

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

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

**Monday, May 1, 2023**

**5:00 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair  
Hunter Kirschner, Vice Chair  
Jan Manwaring  
Marti Fiske  
Tedd Benson, Alternate  
Rabbi Daniel Aronson (at 5:04 PM)  
Dr. Dottie Morris (at 5:07 PM)  
Dr. Mohammed Saleh (at 5:10 PM)  
Jennifer Nescimento, Alternate (at 5:07 PM)

**Staff Present:**

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

**Members Not Present:**

Councilor Catherine Workman  
Gina Burke  
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."* She called the meeting to order at 5:02 PM. Roll call was conducted. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that alternate member Tedd Benson is a voting member, filling in for Dr. Saleh, until he arrives (if he does).

**2) Approval of Meeting minutes – April 3, 2023**

Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of April 3, 2023. Mr. Kirschner seconded the motion.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he will correct the spelling of "Jon Ripley O'Brien" on page 7 of 7.

The motion to approve the minutes as amended passed unanimously.

Dan Aronson arrived at 5:04 PM.

3) **Finance Report**

Mr. Bohannon reported that there are no changes to report. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the finance report would, at some point, somehow include the information that each of the HRC's events has a budget of \$500. Mr. Bohannon replied that he can find a way to do that again.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Dr. Morris and Councilor Workman are not present to give an update. She continued that they will skip this agenda item.

Jennifer Nescimento and Dr. Dottie Morris arrived at 5:07 PM. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Ms. Nescimento is a voting member today.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if Dr. Morris had an update regarding the MDEIB. Dr. Morris replied not today.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they will deviate from the agenda for a moment to welcome new members Tedd Benson and Jennifer Nescimento. She asked them to briefly introduce themselves, which they did.

5) **Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

A) **Juneteenth**

Dr. Mohammed Saleh arrived at 5:10 PM.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the HRC had any questions about the report that the Juneteenth working group submitted.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he can give an update – in past years, the Keene YMCA has also hosted a Juneteenth event, at their own location. He continued that the HRC's Juneteenth working group had a meeting with folks from the YMCA, and this year the YMCA and the HRC will collaborate and host a Juneteenth event at Railroad Square together. He gave more information about what the YMCA is doing, including a walk they created about the history of Juneteenth. He continued that the YMCA will do the advertising for the event, so the HRC needs to get the necessary information to them, logo-wise. There is a positive feeling about the collaboration, and the unification of the events happening under one umbrella. He appreciates everyone involved.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if Dr. Morris is available for the meeting tomorrow. Dr. Morris replied yes.

Ms. Fiske stated that she talked with the Outreach Programs Librarian, and the Library can do a booth at the event. She continued that the Library cannot sponsor musical events, but could give money for/sponsor a speaker, if there is a need for that. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that there is a confirmed speaker from the ACLU. Mr. Bohannon replied that there are more musical acts than speakers this year. Dr. Morris stated that the speaker from the ACLU, if representing the ACLU, cannot charge. Discussion continued. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they will figure out how the money from the Library can be used, and they appreciate the Library's generous contribution.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there were any further questions about Juneteenth. Mr. Bohannon stated that if anyone knows of other community partners who want to have space at the event/a tent at Railroad Square, have them reach out to him. The more the merrier.

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

Mr. Bohannon stated that he has incorporated the majority of the HRC's edits and corrections to the executive summary of the HRC's recommendations regarding the Racial Justice and Community Safety report. He continued that per the HRC's conversation in last month's meeting minutes, he corrected that "racially diverse students" language to "students of color," in 4-E. Under 4-K, he eliminated the reference to Cheshire TV, which has gone off the air, and changed it to FACT-TV.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he put in suggested wording in 1-A. He continued that he eliminated the part about Mayor Hansel, and wrote, "It is suggested by the Human Rights Committee that a statement is read at all City meetings to show its support and to express the City's commitment to racial justice and diversity [etc]." This executive summary will be going to the Mayor and the City Council, and he thinks it would be good for the HRC to show this proposal.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked the committee to take five minutes to review the document and then they will discuss it.

#### **Introduction:**

Dr. Morris stated that she does not think "racial equity" [in the second sentence] was part of the RJCS Committee's charge. She continued that it is nuanced, and racial equity is different from racial justice. She asked what the original document said. Mr. Kirschner read aloud that the RJCS Committee was "charged with developing recommendations to prevent or correct systemic and cultural inequities in Keene." Dr. Morris asked for that whole statement to be included.

Mr. Kirschner stated that the third paragraph should include the "Education" category.

