

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

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

**Monday, April 3, 2023**

**5:00 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair  
Hunter Kirschner, Vice Chair  
Dr. Dottie Morris (left at 5:50 PM)  
Marti Fiske  
Rabbi Daniel Aronson  
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager

**Members Not Present:**

Dr. Mohammed Saleh  
Councilor Catherine Workman  
Dr. Shaun Filiault  
Jan Manwaring  
Tedd Benson, Alternate  
Heidi Schwieger, 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."*

She called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM. Roll call was conducted.

**2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – March 6, 2023**

Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 6, 2023. Dr. Morris seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) **Finance Report**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Mr. Bohannon updated some expenses. She continued that the Finance Report today is informational and Mr. Bohannon is not present to answer questions. She asked, with that caveat, does anyone have questions? Hearing none, she moved on in the agenda.

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

Dr. Morris reported that the Education Subcommittee has been meeting with the Keene High School (KHS) principal, Dr. Gallagher. She continued that those meetings will continue, and the group is thinking about things district-wide, so they are not just focusing on the high school. The MDEIB as a whole continues to meet and to focus on fundraising efforts.

5) **Todd Horner**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos invited Todd Horner to speak.

Mr. Horner stated that he is here representing the City's Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee (BPPAC). He continued that Mr. Bohannon suggested he come to a HRC meeting so the two groups can "cross pollinate" a bit and share what each group is doing and talk about potential intersections of their respective work. BPPAC members have talked about ways that equity and social justice might intersect with the BPPAC's work. Their focus has primarily been on disability rights, but there are of course others ways that human rights and social justice intersect with transportation, especially active transportation.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that this came up as a function of the Downtown Infrastructure project and some efforts to make the City's bike paths more accessible and some considerations specifically around e-bikes. She asked if that is correct. Mr. Horner replied that from an affordability standpoint, bikes and e-bikes are within reach of many more households than a personal auto, which is why Mr. Bohannon brought that up. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if that is coming up, or if this is more of a general conversation. Mr. Horner replied more of a general conversation, although they can talk about downtown specifically if that is where folks want to focus. The City has many construction projects coming up in the next few years, so he was thinking of a more general conversation about what the HRC sees as issues, concerns, or policy concerns that the BPPAC might want to think about related to social justice and equity. He read the Racial Justice and Community Safety (RJCS) Report, flagging areas where he thought there might be overlap. They can also talk about specific locations. The BPPAC wants to know about locations where people are struggling to navigate.

Discussion ensued. Ms. Fiske spoke about a lack of bicycle storage at various shopping plazas around town, and lack of access for people with disabilities/mobility issues, and the importance of increasing their access to bus routes, including for evening hours, events, and so on and so

forth. Mr. Horner replied that the BPPAC has not yet focused on transit as much as they should, but he works for the Southwest Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC), which works with communities in the region on public policy issues, including transit. This next fiscal year they will conduct a feasibility study about what it would be like if there was improved public transit in the area - what sort of organizational structure would be necessary in order to keep that going? HCS (Home Healthcare, Hospice, and Community Services) runs the bus service because no one else stepped up to run it decades ago, but it is not HCS's organizational mission as a healthcare service provider.

Dr. Morris asked if there are plans for a bike share/bike rental service in town. Mr. Horner replied not to his knowledge. He continued that it would be great, but he has not heard anyone talking about this in concrete terms, just conceptual-level conversations. Dr. Morris spoke about the bike-sharing program at KSC and how another program works in Bellows Falls. Discussion continued about the complexities of bike share programs.

Mr. Aronson stated that his congregation has many people for whom a bike would not be helpful, because they are elderly, have health issues, and so on and so forth. Many cannot or should not drive at night. People are good at giving others rides as needed. He imagines that other faith communities in town have similar populations of people with mobility issues and transportation needs.

Mr. Horner stated that in the RJCS Report, the first sentence in the introduction recognizes acts of racism from unfair lack of access to resources. There are obviously different forms of "access," but the ability to freely move through a community and travel to opportunities is critical. He continued that the "public safety" category of recommendations mentions limiting interventions from law enforcement unless absolutely necessary, and frequently he hears people talk about increasing pedestrian safety by increasing law enforcement presence on the street, at intersections, setting up speed traps to reduce speeding, and so on and so forth. That is generally not a good long-term solution to pedestrian safety. Design-based solutions are better.

