC would be interested in helping out and/or being part of a supporting group. She will have more details for the HRC after she attends another meeting tomorrow with the others who are involved.

Discussion ensued. HRC members asked Ms. Bender questions about the details and logistics. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if HRC members are interested in getting more information about this. Others replied yes. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked Ms. Bender if she can email more information to the HRC. Ms. Bender replied yes.

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

Dr. Morris reported that she, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos, Mr. Bohannon, and others from the community, such as Dan Smith from the YMCA, and Rick Van Winkler, who was a co-chair of the RJCS Committee, met with Keene High School principal Dr. Gallagher in regard to more

concerns she (Dr. Morris) had heard from some parents about Racism within the school. It was a meeting to find out more information and offer support. She continued that the meeting went well, and Dr. Gallagher was able to talk about the variety of things going on at the high school. It seems like there is a lot going on, and many people are approaching her and asking to help. Thus, there is a great awareness that things are not shaping up in the way we would want for our young people to be experiencing in high school. It was helpful to hear Dr. Gallagher talk about the various initiatives, and she was open to doing whatever people felt like they could contribute to creating a better environment for the students. They are all meeting again tomorrow to pin down some actions to take between now and the close of the academic year, and the plan for next year. Dr. Gallagher mentioned that she wishes there were more mentors of color for high school students, which is something to think about. When some LGBTQ folks stepped forward, they soon formed an organization with many students involved, but the same thing does not exist for other students. That was a great request for Dr. Gallagher to make.

Mr. Bohannon asked if Dr. Morris thinks the HRC might be able to help facilitate (finding mentors of color). Dr. Morris replied yes, she thinks they could. Mr. Bohannon asked if the KSC would be a resource. Dr. Morris replied that a while back, a parent of a child of color was seeking other children/families of color for her family to connect with, and she created a Saturday morning program that was quite successful. She continued that some KSC students attended/supported it. The program dwindled once summer came. They were thinking of starting it up again, but the parent who had created it, who had great connections in the community, passed away suddenly. A program like this could potentially be restarted and there are other people who would want to help support children of color. The high school could have a similar model.

Discussion ensued. Mr. Bohannon stated that the Rec Center could potentially host it. Ms. Fiske replied or the Library, if it was open to the general public. Dr. Morris stated that she would like to do focus groups with the students who meet the demographic and knows an 11<sup>th</sup> grade student who could probably help her pull together some students. She was one of the original kids in that group she just spoke of, when she was younger.

Discussion continued about the importance of Keene being a supportive, welcoming community. Dr. Morris stated that she is asked a lot, by people considering moving to Keene, "How are the schools?" She does not have personal experience with the Keene schools and thus refers people to parents with school-aged children. Her former physician in Keene was a man of color, and when he and his wife decided to move out of Keene, he told her, "I can't sacrifice my children anymore." Those were his exact words. It was heartbreaking to hear.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked Dr. Morris to continue updating the HRC on all of this, and to let the HRC know how they can help. Mr. Bohannon replied that they try to facilitate this through the MDEIB. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that they are trying to strengthen the connection between the HRC and the MDEIB. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, the survey is part of that. He continued that the Lebanon survey was to gather people's experiences within their

community, and the information goes to a neutral location, not a city staff person. The committee fosters the process, so there is no bias attached to it.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there was more new business.

Ms. Manwaring stated that this might be in the category of “old business,” but at a previous meeting, the HRC had talked about possibly needing to address anti-Semitism. She continued that Mr. Aronson was going to think about it and get back to the HRC. There was an incident in Portsmouth a week or two ago. What if anti-Semitism comes to Keene and they are not prepared?

Mr. Aronson stated that on April 23 there will be a panel discussion at the synagogue, with a keynote speaker from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). He continued that he would moderate that discussion and is part of the planning committee for it. The gist of it is that it will be a reality check about anti-Semitism in the region. Some people are in denial that there are any issues, and there are also people who have an exaggerated sense of threat. There is not a lot happening here; they are not seeing swastikas on every stop sign, but it does exist. He encouraged the chair of that program to submit a letter asking the HRC to help fund this program, but he (the chair of the program) may or may not do that. There is a parent at the high school who is very involved (in anti-Semitism work), working with the administration and making sure people do not jump on the bandwagon and make things more complicated than it needs to be. A couple people in his synagogue think they should be reaching out to/meeting with the principal and the superintendent, but that is not necessary. He hears from the school, this parent, Dr. Morris, and others, that the high school is on top of things. They care and they are going through a process, and do not need “outside agitators.” People with children are as involved as they want to be, and do not need random people from the community knocking on their door saying, “This is what you should do.”

