

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA

Monday, April 7, 2024 at 5:00 PM
Room 22 Upstairs, Recreation Center

Members:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos
Dr. Dottie Morris
Dr. Mohammad Saleh
Marti Fiske
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Councilor Catherine Workman
Gina Burke
Ritu Budakoti
Aja Davis

Staff:

Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager

Alternates:

Tedd Benson
Debra Bowie
Jennifer Nascimento
David Morrill

Agenda:

1. Welcome and Call to Order
2. Approval of March 4, 2024 Minutes
3. Finance Report
4. Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition Updates
5. Racial Justice Community Safety Report
6. Acceptance of Committee Event Reports
 - a. Black History Month
 - b. Juneteenth
 - c. Keene International Festival
 - d. Indigenous Peoples' Day
 - e. Pride Event
 - f. Martin Luther King Jr. Day
7. New Business
8. Adjourn – Next Meeting May 6, 2024 at 5:00 PM

Tabled: Community Survey

“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.”

1 City of Keene
2 New Hampshire

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5 HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
6 MEETING MINUTES
7

Monday, March 3, 2025

5:00 PM

Room 22,
Recreation Center

Members Present:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Dr. Dottie Morris
Marti Fiske
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Gina Burke
Ritu Budakoti
Debra Bowie, Alternate
Emma Siemer, Alternate

Staff Present:

Alyssa Bender-Jesse, Youth Services Manager

Members Not Present:

Dr. Mohammad Saleh
Councilor Catherine Workman
David Morill, Alternate
Jennifer Nescimento, Alternate

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10 **1) Welcome and Call to Order**

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12 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos read the HRC's statement: *"In our efforts to create a more equal and*
13 *just society, we move forward with the firm intention to value the voices, opinions, and*
14 *experiences of all people. We choose to proceed with the awareness and humility that the*
15 *statements and decisions we make will have a different impact for those with different life*
16 *experiences."*

17
18 She called the meeting to order at 5:01 PM. Roll call was conducted. Dr. Morris stated that she
19 is participating remotely from her office at Keene State College (KSC) and no one else is in the
20 room with her. She continued that if she had come in person, she would have been late and
21 would have had to leave early, due to work commitments before and after the meeting.

22
23 **2) Approval of February 3, 2025 Meeting Minutes**
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25 Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of February 3, 2025. Rabbi Aronson
26 seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

27

28 **3) Finance Report**

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30 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that there has been no change to the HRC's budget since last month.

31

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

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34 Dr. Morris stated that last week, the Coalition planned to have a session with students at the
35 high school, but due to the low number of RSVPs, they decided to postpone it. She continued
36 that the other gathering, the listening session, had to be postponed as well, due to the weather.
37 It will now be March 29, from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM and there will be breakfast and lunch.
38 The Coalition will send out information about that.

39

40 Dr. Morris continued that the Coalition is trying to redefine itself and figure out what direction
41 to go in. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the Coalition has any requests of the HRC or of
42 the community. She asked if there is anything that the Coalition might need in its efforts to
43 move forward that the HRC might be able to help with. Dr. Morris replied not that she knows
44 of. She continued that Catherine Workman is the chair, and she might have a better idea of
45 that. It would be great to have HRC members show up for the conversation on March 29, at
46 KSC.

47

48 Ms. Budakoti asked if they need to RSVP if they are coming. Dr. Morris replied that it is not
49 required, but it would be helpful. She continued that she will send the flyer to Ms. Bender-
50 Jesse to send out to the whole group.

51

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

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54 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that as a quick refresher, the Racial Justice and Community
55 Safety (RJCS) Committee had created a report, which the HRC distilled, and the life it has taken
56 on is that there is now a DEI Committee for City employees. She continued that Ms. Bender-
57 Jesse is on the committee and provides the HRC with regular reports about its activities, when
58 there is something to report.

59

60 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that there is not much to report right now. She continued that now that
61 they have looked at the entire report, the committee is, similar to what Dr. Morris said about the
62 Coalition, trying to figure out their direction and purpose. As she reported to the HRC before,
63 regarding the RJCS report, the City acted on what they could act on, and now there are just
64 smaller things constantly being in the work, like hiring practices. The committee is setting up a
65 meeting with the Deputy City Manager to try and figure out what their hope is and a new
66 direction for the committee going forward.

