

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

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

**Monday, January 8, 2023**

**5:00 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair  
Councilor Catherine Workman  
Dr. Mohammad Saleh  
Marti Fiske  
Rabbi Daniel Aronson  
Gina Burke, Alternate  
Tedd Benson, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager

**Members Not Present:**

Ritu Budakoti, Alternate  
Jennifer Nescimento, Alternate  
Dr. Dottie Morris

**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.

**2) Approval of December 4, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of December 4, 2023. Rabbi Aronson seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

**3) Finance Report**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the Finance Report is in the agenda packet. She continued that Ms. Bender noted that there seems to be a discrepancy of about \$1,500 between the old system and the new system. The current number exceeds the \$2,500 budget the HRC needs for each event to have \$500 seed money, so they still have discretionary funds.

Discussion ensued about the Finance Report. Ms. Bender reported that the Finance Report in the agenda packet is not correct, but she has copies of the corrected one.

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

Councilor Workman stated that the Coalition has not yet finalized its strategic plan, but that should be done in January. She continued that the next meeting is the Monday after Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

Councilor Workman stated that the Coalition is looking for the following new members:

- Someone from the eastern part of the Monadnock region, near Hillsborough County
- At least one representative from one of the three school districts (SAU 1, SAU 29, and SAU 93)
- At least one small employer (someone with less than 100 full time employees)
- Representation from the Town of Peterborough
- Representation from Cheshire County

Councilor Workman continued that the Coalition also has a goal of having at least 25% of its at-large members be BIPOC. She asked that the HRC spread the word and let her know if they know people who fit into any of those categories or multiple categories. The subcommittees can be as large and as encompassing as possible, so anyone with interest in DEI work is welcome. She would be glad to meet with anyone one-on-one to talk about it more and see where they would fit in. Discussion ensued.

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

Ms. Bender stated that the full report has been submitted to the City's internal DEI group. She continued that she knows there has been talk of submitting it to the new Mayor, now that he has officially been sworn in. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the HRC can be notified if it is submitted to the new Mayor. Ms. Bender replied yes.

Dr. Saleh stated that Ms. Bender had said the DEI group has a member from each City department. He asked how many people that is. Ms. Fiske and Ms. Bender replied about 10 to 12 people. Ms. Fiske continued that some large departments, such as Public Works, have representatives from subgroups (e.g. Fleet, Highway, Water).

Dr. Saleh stated that his recollection was that departments are not able to actually take any action. He asked if that understanding is correct. Discussion ensued. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she does not think that is true. She continued that the DEI Committee was created with the intention of moving things forward, and they are empowered to take actions. Ms. Fiske agreed and stated that individual department can take actions, as the department heads see fit. She continued that regarding City-wide actions, the DEI Committee can only make

recommendations, which need to be approved by the City Manager. The DEI Committee is working on a survey for staff, to see how people are feeling about any sort of harassment related to being any sort of minority. She gave more information about this and other potential actions the DEI Committee is discussing.

Ms. Fiske stated that regarding the HRC's statement that they say at the beginning of their meetings, the HRC's recommendation did not get past the former Mayor, but perhaps the new Mayor would consider it. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that Ms. Bender says the HRC can be notified if/when it is put in front of the Mayor. Ms. Bender asked if the HRC's recommendation was for that statement to be read at the start of any City Council meeting. Ms. Fiske replied yes. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos added, read before any public meeting.

Councilor Workman stated that she met with Mayor Jay Kahn (when he was Mayor Elect), and he expressed that he very much wants to make DEI initiative work a priority for the City in the next couple years. She continued that that was great to hear. Others agreed.

**6) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**  
**A) Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**

Rabbi Aronson reported that many people are excited about the upcoming program for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. He gave information about the breakfast and lunch events to be held at the Community Kitchen with civic leaders and the faith community, which he is making sure will also include the people the Community Kitchen and Hundred Nights serve.

Rabbi Aronson shared information about promotion for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day events, and other details about the events, including that two American Sign Language interpreters will be present. He gave information about the morning's and afternoon's schedule and speakers.

Rabbi Aronson spoke about the books by Father Greg Boyle that Toadstool Books is ordering to be sold at the events. He continued that the HRC needs a way to sell the books, and spoke about pricing and payment methods. Discussion ensued about whether there are possible methods the HRC could use for accepting credit card/electronic payments for Father Boyle's books, in keeping with the City's policies and protocols. The group eventually decided to just accept cash or check payments.

Rabbi Aronson spoke about press coverage, and adding "books sold by cash or check only" to flyers. HRC members gave information about how they and others have been spreading the word about the MLK Day events via social media and the newspaper. Discussion continued about how "books sold by cash or check only" could be added on social media. Ms. Bender stated that today or tomorrow she can re-send the press release and ask if that can be added. Discussion continued about radio coverage. Ms. Bender stated that she will reach out to her radio contacts.

Rabbi Aronson asked if anyone has heard from youth and students, regarding their involvement with/attendance at the events. Discussion ensued. Ms. Fiske asked how they are getting the word out to civic leaders, and discussion continued. Ms. Bender shared that she has heard a lot in the community about how people are extremely excited about this (event). She continued that it has been brought up frequently in the criminal justice circle she is in.

Rabbi Aronson asked for a volunteer to provide dinner for Father Boyle and the people with him. Mr. Benson replied that he will.

Rabbi Aronson stated that he is waiting to hear from the Greater Monadnock Youth Choir about singing at the event.

**B) Black History Month**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Dr. Morris is spearheading this but is not present today. She asked if anyone else had information to share about it. (No)

**C) Juneteenth**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos reported that the next Juneteenth working group meeting is tomorrow. She continued that they will then have a better sense of the Juneteenth budget and whether they have a first pass list of talents or if they need to go back to the drawing board. Mr. Benson asked who is on the working group and Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos listed the members. She continued that they seem to be successful this year in making it a community-coordinated event.

**D) Keene International Festival**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the KIF is a ways away, so she thinks the working group is taking a break on this.

**E) Indigenous Peoples' Day**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that it is also the same with Indigenous People's Day; it is a ways away.

**F) Pride Event**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the chair of the Pride working group has left the HRC, so they will need another HRC member to take this on. She continued that they will put a note about this on next month's agenda, so people can take the month to think about whether they can volunteer for this. At next month's meeting, she will ask for a volunteer. Rabbi Aronson suggested they ask a member of Keene Pride if they want to join the HRC. Discussion ensued about HRC membership and the process of joining. Ms. Bender stated that anyone who wants to

join can submit an interest form, to go through the process. Councilor Workman stated that she knows someone who was interested in joining and was told there were currently no vacancies on the HRC. Discussion continued about HRC membership terms.

7) **New Business**

Ms. Bender stated that she has an update on last month's conversation about HRC membership terms. She continued that everyone is fine for now, and if someone's term is about to expire and they want to continue on the HRC, they can let her know and write a letter to the Mayor. The Mayor reappointed everyone whose terms were expiring in December 2023, who expressed interest in continuing. Somehow, Hunter Kirschner was mistakenly reappointed, but he is not coming back. They are working on fixing that.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there are term limits. Ms. Bender replied yes, she believes it is two terms, but after that, you can become an alternate member. Discussion ensued. Ms. Bender stated that she thinks that if a new person wants to join the HRC, however, they would "bump" a person who has already served two terms. The HRC's webpage has an "active members" section that specifies when each person's term expires. Discussion continued.

8) **Adjourn – Next Meeting February 5, 2024 at 5:00 PM**

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 6:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Alyssa Bender-Jesse, Youth Services Manager