

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, January 5, 2026

5:00 PM

Room 22,
Recreation Center

Members Present:

Councilor Bettina Chadbourne
Dr. Dottie Morris (remote)
Marti Fiske
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Gina Burke
Debra Bowie
David Morill
Gregory Kleiner
Dr. Mohammad Saleh, Alternate (remote)
Julie Odat, Alternate

Staff Present:

Alyssa Bender-Jesse, Youth Services
Manager

Members Not Present:

Ritu Budakoti
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Alternate

1) **Welcome and Call to Order**

Mr. Kleiner 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."*

Mr. Kleiner called the meeting to order at 5:02 PM. Roll call was conducted. Dr. Morris stated that she is at home, due to not feeling well, and no one else is with her. Dr. Saleh stated that he was participating remotely from his office, due to not having transportation to the meeting today, and no one else was with him.

2) **Approval of December 1, 2025 Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of December 1, 2025. Ms. Bowie seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Rabbi Aronson arrived at 5:05 PM.

3) **Finance Report**

Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that it was brought to her attention that the re-formatted budget layout did not show if the HRC's working groups fundraised money and how much was in the accounts. She continued that today's Finance Report was updated so that the Pride Event's remaining balance reflects the \$71 that the working group fundraised.

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

Ms. Burke stated that the steering committee met a couple of weeks ago for a second strategic planning meeting. She continued that they are figuring out their three big things as they head into the new year. They are working on a reporting tool that they would share with community partners, which would allow people to report incidents of racism, sexism, or other discrimination happening in the city. The steering committee is determining what their action steps would be and what protocols would be in place so people would receive a response in a timely, appropriate way, and so the MDEIB can collect information and use it to inform the institutions and people who need to understand what is being reported.

Ms. Burke continued that the MDEIB is working on their community partner list, since there are many groups doing equity work, to stay informed about what is going on with community partners and figure out how to do more information-sharing and collaborating. They are especially focused on building those lists outside of the Keene area, to not just focus on Keene.

Ms. Burke continued that the MDEIB has a small task force working on the RJCS Report, going through it line by line, looking at the action steps a little bit differently. She feels like many great things will come from that.

In summary, Ms. Burke continued, those are the main items the MDEIB is working on. Their next meeting will be the Monday after Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

Dr. Morris stated that the task force working on the RJCS Report might be reaching back out to some of the organizations to potentially help with some projects, or help shape some of the things the task force plans to do.

Ms. Fiske stated that she is curious about what Ms. Burke foresees being done with the reports of sexism, racism, or other indiscrimination. Ms. Burke replied that that is what the MDEIB is trying to figure out. She continued that various MDEIB members have been receiving anonymous reports, from people whose privacy they are trying to respect, and they are legitimate concerns. The MDEIB is working to figure out what its response can be, and how to use the MDEIB's privilege, power, and resources to potentially help bridge some of those incidents. They are figuring out how to safely set this up, and how to have a team ready to respond. They do not want to accept reports and not respond, at least by having a conversation to see what people would like to happen, based on the incidents being reported. They are also curious to see, as they collect the information from the reports, what they are seeing over and over. The MDEIB came together because of incidents of unsafety across the region, and the narrative is still

sometimes, “*What do you mean? That doesn’t happen here.*” It does, though, which the MDEIB is trying to bring to light.

Dr. Morris stated that the MDEIB is trying to think of a good protocol to put in place. She continued that when a report comes in, they need to have a really good plan for how to approach it, and they do not want to leave people lingering. For example, a protocol for responding within 48 hours. They need to figure out both the protocol and how to respond. There are actions they can take that would not lead back to that person, per se. Again, the MDEIB might be calling on organizations to help with those.

Ms. Fiske asked if this will be an online portal. Ms. Burke replied that the MDEIB would have a form on its website, and share it with community partners. She continued that this will not solve everything, but it is something, in response to people who are saying they do not know who else to go to, and that what they have tried so far has not met their needs.

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

Rabbi Aronson stated that he just sent out 175 invitations to the MLK Day breakfast, and there are probably more invitations he could send. He continued that he will send the HRC members the list of people he invited, and if anyone has other names he should add, they can let him know. The HRC members are invited to the breakfast, too, and Ms. Bender-Jesse will forward that invitation to them. Adar Cohen and the Community Kitchen are all set for the breakfast. He is happy to share the spreadsheet of names and emails with the HRC for future use.