Discussion continued. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that there are areas of Keene that are not accessible at all by bicycle or anything other than a car. She asked if the BPPAC or SWRPC is looking at that. Mr. Horner replied absolutely, and he habitually takes photos of such locations and instances when he sees them, such as people with mobility aids in the middle of the street as they try to go to essential places. He gave examples, like Rt. 10 heading toward Market Basket and the Market Basket parking lot, and the Hannaford parking lot. Discussion continued about the safety issues for pedestrians and cyclists trying to access the Target plaza from the bike path out back.

Dr. Morris asked what models there are for Keene to look at, and what the obstacles are for doing certain things. She asked if it is a financial issue. Mr. Horner replied that seizing opportunity when it strikes is one reason why the BPPAC is interested in tying these improvements in with the Downtown Reconstruction Project – a lot of that work has to happen

anyway, so it will not incur additional costs to make certain changes. The City could even save money, since a lot of grant funding is tied to multi-modal improvements. The City of Concord, NH went through a similar project several years ago, and a great improvement they made was an improvement to ADA access into most Main St. storefronts. That required a partnership between the municipality and private property owners. He has not inventoried Keene's downtown storefronts to see which are accessible and which are not. Ms. Fiske replied that most have at least one step, and many have several steps. Discussion continued about the challenges of making downtown businesses accessible, and examples of businesses that are accessible.

Mr. Horner stated that he will bring these issues and this information back to the BPPAC, since this is something they should flag for the City Council as they are talking about this downtown project. He continued that he would be happy to keep in touch with the HRC and come to another meeting sometime. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the BPPAC holds public hearings about designs. Mr. Horner replied that the BPPAC meetings are open to the public, and usually small, but the BPPAC has been participating in the public hearings the City Council has been holding on the Downtown Infrastructure Project. There are separate committees focused on other construction projects in the City, so there are opportunities for the HRC to weigh in on projects.

Ms. Budakoti asked Ms. Fiske about the Community Listens project at the Library, and about whether one of those sessions would be something Mr. Horner would be interested in. Ms. Fiske replied that they finished the public sessions, but she would be happy to connect with Mr. Horner about it.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the Juneteenth working group has been meeting and their budget is looking to be about \$2,800 at last count, and they start with \$500 from the HRC, so they have started working on identifying community partners to reach out to. She continued that they welcome other HRC members' ideas for who they could talk to, and connections to potential support for the event.

Ms. Fiske asked what the event will be like. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it will be 11 AM to 2 PM on Saturday, June 17, on Railroad Square, beginning with a welcome and introduction from Kris Roberts. She continued that they envision a musical act for about 45 minutes, a speaker for 15 minutes, then more alternating speakers and musical acts. The person who is confirmed so far is Zaron, creator of the Black Cowboys podcast. Multiple Juneteenth events are happening in the city that weekend, and the working group is trying to connect with those other groups so they can present a unified program of events to the entire community and coordinate better than they have in past years. Dr. Morris added that she was supposed to talk with the choir, and she will talk them soon. Ms. Fiske stated that if the working group is looking for sponsors for the entertainers, the Library might be able to help. Discussion continued about

the setup of the space at Railroad Square and the logistics of shade, water, the sound system, and so on and so forth.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she is not sure where the (executive summary of the HRC's recommendations regarding the RJCS Report) stands, and Dr. Filiault is not here tonight. She continued that she knows some edits were put in. She asked the group to take five minutes to review the document and then share their thoughts.

Dr. Morris stated that she has a correction for something under "4C," which recommends a "trailing spouse program" – KSC does not have an official trailing spouse program, although she has been trying for years to start one. Thus, they should scratch off "as adopted by Keene State."

Dr. Morris asked if they can add Franklin Pierce under 4E, as a potential source of internships, even though this is regarding Keene and Franklin Pierce is in a different town. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she thinks it is fine to add, and asked for others' thoughts. Ms. Fiske suggested the HRC vote on all of the edits at the end.

Ms. Fiske noted a scrivener's error at the bottom of the last page – the HRC's statement ("In our efforts to create a more just society...") is there, and is probably not meant to be. It is out of context.

Mr. Aronson noted another scrivener's error in the second paragraph: "Racial Justice and Community Safety Community Safety Committee Report." He continued that regarding the trailing spouses program, it would help to have a clause that explains what that is, for people unfamiliar with it.