Ms. Manwaring stated that what she was thinking, which is in agreement with what Mr. Aronson is saying, is that the HRC could write some sort of statement or letter acknowledging that if there were an incident, they would be prepared and have been thinking about it and are concerned about it. She continued that she is not sure people actually read the HRC’s meeting minutes.

Dr. Saleh stated that if someone had not posted about the incident in Portsmouth on Facebook, he would not have known there were anti-Semitic incidents like that happening in NH. He continued that he guesses that many people do not know. Anything the HRC can do to facilitate awareness may be helpful, although others argue against bringing attention to such things so as not to “glorify” them, so it is complicated.

Dr. Morris replied that she had not known about the Portsmouth incident, either, until she was in Portsmouth and people were about to have a rally in response. She continued that there were several incidents’ people were concerned about. Mr. Aronson stated that there were a couple incidents of graffiti at a Portsmouth synagogue, and that same week, vandalism to storefronts

that are somehow associated with people of color, LGBTQ people, progressive values, and so on and so forth. In Manchester and Concord there have been other incidents of anti-Semitism and other types of hate, over the past couple of years, things that Keene has not experienced. Last weekend, there was online chatter about a “National Day of Hate.” The Jewish community was very aware of this. He thought it was focused on not just anti-Semitism, but other forms of hatred, but when he called the Police Chief to ask that the Police keep an eye out during the synagogue’s programming, the Police Chief told him he had only heard about the “National Day of Hate” the day before. The Jewish community had been hearing about it for weeks. As it turns out, nothing happened on that day, in the state or in the country, as far as he is aware. Dr. Morris replied that it (announcing the impending “National Day of Hate”) is itself a form of terrorism. She continued that she heard a lot about it, too, from her family in the south. Discussion continued.

Dr. Morris left at 5:50 PM.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the April 23 event at the synagogue is open to the public. Mr. Aronson replied that he will find out. He continued that if HRC members want to come, they are welcome, whether it is a public event or not. He likes the idea of it being a public event. He does not feel there is a great sense of interest, or urgency, from the community.

Dr. Saleh asked what the goal of the program is. Mr. Aronson replied that that is still being defined, but his understanding is that it will be a reality check, information sharing, so that everyone has the same information with which to gauge the extent of anti-Semitism in Keene and the surrounding area. Ms. Fiske replied that if it is a public event, they can post it on the bulletin board at the Library, if he sends her the flyer/information.

Dr. Saleh stated that he has an idea – if people were spreading the idea of a “day of hate,” even if nothing resulted from it, what if the HRC started a “day of solidarity”? It could highlight the importance of everyone being connected and that there is no place for hate. Keene could have a “day of love.” It is something to think about. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she likes the concept.

Mr. Aronson stated that another item of new business is that on April 27, the Monadnock Interfaith Project will have an interfaith Passover Seder. He continued that he is working on this with Reverend Sandra Whippie of the Walpole Unitarian Universalist church. They hope to have the event on the KSC campus. People can register to attend and are asked to give a donation to help cover the costs. There may be a request coming to the HRC from the MIP to co-sponsor this.

Ms. Manwaring stated that when you enter City Hall, there are panels, and the City Clerk’s Office put together a (display) for Black History Month, which will stay up longer than that. She continued that the Clerk’s Office asked her to help with it. It has Jonathan Daniels, Dr. (Albert) Johnston (a Keene physician in the 1940s, subject of the movie “Lost Boundaries”), and George

Miller. A sad story is that Mr. Miller one day went to Dr. Johnston's office to give blood, and the nurse asked Dr. Johnston, "What do I do with this?" Dr. Johnston told her to put it with all the other blood. The nurse could not deal with that and instead dropped it. Mr. Miller died in 1978 and just had one little line in the Keene Sentinel saying that he died. She is glad this display is in City Hall. It was done with the help of the Cheshire County Historical Society. She encourages everyone to go take a look.

**10) Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, April 3, 2023, at 5:00 PM**

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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