Rabbi Aronson continued that the evening event for MLK Day is all set as well, at the Library, and Library staff have been great. Ms. Fiske replied that the event is in good shape. Rabbi Aronson stated that originally, Larry Benaquist was going to speak with his co-producer, but the co-producer cannot come. He thinks he updated the flyer with that information before it went out. Regarding finances, the only outlay they will have is \$250 for Adar Cohen. Since the MLK Day working group has a budget of \$500, it would be good to give \$250 to the Community Kitchen. It would be neighborly to do so, because the Community Kitchen is putting out much more than that.

Dr. Morris asked if he wants to put that to a vote, to give \$250 to the Community Kitchen. Rabbi Aronson replied yes, and asked if anyone wanted to make that motion. Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that technically, it is up to Rabbi Aronson as the chair of the event. Rabbi Aronson replied that he thinks it would be good to vote.

Dr. Morris made a motion for the HRC to give \$250 to the Community Kitchen. Ms. Fiske seconded the motion, which passed by a vote of 9–0. Ms. Burke abstained.

B) Black History Month

Dr. Morris stated that she heard back from JerriAnne Boggis and received permission to show the film *Shadows Fall North*. She continued that if the working group fills out the paperwork of

when they want to show the film, JerriAnne Boggis will help with having someone from the Portsmouth area come to Keene to lead a discussion after the film. She will share the trailer with Ms. Bender-Jesse to share with the HRC. The working group will meet to determine how to show the film and how to get the word out, and she expects there will be interest in it, since it is related to New Hampshire. It is very relevant to New Hampshire and to people of African descent. She will check to see if they can show it at The Showroom. If not, Heberton Hall would be an option. Ms. Fiske stated that Dr. Morris can call the Library if they need anything.

Dr. Morris stated that they do not have a date for the event yet. She asked anyone who knows of dates in February they should stay away from to let her, Ms. Burke, or Ms. Bowie know. Ms. Odatto stated that Keene schools have vacation the week of February 23, 2026.

C) Juneteenth

Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that the working group has a meeting tomorrow at 5:00 PM, on Zoom, if HRC members are interested in joining. She continued that the group is in the early stages of planning, and trying to figure out a backup location for the event, if Central Square will be unavailable due to construction. If any HRC members are interested, they can let her know, and she will send the information to Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, who will put them on the list.

D) Pride Event

Mr. Morrill stated that the working group's next meeting is on the 15th. He continued that they are very early in the planning process, so he does not have a lot to share. Their biggest concern right now is that Pride is a downtown event, and no one knows what will be happening with the Downtown Infrastructure Project construction at that time. Even if attendance is down because of that, they want to have the event. Businesses will be struggling and they want to help encourage people to visit downtown. He will give more updates when he has them.

E) Keene International Festival

Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that she has been informed that Ms. Budakoti has been taking a step back from the KIF committee for now, and will help once the event gets closer. She continued that she was not able to check in with Ms. Fisk-Hennessey about this. If HRC members are interested in participating with KIF, they should get in touch with Ms. Fisk-Hennessey.

F) Native American Heritage

Ms. Fiske stated that the Shock of Colonialism in New England happened on Zoom. She continued that that was the event that Meghan Howey had needed to reschedule, and since Ms. Howey offered it via Zoom and did not have to travel, she did it for free. However, because of the rescheduling, there were only eight people in attendance. If the HRC has any recommendations, she will gratefully accept them and start research for next year.

6) **New Business**
A) **Education Options for Committee**

Mr. Kleiner stated that the HRC had some good discussion last month about this agenda item.

Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that before they get into the discussion, she wants to acknowledge that HRC membership and positions have changed, so it would be good for everyone to go around and briefly introduce themselves. She continued that Councilor Workman sent her an email for the HRC, saying that she wants to wish them all the best, hopes to see them at events, and thanks the HRC for all they do.

HRC members went around the table and briefly introduced themselves. Ms. Bowie stated that she is involved with a variety of things in the community related to equality. Ms. Burke stated that she is the part-time Executive Director of the MDEIB and does part-time work with the Monadnock Habitat for Humanity, and is the chair of the Board of Directors for the Community Kitchen, which is why she abstained from the vote to give them money. Ms. Odato stated that she is the Librarian at Franklin School. Rabbi Aronson stated that he is the Rabbi at Ahavas Achim in Keene. Ms. Fiske stated that she is the Library Director. Mr. Morrill stated that he works at Badger Balm and is on the Board of Directors at Scores Running Club. Dr. Morris stated that she is a representative from Keene State College, where she works, to the HRC. Dr. Saleh stated that he is on the MDEIB's steering committee, a founding board member of Project Home, and an immigrant activist. Mr. Kleiner stated that he has been in public service for about 20 years. He continued that he is the Office Manager of Monadnock Ford, a member of the Colonial Theater board, and a producer of the twice-yearly Lions Club shows.