Mr. Kirschner stated that something that needs clarification is which committee is being referenced with the words “the committee.” The HRC or the RJCS Committee? Some things in here were added by the HRC, and some things are from the original report from the RJCS Committee. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will review and clarify that.

### **Section 1-A**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that there is a proposed change, substantially simplifying the first paragraph.

Ms. Fiske stated that someone else already mentioned that the extra “that” can be struck after the word “statement.” She continued that missing from this draft is the compromise sentence the HRC had put in, about the possibility of having the statement printed at the bottom of the agendas for City meetings. Mr. Bohannon replied that he took that out because it was the HRC’s compromise relating to comments from the Mayor, and instead stated, “The HRC recognizes that the City already posted such a declaration [etc...] It is suggested by the HRC that a statement [...]” He continued that there is no compromise there. The HRC is suggesting that the statement be made; that is what the City Council will see.

Ms. Fiske replied that she recalls the HRC discussing proposing a compromise, though, if there is an objection to taking the time to read the statement, to at least have the statement shown on agendas. Discussion ensued about the wording, such as not using the word “compromise” and instead saying “Additionally,” or “As an alternative,” or something similar. Mr. Aronson asked to use “active language,” such as, “The HRC recommends that a statement be read,” instead of “It is suggested by the HRC....” Mr. Bohannon replied that he will add some language to this part.

Mr. Benson noted a typo at the bottom, in the HRC’s statement: “will have a difference impact” should be “will have a different impact.”

### **Section 1-B**

Dr. Morris stated that she questions the word “ombudsman.” She continued that typically, an ombudsman is a person who handles conflicts, and the HRC had talked about how this person would do more than just resolve conflicts, such as work with the HR Department to develop trainings, work with interns, and so on and so forth. Mr. Aronson replied that he was the one who brought up the word “ombudsman.” He continued that he was thinking of how the HRC is not empowered to address issues that citizens bring forward, so the City should have a person who can do that. Ms. Fiske stated that she recalls the HRC discussing how members of the public could reach out to the City and the person could connect those members of the public to resources and people. Dr. Morris suggested expanding this – “...a point person for communication with community stakeholders about diversity issues” – and making it more

specific. She continued that “about diversity issues” is not very clear. Ms. Fiske suggested “as point person for communication with the community, to help address problems and concerns and guide people toward resources.”

Mr. Aronson asked if they need an alternative to the word “ombudsman.” Dr. Morris replied no, not now that they have clarified.

#### **Sections 4-B and 4-C**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the “trailing spouse program” language was taken out because Keene State College (KSC) does not have such a program (for the City to use as a model). Discussion ensued, and the HRC decided to keep the concept of the trailing spouse program, but without the reference to KSC.

Dr. Saleh stated that in 4-B, the second line is missing a word, such as “training.” Dr. Morris asked for the term “professional development” instead. Mr. Bohannon replied that the language is copied word-for-word from the RJCS Report, but he can add “professional development” in parentheses after “training.”

Ms. Fiske asked for the words “in order to” to replace the words “so as to potentially.” (Regarding increasing the diversity of the applicant pool.)

#### **Sections 4-D and 4-E**

Dr. Morris asked if they need to be more specific, regarding the internships, instead of just saying “the City.” Who, exactly, will be doing the implementation? Mr. Bohannon replied that to him, the term “the City” refers to the various departments, such as HR, the Library, Public Works, Parks & Rec, and so on and so forth. He continued that this report will go to the Mayor, the City Manager, and the City Council, and the City Manager will determine who to give certain tasks to – in this case, it would be HR.

Ms. Fiske asked to strike “These internships ought to be focused on transferable skills,” because that is repeated in the next paragraph. She continued that she also prefers “should” instead of “ought to,” such as “should focus on” instead of “ought to be focused on.”

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if it is correct that the “racially diverse students” language has been updated, (regarding this sentence: “Because working without pay would pose economic challenges for many students - especially [racially diverse students], who are historically socio-economically disadvantaged – these internships ought to be paid when possible.”) Mr. Bohannon replied yes. Dr. Morris asked for the word “disenfranchised,” stating that she does not want this to imply that it is just ‘racially diverse’ folks who might need funding. She continued that it could be any group of disenfranchised folks, and low-income folks. It is not just people of color. That will trigger people, especially people of color, if they imply that. She continued that

in addition, saying “people who are socio-economically disadvantaged” puts the onus on the individuals rather than the system, in her read, (and they should change that wording so the onus is on the system instead).