Mr. Aronson continued that the second to last sentence under 4E says "racially diverse student," and he is not sure what that means. He continued that the full sentence is, "Working without pay would pose economic challenges for many students, especially racially diverse student who are..." Others replied that it should say "students" to be grammatically correct. Mr. Aronson replied that it is more than that; the term "racially diverse students" is not necessarily a helpful category. He continued that the term occurs again under 4I, regarding "serving racially and linguistically diverse people."

Lengthy discussion ensued about what the term "racially diverse students" means, and what the HRC is trying to say. Mr. Kirschner stated that to him the term "racially diverse" would include white students, and they are not talking about white students. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked what Mr. Aronson thinks makes sense. Mr. Aronson suggested "a racially diverse community." He continued that what is diverse is the *community* of students. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if "especially from racially diverse communities, who are historically socio-economically disadvantaged" makes sense. Ms. Budakoti stated that to her the text looks fine as it is, the

racially diverse student community. She continued that her recommended change is adding the word “community” after “student.” She agreed that the sentence did not make sense to her the first time she read it. Mr. Aronson replied that a student could be racially diverse, but they are talking about a community of people where there are different nationalities, different backgrounds, and different races, and it looks funny to talk about a racially diverse *person*. “Racially and linguistically diverse people” sounds like they are describing individuals, each of whom is racially and linguistically diverse, which is grammatically off. Ms. Fiske replied that the main thing is to get it to be a plural subject.

Discussion continued on the term. Mr. Aronson stated that terms like “racially and linguistically diverse people” makes it seem like they are avoiding saying words like “people of color,” “people from minority backgrounds,” and so on and so forth. It sounds like an awkward way to try to be politically correct. Mr. Kirschner replied that he thinks they should table this, because it seems like this needs to be a bigger conversation. He continued that “racial diversity” is used a lot in this, and “racially diverse” as a descriptor, and he is also not clear about what was meant by that. He wishes Dr. Morris were still here, because she was on the RJCS Committee and could maybe give some insight. Again, to him, the term “racially diverse” includes white people.

Ms. Bender stated that the HRC can email Mr. Bohannon thoughts about edits, and this specific line/term can be set aside for a discussion for next time. Ms. Budakoti stated that it would be good for the HRC to define what they mean by “racially diverse,” so when it comes up in the future, they are very clear about who they are talking about.

Mr. Kirschner made a motion to table this. Ms. Budakoti seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

#### **8) Community Survey**

Ms. Bender stated that Mr. Bohannon saw that Lebanon’s community survey was no longer on their website, so he has been reaching out to them and asking why – did they get enough responses? She continued that Lebanon is going through the responses. Mr. Bohannon has a link to the summary, which he will send to the HRC to look at.

Ms. Bender continued that there will be a Zoom call with the people from Lebanon who ran the survey, Monday, April 10 at 2:00 PM. She continued that HRC members are invited but there cannot be a quorum of HRC members on that Zoom call. They will talk about how the survey went, what worked well and what did not, and so on and so forth. Hopefully at the next HRC meeting they can discuss more of the survey findings.

**9) New Business**

Ms. Bender stated that it is the last day to register for Building a Restorative Community. She gave the HRC the flyer.

Ms. Bender stated that a letter was sent to the Mayor from John Ripley O'Brian, a poet/composer who created and composed an opera based on the life of Jonathan Daniels. She continued that staff has it, if the HRC is interested in reviewing it. Mr. Aronson replied that he is interested. Discussion ensued. Ms. Fiske stated that the opera could be added to the Library's collection, if Mr. O'Brian is willing to have it placed there, after it has been reviewed. Ms. Bender replied that his contact information is in his letter. She continued that he says he is interested in having it presented by 2025.

Ms. Budakoti stated that the NH Theater Project came to the high school last month, with 40 different stories that were recorded as interviews and enacted on stage. The stories are about immigrants who have come at different times, and what brought them here, what their struggles are, their talents and skills, and so on and so forth. She continued that it was a great program and resonated with her on so many levels. This program needs a wider audience, she realized, after discussing it with her middle school students, who had many questions and expressed doubt that their family members would understand it. She asked if the HRC would co-sponsor this if she were to pursue it. She would begin with a Zoom with the NH Theater Project, which HRC members would be invited to, to see what availability the NH Theater Project has and how much it would cost, given that there are some potential grants and community members who could pitch in.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the HRC is interested. Others replied yes. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked who is interested in joining a Zoom call. Ms. Fiske stated that the Library could be involved with this. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she would like to be on the call as well. Ms. Budakoti thanked the HRC and stated that she will get the ball rolling.

**10) Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 6:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reid, Minute Taker

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