Mr. Kleiner stated that to return to the topic of educational options for the HRC, he does not know if there has been any movement on this. Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that at the last meeting, the HRC wanted this to stay on the agenda under "New Business." She continued that they had discussed what everyone envisioned the educational piece was. It is up to them where they want to take the discussion now.

Mr. Morrill stated that one of the ideas was to have members of the community come and speak about their part in the community regarding human rights. He continued that something that came up recently was the "Cottage Court" program, which is a development of small communities of single-family homes. One is planned for Elm St., for the property of the Sadoques, an Abenaki family that moved to Keene from the Quebec area in the 1880s. They lived on that property for over 100 years, and sold the house in about 1993. A Cottage Court development is being planned for that property, which includes the demolition of that house. It would be a shame to see that house demolished. Joyce Heywood edited the book "Woven Through the Sweetgrass," which is a collection of journal entries from Claudia Chicklas, Israel Sedoques's granddaughter, Joyce Heywood's mother. The Mayor is working with Ms. Heywood and the Historical Society to find a way to move the house. It is all up in the air right now. They need to go through the Demolition Review Committee. The City cannot stop the demolition of the house, but they can delay by 30 days to discuss alternatives, such as moving it or finding a way to memorialize this property.

Mr. Morrill continued that the reason why he thought this connected to the HRC's education opportunities is that if they are inviting people from the community to speak to them about certain issues, he would like to invite Ms. Heywood to come and speak to them about this. Beyond that, the Mayor said they need to raise about \$50,000 to move the house. He does not know whether the Historical Society could offer funds, or how much, but if the HRC was able to do some sort of event to raise funds, it would be appropriate for the HRC.

Discussion ensued. HRC members asked if Mr. Morrill knows the timeline for demolishing or moving the house. Mr. Morrill replied that the Planning Board, at its December 22, 2025 meeting, approved moving the plan to the next phase, which he is not sure the details of. He continued that it is moving through the approval process, but he does not know the dates. The Mayor might know. Ms. Fiske stated that she worked with Ms. Heywood at Keene High School, as part of the Mayor's Youth Council, and as far as she knows, Mr. Morrill is correct that the family left the property around 1993. Ms. Heywood lives in Massachusetts, more than an hour away, so they could probably offer a Zoom meeting. Mr. Morrill stated that he does not have Ms. Heywood's contact information. Ms. Fiske replied that she does.

Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that Ms. Fiske did an event three years ago with Ms. Heywood. Ms. Fiske replied yes, Ms. Heywood's was the first event that she (Ms. Fiske) presented as chair of the Native American Heritage program. She continued that the Sadoques family is also on a mural in Keene.

Ms. Bowie stated that she thinks a historical marker needs to be placed in that area. She continued that she would really like a historical marker near Tenant Swamp, so people see it and think. That had been a discussion a while ago with the archeologist. Maybe historical markers are something the HRC could get involved with. They could inspire children to learn more and share the information with others. Mr. Morrill replied that at the stone building on West St. there is a historical marker that names a settler "killed by an Indian" – it is old, with racist language. Discussion continued about the location of this marker.

Rabbi Aronson stated that this conversation is striking to him, because he had not thought about historic preservation as a human rights issue, and this conversation is making it very clear that it is. He continued that at some point, he would add Jenna Carroll, Executive Director of the Historical Society, to the list of people the HRC might want to have a conversation with, to explore this and find ways to lift up other people's stories in the area. Mr. Morrill replied yes, Ms. Carroll is involved with the project to move the Sadoques' house.

Dr. Morris stated that she appreciates Rabbi Aronson bringing this up, because it would be a great educational opportunity for the HRC to have a conversation about what they understand a "human right" to be, and what it means. She continued that then, they would be able to articulate it to people who might ask them why they are bothering with such-and-such and why it is a human rights issue. They could talk about how ethnocide is a human rights issue. They could explain to people why the HRC engages in so many intersectional activities.

Ms. Fiske asked what the HRC thinks about inviting the Mayor, Ms. Heywood, and Ms. Carroll to tell the HRC about this program. She continued that she is concerned about the timeline, if there are 30 days starting from December 22 or how that works. Mr. Morrill stated that he does not know the details, but it still has to go through processes such as floodplain approval, so they have some time. There is City Council involvement, too. Discussion continued about the process. Rabbi Aronson suggested putting this on the HRC's February agenda.

