



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA

Monday, April 6th, at 5:00 PM
Room 22 Upstairs, Recreation Center

Members:

Ritu Budakoti
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Debra Bowie, Vice Chair
Councilor Bettina Chadbourne
Dr. Dottie Morris
Marti Fiske
Gina Burke
David Morrill
Gregg Kleiner, Chair

Staff:

Alyssa Bender-Jesse, Youth Services Manager

Alternates:

Dr. Mohammad Saleh
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos
Julie Odató
Jennifer Porschitz
Thomas White

Agenda:

1. Welcome and Call to Order
2. Approval of March 2nd, 2026 Minutes
3. Finance Report
4. Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition Updates
5. Acceptance of Committee Event Reports
 - a. Martin Luther King Jr. Day
 - b. Black History Month
 - c. Juneteenth
 - d. Pride Event
 - e. Keene International Festival
 - f. Native American Heritage
6. New Business
7. Adjourn – Next Meeting May 4th, 2026 at 5:00 PM

“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.”

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 2, 2026

5:00 PM

Room 22,
Recreation Center

Members Present:

Gregory Kleiner, Chair
Debra Bowie, Vice Chair
Ritu Budakoti (participating remotely)
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Councilor Bettina Chadbourne
Dr. Dottie Morris
Gina Burke
David Morill
Jennifer Porschitz, Alternate
Dr. Mohammad Saleh, Alternate (at 5:02 PM)
Julie Odat, Alternate
Thomas M. White, Alternate

Staff Present:

Alyssa Bender-Jesse, Youth Services
Manager / JCC Coordinator

Members Not Present:

Marti Fiske
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Alternate

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair 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.”* He called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

Roll call was conducted. Ms. Budakoti stated that she was participating remotely, because she was not sure she would be able to make it to the meeting on time. She continued that she was at home, and no one was in the room with her.

2) Approval of February 2, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Ms. Bowie made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of February 2, 2026. Councilor Chadbourne seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

28 **3) Finance Report**

29

30 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that the only thing that is different is the change under the Native
31 American Heritage line. She continued that Ms. Fiske was going to use some of the remaining
32 balance to buy copies of the book for the Community Reads book group.

33

34 Dr. Saleh arrived at 5:02 PM.

35

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

37

38 Ms. Burke stated that the MDEIB had a great turnout on February 17 for the screening of
39 Shadows Fall North, and the follow-up event, a discussion of the film, is this Thursday at the
40 Historical Society at 6:30 PM. She continued that the film is incredible and she recommends
41 watching it. Dr. Morris stated that it is open access now, so the film is available for people to
42 watch.

43

44 Ms. Burke stated that the MDEIB has been applying for grants. She continued that she recently
45 joined the advisory board for the NH Center for Justice and Equity. Today she came across an
46 article about how the Upper Valley can be unwelcoming to people of color. The book
47 Homesick: Race and Exclusion in Rural New England came out in November, and it could be a
48 great option for a Community Reads book or education for the HRC. She can send Ms. Bender-
49 Jesse the link to the article to share with the group.

50

51 Ms. Burke asked if anyone else has anything to add about the MDEIB. Dr. Morris stated that
52 they continue to go through the Racial Justice Community Safety Report. Ms. Burke replied yes,
53 and they are still working on the reporting tool that she spoke about last time.

54

55 **5) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

56

57 **A) Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**

58

59 Rabbi Aronson stated that if anyone is interested in chairing the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
60 working group next year, that is something to think about.

61

62 **B) Black History Month**

63

64 Ms. Burke stated that about 30 people came to the Shadows Fall North screening, and they had a
65 great spread of food, and some good discussion after the film. She continued that it was a
66 successful event.

67

68 Rabbi Aronson asked if the food was donated. Dr. Morris stated that she ended up paying for the
69 food herself, when she went to pick it up, because she did not realize that Black History Month
70 did not have a budget. She continued that people were glad to have the food, so that was good.

71

72 Dr. Saleh thanked Dr. Morris for doing that, and asked why the HRC does not have a budget for
73 Black History Month. Ms. Bender-Jesse replied that there has never been a line item for Black

74 History Month. She continued that her recollection is that she had just started observing Andy
75 Bohannon, to become the new HRC staff liaison, at the time when Mr. Bohannon went to the
76 City Council to ask to increase the HRC's fiscal amount from \$1,000 to \$2,000. The HRC set it
77 up so that the \$2,000 was split eventually between the HRC's four events. Native American
78 Heritage, Pride, Juneteenth, and MLK Day each got \$500. She thinks it is because for most of
79 the years prior, everything related to Black History Month was part of MLK Day or part of
80 Keene State College and thus already donated. The group can talk about this more under "New
81 Business." Dr. Saleh stated that he thinks the HRC should reimburse Dr. Morris for the expense.