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6) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports

A) Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was recent and she imagines there is nothing to report for planning the next event. Rabbi Aronson replied no, he has nothing to report. He continued that the working group has not yet met to review how this year’s event went; that was rescheduled.

B) Black History Month

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that Black History Month just ended, and she thinks the HRC was unable to pull something together this year for a Black History Month event, for a few reasons. She asked if that is correct. Dr. Morris replied yes.

- C) Juneteenth**
- D) Pride**
- E) Keene International Festival**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the Juneteenth, Pride, and Keene International Festival working groups each sent a written update.

F) Indigenous People’s Day

Ms. Fiske stated that she wanted some feedback from the HRC, given the conversation they had last month about the holiday’s name [per NH HB1014 and RSA 288:1’s definition of “Columbus Day.”] She continued that it reopens the opportunity for the HRC to talk about what happened when Columbus came and opened up the West. She is interested in looking at some things, such as a lecture or movie, which focus on what happened when the Western Hemisphere was opened up to European influences. She welcomes any recommendations people have for speakers, beyond KSC and Franklin Pierce staff. She has started looking through the Council in Humanities speakers for VT and NH, and will look at MA’s offerings, too. MA has a speaker who has something on the topic, but given the controversy of State-recognized tribes versus the Federally-recognized tribes, having that person here might cause some additional complications. Thus, she is looking for another opportunity.

Discussion ensued. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if Ms. Fiske is looking for someone from a Federally-recognized tribe. Ms. Fiske replied yes.

Dr. Morris asked why they are looking for a federally-recognized group, because that is a whole can of worms. Ms. Fiske replied that two years ago, there was a discussion at the University of Vermont where members of the First Nations Abenaki tribe laid out many negative accusations

111 against NH and VT State-recognized tribes as hurting the Federally-recognized tribes and First
112 Nation Canadian tribes by taking away funding that should be going to them, engaging in
113 cultural appropriation, and actively working against goals that the First Nations tribes are
114 working towards. They (First Nations Abenaki people) claimed that they (NH and VT Abenaki
115 people) only had Native heritage – for example, a great-grandmother who was a member of a
116 tribe - but were not Native themselves. A week or two ago, they spoke at the Statehouse,
117 actively trying to start the process of removing State recognition in VT. Thus, the issue is
118 getting even hotter than it was two years ago.

119
120 Discussion ensued. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if one of the issues is that the State-
121 recognized tribes have a different definition of what Abenaki identity is. Ms. Fiske replied yes,
122 in Federally-recognized tribes you have to show an unbroken lineage with a Native group, and
123 most State-recognized groups cannot meet that standard. She continued that the argument has
124 been, in VT in particular, that eugenics caused many Native peoples to go underground and
125 claim other heritage in order to avoid being harassed, sterilized, and harmed in numerous other
126 ways. Thus, most people in State-recognized tribes cannot show multiple generations of Native
127 forebearers, and are only able to find one or two. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it
128 sounds very complicated. Others agreed.

129
130 Dr. Morris replied that they (the HRC) could do a whole thing on how colonization and
131 colonialism created this rift. She continued that there is a lot of literature about definitional
132 genocide, and how the US government engages in a certain way of counting who is Indigenous.
133 Indigenous People are the only race of people who have to prove their identity like this. The
134 HRC could create an (event/lecture/forum) about how colonization has created this rift and the
135 impact it has had on identity. Ms. Fiske stated that if the HRC did that, especially if the Library
136 was part of it, she would want it to include a “third party view,” because if they include people
137 from a State-recognized group and people from a Federally-recognized group, she does not have
138 the energy to mediate that. Dr. Morris replied that to her, bringing in a “third party” would be
139 even more problematic due to the cultural appropriation that goes along with that, with someone
140 speaking for a group or on behalf of a group. She suggests the HRC reach out to some
141 Indigenous people in the area and see what they think.