Discussion continued about what the plan for the house could be if it were moved instead of demolished. Mr. Morrill stated that the Mayor said the initial idea was to move it to a different space on the property, and they are looking at it. Ms. Fiske asked if the Historic District Commission is involved with this yet. Mr. Morrill replied that he does not know. An HRC member asked who is in charge of historical markers in Keene, and discussion continued. Ms. Bowie talked about how it depends on what type of marker you want to do, whether the application process is with the State, or local. She talked about the discussions about the middle school location, and stated that she thinks it is important to acknowledge the history, and to remember. Ms. Fiske stated that the State or Federal process is very involved and would probably take more than a year. She continued that she thinks it might be best to try and move the house to a safe place while a longer process is being done.

Mr. Morrill asked if he should ask the Mayor to come to the HRC's February meeting. Others agreed, and added that they would like to also hear from someone from the Historical Society or someone else with knowledge about preserving that house. Mr. Morrill and Ms. Fiske noted that the Mayor is connected with Ms. Carroll and Ms. Heywood.

Ms. Odató stated that she would like to circle back to Dr. Morris's discussion topic, regarding getting a bigger view of the HRC's concept of "human rights" and the various ways the HRC could support strong human rights in the Keene area. She continued that that would be a good conversation to set time aside for. Rabbi Aronson asked Dr. Morris if she thinks Dr. Kate Gibeault, the Executive Director of the Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, would be a good person for that. Dr. Morris replied yes, or Ashley or someone else.

Ms. Bender-Jesse asked, regarding logistics, if they think 30 minutes would be enough for the conversation if they invited the Mayor, Ms. Heywood, and Ms. Carroll to the February meeting. She continued that she thinks it could work, if the HRC came prepared to get through their other agenda items in a timely fashion. Regarding an HRC member's suggestion of scheduling a second meeting for that conversation with Ms. Heywood, Ms. Carroll, and the Mayor, Ms. Bender-Jesse reminded the group that it would require noticing the public and having a Minute Taker. Discussion ensued, and the HRC decided to try having the conversation with Ms. Heywood, Ms. Carroll, and the Mayor be part of the regular HRC meeting, as a test run. Ms. Fiske suggested the working groups submit their reports ahead of time, and at the meeting, only have Dr. Morris's report out about Black History Month, since that will be the next event. Others agreed. Mr. Morrill stated that he will contact the Mayor.

Mr. Morrill recommended reading "Woven Through the Sweetgrass" and shared more information about its content. Ms. Fiske recommended it as well. Dr. Morris suggested it be a book group, and discussion ensued. Ms. Bowie spoke about book group ideas. Ms. Fiske stated

that maybe this could be the next Native American Heritage program. Others agreed. Ms. Bowie stated that she is part of the Compassionate Community group and has talked with Ms. Burke and Dr. Morris about the question of how they come together after they read the book and start to think about things that they do not just take for granted, or are not thoughtful about. A book like this and a discussion about the Native past here is very important. Dr. Morris suggested the HRC consider buying copies of the book and have it passed out at the library, to increase people's access to the book. Ms. Fiske replied that she is thinking of applying for a grant to purchase more copies, as she has done with other book group books.

Mr. Kleiner asked if there was anything else for new business. Rabbi Aronson asked Ms. Fiske for more information about the Mayor's Youth Council, because it would be nice to invite them to the MLK Day breakfast. Ms. Fiske replied that it is about a dozen high school students. She continued that this year, the Mayor asked her to work with him on it, and they focused on doing an event for Native American Heritage month. She continued that they are talking about doing something for the 250th Anniversary of the Constitution, that they would do at school to encourage people to get involved with. However, because it will happen in the summer when school is not in session, they will not be doing something directly. They also meet with different members of the community to know what is going on in the community. This Thursday, for example, they will talk about the Master Plan with Mari Brunner. Rabbi Aronson can invite them to the breakfast through the Mayor, and the Mayor will send the invitation to the person at the school.

Ms. Bowie stated that a quick update is that she has reached out to Compassionate Brattleboro and has not heard back. She continued that she also reached out to an individual through a church and has not heard back. She will try again. She, Ms. Burke, and a few people from the Compassionate Community group would go meet with them and learn about how Brattleboro has done their Compassionate Community group.

7) **Adjourn – Next Meeting February 2, at 5:00 PM**

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

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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