82
83 **C) Juneteenth**

84
85 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that the written update from Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos is in the agenda
86 packet. She continued that Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos gave a breakdown of everything the
87 working group has planned and where they are at. Dr. Morris stated that the event will not be
88 downtown this year, because of the construction. Ms. Bender-Jesse replied that they are looking
89 at using Fuller Park right outside the Recreation Center. Discussion ensued.

90
91 Rabbi Aronson stated that he wants to note that anything scheduled for a Friday night will
92 preclude him and perhaps members of his community. He continued that it will also bump up
93 against anything scheduled at the Colonial Theater, The Showroom, Moco, or wherever else. It
94 is not an optimal time to be doing programming. Dr. Morris replied that she will bring that up to
95 the working group when they next meet.

96
97 Ms. Burke stated that she had talked to Councilor Workman about doing the Dr. Johnson
98 historical marker around Juneteenth, but that does not work for the Black Heritage Trail. She
99 continued that she was going to ask the Juneteenth working group if they can think of any other
100 days that would be appropriate. It is always good when there is already something going on in
101 the city. It is about a two-hour event with the Black Heritage Trail. It seems like the Juneteenth
102 working group has a whole series of dates, so this is something to keep on their radar. Dr.
103 Morris asked if Ms. Burke knows which dates work better for the Black Heritage Trail. Ms.
104 Burke replied no, they did not say. She continued that maybe earlier in the month would be
105 better. Dr. Morris thanked Ms. Burke for the information and continued that she will bring it to
106 the working group.

107
108 **D) Pride Event**

109
110 Mr. Morrill stated that the Pride working group is making progress. He continued that the
111 opening for the Art Crawl will be Friday, June 12 at Brewbakers. There will be some speakers
112 and performers, and a community art project – a mural painted on the wall of Madame Sherri's.
113 They have an artist who will organize all of that, once they give him a topic or subject matter for
114 him to design. He will create a "paint by number" design on the wall for people to paint on. The
115 closing party will be the last weekend in June, on Friday or Saturday at Madame Sherri's. The
116 working group is putting the call for artists together and looking for donations from folks.

117
118 **E) Keene International Festival**

120 Chair Kleiner asked Ms. Budakoti if she had a KIF update. Ms. Budakoti replied that she is
121 taking a break from the KIF this year because she is not here the majority of the time. She
122 continued that when the KIF committee regroups, they will probably assign a liaison for the
123 festival, and at that point, more will be shared.

124

125 **F) Native American Heritage**

126

127 Chair Kleiner stated that there is no report at this time. He continued that people can refer back
128 to February's report.

129

130 **6) New Business**

131

132 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that the City Clerk's Office would like the HRC to confirm Ms. Bowie's
133 nomination as Vice Chair by voting again.

134

135 Rabbi Aronson made a motion to nominate Ms. Bowie as Vice Chair. Dr. Morris seconded the
136 motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

137

138 Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that someone from the Durham, NH human rights committee reached
139 out to her, just to connect. She continued that the Durham group was researching whether there
140 were any other human rights commissions or committees in the state that are similar to theirs, in
141 that they are overseen by a municipality. Keene's HRC is the one that came up. She just
142 connected Chair Kleiner and Vice Chair Bowie with the chair of the Durham group, and she will
143 keep the HRC in the loop about what comes from that. It would be phenomenal to have a
144 connection with a group that operates potentially similarly to the HRC.

145

146 Chair Kleiner asked if there was any other new business.

147

148 Ms. Bowie asked if the HRC has money to pay for the food at the Black History Month event.

149 Ms. Bender-Jesse replied that the HRC has \$3,793 in its account.

150

151 Ms. Bowie made a motion for the HRC to reimburse Dr. Dottie Morris for \$441 for the food
152 items for the Black History Month event. Ms. Budakoti seconded the motion, which passed by a
153 vote of 7 to 0. Dr. Morris abstained.

154

155 Ms. Burke stated that she thinks they should also make a motion to give the Black History Month
156 event a budget moving forward. Mr. Morrill asked if this is something they need to bring to the
157 City Council. Ms. Bender-Jesse replied that to clarify, the HRC could make a motion to allocate
158 funding to that line item, either by splitting the \$2,000 they receive in July five ways for the five
159 events, or by asking the City Council for another \$500, thus asking for \$2,500 each year instead
160 of \$2,000.

161

162 Ms. Odatto stated that she questions the idea of the HRC funding five events, if they oversee six
163 events. She continued that she understands that the KIF is its own thing, but she wonders if the
164 HRC should be funding all of its events equally. Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that the reason the KIF
165 is listed throughout the HRC's budget is because it is overseen by the HRC, but the KIF is its

166 own nonprofit, 501c3 organization, she believes - Ms. Budakoti can correct her if she is wrong.
167 Thus, the KIF's budget is, while still under the HRC, a completely different line item. She
168 cannot even go into the system and allocate any funds to KIF, because the Parks & Recreation
169 Director oversees them directly.