Mr. Bohannon stated that they can continue to revise this, and he will make the changes he is hearing suggested tonight and circulate the revisions to Ms. Fiske, Dr. Morris, and Mr. Kirschner, if that is okay with everyone. He continued that after this conversation, they should have the finished product in June.

Mr. Aronson stated that regarding the ‘racially diverse’ term, there was an email chain in which Mr. Kirschner suggested the phrase “especially students of color, who are historically socio-economically disadvantaged.” Mr. Kirschner replied that he really appreciates Dr. Morris’s comments about that, and wishes she had been there for the previous conversation. Mr. Aronson continued that in 4-D, “under-represented” should be hyphenated. He suggests a comma after “Franklin Pierce College” and before “thus.”

#### **Section 4-G**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that a comma has been added after “incentive.”

Mr. Aronson asked how the second sentence is supposed to read. He continued that it currently reads, “the committee recommends one incentive may be the City only considers bids from...” Ms. Fiske replied that they could strike “one incentive may be” so it reads, “The committee recommends the City only considers bids from...” Others agreed. Discussion ensued about whether it should be “the City only consider” or “the City only considers.” (Later in the meeting, Mr. Aronson looked up the grammar rule and confirmed that “the City only consider bids” is correct).

#### **Section 4-I**

Dr. Morris asked if they should refer back to the ombudsman as the person who would facilitate the solicitation of feedback (from diverse communities), or if they should just keep it as “the City.” Mr. Kirschner replied that he likes the idea of referencing the ombudsman. Ms. Fiske replied that she is not sure that would be practical, given that each City department works on its own projects and would then have to make sure everything went through this ombudsman. She continued that if they just say that they deliberately solicit feedback, that can be done whether (City government) takes the HRC’s recommendation of having an ombudsman, or not. Dr. Morris suggested something like “potentially in conjunction with the ombudsman.” Ms. Fiske suggested a sentence such as, “the ombudsman position could assist with this work.” She continued that the Library, for example, just did strategic planning. Library staff very purposefully did that work, instead of having an ombudsman. Mr. Bohannon stated that he will work on language for this.

#### **Section 4-J**

No edits.

#### **Section 4-K**

Ms. Fiske stated that the repeated statement is still there and needs to be struck; it is out of place.

Mr. Kirschner noted a typo in the statement in 1-A – the word “justice” should be “just.”

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos thanked Mr. Bohannon for taking on the task of incorporating all of these edits. She continued that Dr. Morris, Mr. Kirschner, and Ms. Fiske will help. She asked if anyone else wants to be part of the distribution. Mr. Aronson replied that they can include him in the distribution.

#### **7) Community Survey**

Mr. Bohannon stated that he sent the link around to everyone, to review the results of the Lebanon survey. He continued that it might help the HRC determine if they want to do a survey like this. He knows the MDEIB is looking to do some type of survey or somehow get some data points. This (work that Lebanon did) might help the HRC. He is not sure their results would be too different. A Sociologist and Professor at Dartmouth, who created the Lebanon survey, offered to help the HRC if they want. He thinks it would be great to do this survey and get this information, especially if they could do it during the summer months.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if this is of interest to the committee. She continued that she sees lots of nodding heads. She asked what the next steps are. Is there a cost associated with this? Mr. Bohannon replied no, because they can do it via the City’s website. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the next step, it seems to her, is to change the survey’s language to fit Keene. She continued that that is a task for the HRC, not the Dartmouth person. Then the next step would be posting the survey. Mr. Bohannon replied that they can do that in-house; Rebecca Landry, Communications Director, can help.

Mr. Benson asked if they know how Lebanon’s survey was conducted, and how they know the results were an accurate reflection. Ms. Fiske replied that that was one of the HRC’s questions for the Lebanon folks. She continued that the survey information was self-reported. She thinks the Lebanon folks wish they had reached out more to purposefully reach a more diverse group of people. Mr. Bohannon replied that the survey was only online. Mr. Benson asked if the survey respondents were only people who volunteered to take it. Others replied yes.

Dr. Morris stated that she recommends they not rush the survey. She continued that they could have iPads set up at the Keene International Festival, for example, or at any of the HRC’s events, which is one way to increase the responses. Discussion ensued about methods of reaching more

people, such as having paper copies available at various locations; partnering with other social service agencies that work with people experiencing hunger, lack of housing, mental health challenges, and so on and so forth; providing assistance so that people who cannot read or write can take the survey; and translating the survey questions to other languages.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked what the manageable next step is. She asked if they should all look at Lebanon's survey and think about how to edit the language for Keene. She continued that they cannot have a "reply all" email chain [and risk accidentally creating a quorum], but they could each email their edits to Mr. Bohannon. Dr. Saleh asked if it is correct that they can edit the questions' language but cannot create new questions. Mr. Bohannon replied that they could certainly add more questions if they need to, keeping in mind that the longer the survey is, the less likely people are to fill it out.