142
143 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she thinks Ms. Fiske was suggesting a third party as a
144 moderator, not as someone to speak for the groups. Ms. Fiske replied yes, that is what she
145 meant. She continued that she personally does not have the skills or knowledge base to mediate
146 that sort of conversation. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that putting together any event is
147 complex, in light of the situation. Ms. Fiske replied yes, which is one of the reasons why she has
148 been focusing on things like documentaries by Federally-recognized tribes outside of the
149 immediate area, to try and work around this.

150
151 Discussion continued. Dr. Morris stated that a (presentation) about colonialism could be given
152 by a historian. Ms. Fiske agreed. She continued that she is interested in a conversation about
153 what happened when the Western Hemisphere opened up, because she thinks many people are

154 not familiar with that history. They know “bad stuff happened,” but not the details of what,
155 exactly, and how. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if Ms. Fiske is asking for the HRC to
156 recommend contacts who might be able to speak about that. Ms. Fiske replied yes, and
157 obviously, there are local staff members at KSC and Franklin Pierce, but she appreciates other
158 recommendations. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that there have been some good PBS
159 documentaries from the past 10-15 years. Dr. Morris stated that “Killers of the Flower Moon” is
160 a movie to look into; it deals with similar issues. Discussion continued. Ms. Budakoti stated that
161 the book “Cobalt Red” might be good.

162
163 Rabbi Aronson stated that a program on the eugenics would also be interesting, as many people
164 do not know it affected Indigenous people here. Discussion ensued about whether this area of
165 New England had schools for Indigenous children. Dr. Morris stated that she will try and find
166 the dissertation one of her students did, regarding interviewing survivors of Indian boarding
167 schools and the abuse and trauma they endured.

168
169 **7) New Business**

170
171 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that last time, the HRC said that they wanted “ACLU” to be on the
172 agenda under New Business, regarding the discussion with Mayor Kahn and Eli Rivera and
173 possible Know Your Rights trainings. Ms. Bowie replied that she has been in touch with them
174 (people from the ACLU) but now is waiting to hear back from them again; she knows they are
175 really busy. She will reach out again to see if they can come. It might not be “Know Your
176 Rights” specifically; the ACLU might give an overview of some of the things they are doing.

177
178 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she is the vice chair for the Cheshire County Bar
179 Association, and she raised the idea of helping sponsor a Know Your Rights event, and there was
180 interest. She continued that she has not reached out to the ACLU independently, but she will.
181 Dr. Morris replied that she was on the phone with someone from the ACLU today about
182 something else, and that person could help them facilitate getting something here. Chair Cunha-
183 Vasconcelos asked if Dr. Morris is the Chair of the NH ACLU. Dr. Morris replied yes, she is the
184 board chair, and Rick Van Winkler is the vice chair. She continued that Eli Rivera and Hunter
185 Kirschner are also on the board. Discussion continued.

186
187 Ms. Budakoti stated that the ACLU has done a few sessions in Keene already, with Keene
188 Community Education and other local places. She continued that there is also a local solidarity
189 group that is working toward hosting some of the sessions and bringing ACLU people to be able
190 to train people in Know Your Rights. They have also provided some red cards in multiple
191 languages. Discussion continued.

192
193 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there was any other new business. Ms. Bender-Jesse stated
194 that Jennifer Nescimento has resigned. She continued that the HRC now has three vacancies for
195 alternate members, if anyone knows anyone. Ms. Budakoti replied that her friend is a great
196 candidate. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked her to introduce herself.

197

198 Julie Odato, Librarian at Benjamin Franklin Elementary, introduced herself and stated that she
199 has an interest in the HRC's goals and thinks she would fit in well here. She continued that she
200 would like to be an alternate member. Discussion ensued and HRC members welcomed Ms.
201 Odato. Ms. Bender-Jesse explained the process to Ms. Odato for applying to be an alternate
202 member.