Dr. Morris stated that she can look at editing the survey, thinking about Keene and the Monadnock region. She asked if they have the original to look at. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will send it around. He continued that collectively, they would want to figure this out, and there is a big difference between the Monadnock region versus the city of Keene. He is just thinking out loud, but maybe the HRC could work with the MDEIB simultaneously, so they would not be duplicating any work. That way, they would collectively be getting a larger pool of information. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the next step, then, is to coordinate with the MDEIB. Mr. Bohannon asked if they think the MDEIB would take this on. Dr. Morris replied that she thinks so. She continued that this is something the MDEIB has discussed before, at least in a subcommittee. Mr. Bohannon stated that starting the conversation with Cat Workman would be the next step, and he can do that.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the question remains as to whether they would be focusing on the Monadnock region or strictly the city of Keene, but in the meantime, if HRC members want to send suggested edits to Mr. Bohannon, they can. Discussion continued about collaborating with the MDEIB.

#### 8) New Business

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

Ms. Fiske stated that she emailed information to the HRC members about the documentary "Voices from the Barrens: Native People, Blueberries, and Sovereignty." She continued that it is about the Native peoples of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Maine. If a group wants to screen the documentary, the people who created it would assist with putting together speaker panels. She could reach out to them, if the HRC is interested, and find out about the cost and other details. She gave information about the possible locations for screening.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if this would be for Indigenous People's Day. Ms. Fiske replied yes. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she thinks the film sounds wonderful. Mr. Bohannon



stated that he thinks this would be a good thing for the HRC to do. Ms. Fiske asked if he had said there was another City group that might be interested in joining the HRC in doing this and could possibly help with the cost. Mr. Bohannon replied that they probably would not be able to help with the cost, not having a budget, but there are folks at Antioch who might be able to connect. He could connect Paul Bocko with Ms. Fiske to have a conversation about it.

Dr. Morris stated that she wants to tell them about a personal experience, when she did not do her homework and brought in some Abenaki people from Vermont and then had to go apologize at a public meeting for the mistake she made. She continued that the HRC needs to make sure they are conscious of what it means to bring someone from another place to be a part of what goes on here for Indigenous People's Day. Ms. Fiske replied that last year, when they went back and forth about things, they ended up bringing in someone from Canada to talk about the region, because of the controversy that has been going on about the local tribes that are not federally recognized. She continued that she will have to check and see what tribe they represent and whether it is federally recognized. Dr. Morris replied that she is not against the idea (of screening the documentary), she just wants them to be clear about what they are doing. Ms. Fiske replied yes, it is a sticky situation. Dr. Saleh asked if there is a recognized Abenaki group from this region that they could connect with. Ms. Manwaring replied not federally recognized, but yes, there are tribes. Dr. Morris stated that there is work being done by a group of people on the seacoast, and a statewide, Governor-appointed group, the NH Commission on Native American Affairs, knows about all of the different parts of the state. That is the one she had to go apologize to. Before the HRC does anything, they can reach out to that group. It is a wonderful group of people and she learned so much from the meetings she went to. She thinks they could give some insight. Maybe they would want someone from their group to be present.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there was any other new business. Mr. Bohannon stated that next month's agenda should include Indigenous People's Day. He continued that it should also include the NH theater project that Ms. Budakoti was interested in pursuing, although he does not know where that stands. He asked if he needs to do anything with the "partner organization request for funds," since they do not have any funds to disseminate, or if it would be helpful to have it on the agenda as something the committee put out there years ago, to revisit and either re-establish or eliminate. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied yes, it should be on the agenda for discussion.

Mr. Bohannon stated that regarding the Jonathan Daniels musical Mr. O'Brien submitted, he (Mr. O'Brien) was actually looking for the HRC to *commission* the work, not just listen to it and put it out to the public. He continued that he does not see the HRC being in a position to do so. Others agreed. Discussion ensued. Mr. Aronson stated that he would like to listen to it, and he wonders if the HRC could consider it for an MLK Day program, if it were commissioned by a different entity. He continued that maybe the HRC could take the lead in getting sponsorships. Mr. Bohannon listed several other groups and organizations Mr. O'Brien has reached out to, stating that they have all declined to commission the work.

9) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 6:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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