203

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

205

206 Ms. Budakoti stated that at the Keene International Festival, there was a thought people were
207 sharing, which she wanted to share with the HRC – with everything they are seeing and hearing
208 against diversity, and the KIF standing *for* diversity, there might be forces at work that want a
209 different outcome for those things. Maybe they are just skeptical thoughts, but with everything
210 going around, they want to be mindful, knowing that people from many diverse backgrounds
211 come to be part of the festival. They (the festival organizers) want to make it safer for people,
212 both psychologically and physically, so that people want to continue to participate. More than
213 any other year, this is the year when they will be put to the test. As a KIF chair, she wants to say
214 that the KIF needs more hands on deck. They need people who can support them in any way
215 possible. She welcomes the HRC's ideas for how to make it better, stronger, and bigger, which
216 sends a clear message that they recognize and celebrate diversity and will continue to do so.

217

218 Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked how people should share ideas. Ms. Budakoti replied that
219 people can send them to her, or wait until the next meeting, whatever works. Chair Cunha-
220 Vasconcelos stated that she thinks the thoughts Ms. Budakoti has shared are ones that are in
221 many of their minds, about how the work they do is going to be tested and all the more important
222 this particular year.

223

224 **8) Adjourn – Next Meeting is April 7, 2025, at 5:00 PM**

225

226 There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:36 PM.

227

228 Respectfully submitted by,
229 Britta Reida, Minute Taker

230

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

7/1/22- 6/30/23	HRC	KIF	7/1/23- 6/30/24	HRC	KIF	7/1/24- 6/30/25	HRC	KIF
Balance 7/1/22 4,091.88	\$ 2,991.88	\$ 3,985.44	Balance 7/1/23	\$ 2,692.50	\$ 5,951.74	Balance 7/1/24	\$ 3,192.50	\$ 3,946.97
Income			Income			Income		
City of Keene donations TILL	\$ 1,000.00		City of Keene Donation MLK	\$ 2,000.00		City of Keene	\$ 2,000.00	
donations Juneteenth	\$ 1,800.00		MLK Book Funds	\$ 750.00				
Donations KIF	\$ 3,150.00	\$ 8,312.00	Donations KIF	632.65	\$ 4,300.00	Donations KIF	\$ 13,377.00	
			Donations - Juneteenth*	\$ 11,944.77				
subtotal	\$ 5,950.00	\$ 8,312.00	subtotal	\$ 3,382.65	\$ 4,300.00	subtotal	\$ 2,000.00	
Total Income	\$ 5,950.00	\$ 8,312.00	Total Income	\$ 3,382.65	\$ 4,300.00	Total Income	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 13,377.00
Expenses			Expenses			Expenses		
						Extra	\$ 150.00	
Martin Luther King Day 500.00	\$ 45.55		Martin Luther King Day	\$ 331.90		Martin Luther King Day	\$ 300.00	
			500.00	\$ 1,550.75		500.00		
Black History Month TILL	\$ 1,800.00		Black History Month	\$ -		Black History Month	\$ -	
Juneteenth	\$ 3,098.58		Juneteenth	\$ 500.00		Juneteenth	\$ -	
500.00			500.00			500.00		
			Expenses - \$11,707.96*					
International Festival		\$ 6,345.70	International Festival		\$ 6,339.06	International Festival		\$ 7,224.89
Indigenous Peoples Day 500.00	\$ -		Indigenous Peoples Day	\$ -		Indigenous Peoples Day	\$ 500.00	
			500.00			500.00		
			Pride Event - Story Clear Film	\$ 500.00		Pride Event	\$ 238.06	
			500.00			500.00		
						2024 Pride Festival		
Total Expenses	\$ 4,944.13	\$ 6,345.70	Total Expenses	\$ 2,882.65	\$ 6,339.06	Total Expenses	\$ 1,188.06	\$ 7,224.89
Net 22-23	\$ 1,005.87	\$ 1,966.30	Net 23-24	\$ 500.00	\$ (2,039.06)	Net 24-25	\$ 811.94	\$ 6,152.11
Balance on hand Correct Balance	\$ 3,997.75	\$ 5,951.74	Balance on hand***	\$ 3,192.50	\$ 3,912.68	Balance on hand	\$ 4,004.44	\$ 10,099.08
	2692.5		*Keene YMCA was fiscal agent of Juneteenth					