170
171 Ms. Budakoti stated that Ms. Bender-Jesse is correct about most of that. She continued that the
172 KIF is not registered as a 501c3 yet, but the KIF operates under the HRC's umbrella because the
173 City does the KIF's finances and it is the safest way for them to be able to do the community
174 festival. She appreciates what Ms. Odato said about having equity, but in the past, the KIF has
175 been very fortunate to receive donations and sponsorships from supporters in the community, so
176 they have never been in a situation where they needed to request more. However, she wants to
177 be on the record in case there comes a time in the future when the KIF does not have the money
178 and the city really wants to continue the festival. At that time, she thinks there should be some
179 sort of step up in order to have that resource for them to be able to continue. She wants to again
180 express her huge gratitude for the community, because the festival is because of the community
181 and for the community, and she hopes it continues.

182
183 Ms. Burke stated that she is not sure if they are talking about five events or six, but her motion
184 would be for the HRC to allocate \$500 to each event the HRC oversees. Dr. Saleh replied that if
185 the KIF remains independent, the HRC has five events to fund, which means requesting an
186 additional \$500 from the City Council. He continued that he thinks it cannot hurt to ask. They
187 should request the additional \$500, and have the five events covered by whatever allocated funds
188 the HRC receives, so that even if the City Council denies the request for the additional \$500, the
189 events are still covered. Discussion ensued about whether the HRC will be requesting \$2,500 or
190 \$3,000 from the City Council. Councilor Chadbourne stated that as a member of the Finance,
191 Organization, and Personnel Committee, she can say that it is going to be a very difficult budget
192 this year.

193
194 Dr. Saleh asked what the HRC's justification would be for asking the City Council for \$3,000
195 instead of \$2,500, since the KIF has been adequately self-funded over the years and appears to
196 have a surplus. Rabbi Aronson replied that the justification would be that the HRC could help
197 compensate for any drop in funding the KIF might have in the future. Ms. Budakoti stated that
198 to clarify, it might look like the KIF has a surplus now, but this has not always been the case, and
199 the reason the budget looks very healthy right now is because one of the sponsors expressed that
200 the KIF needs to be made more sustainable and that sponsor donated an amount at the end of last
201 year that was intended for the KIF's continuation in future years.

202
203 Discussion continued about what the HRC will request of the City Council. Ms. Bender-Jesse
204 stated that although the fiscal year begins in July, she would need to present the HRC's request
205 next week. She continued that if it is the HRC's desire, she can write the memo as a request for
206 \$3,000 to give \$500 to each of the six events the HRC puts on every year. She appreciates the
207 comments about having equitable access for the KIF, because the HRC is also not the actual
208 fiscal agent for the Juneteenth event anymore since that switched over to the YMCA a couple of
209 years ago, but the HRC puts \$500 into that budget each year. Dr. Morris replied that the
210 Juneteenth group fundraises for the rest. Ms. Bender-Jesse replied yes, and it is similar with the
211 KIF – the festival costs over \$10,000, and the HRC could offer the \$500 because it is the same

212 with every other event. The HRC could put their increase request forward in that sense. Ms.
213 Burke replied that it seems equitable that if the HRC hosts six events, they should fund six
214 events.
215

216 Ms. Burke made a motion for the HRC to request \$3,000 from the City's upcoming budget, to
217 fund all six events that are under the HRC. Ms. Bowie seconded the motion.
218

219 Ms. Burke stated that to reiterate what Dr. Saleh said before, if the HRC ends up only getting
220 \$2,000, the HRC needs to decide whether to include Black History Month as an HRC budget
221 item for next year, which she thinks they should do. Chair Kleiner replied that if the HRC only
222 had \$2,000, that would be \$400 per the five events. He continued that it would not include the
223 KIF unless they decide it should, which would further bring the amount down. Rabbi Aronson
224 suggested the HRC make a motion about that in July or August, or whenever it is that they hear
225 back about the City Council's decision. Dr. Saleh asked if the only reason the City Council
226 needs to be consulted is regarding the HRC's request for the increase, or if they would still need
227 to consult the City Council regarding the decision to split the money among the five events. Ms.
228 Bender-Jesse replied that it is up to the HRC to decide how to spend their budget. She continued
229 that when the HRC is asking for an increase in funds, they need to really justify why they are
230 asking for that. That is, they are asking for the extra \$500 and \$500 for two events, not just
231 asking for more money because they simply want more money. If the HRC gets approved for
232 the \$3,000, they are still allowed to allocate the HRC's funds the way they need to that year. For
233 example, if someone suddenly donates funds to cover all of Juneteenth, and the HRC then does
234 not need that \$500, the HRC could decide to put that money in their balance on hand.
235

236 Chair Kleiner asked if there was further discussion. Hearing none, he called for a vote. The
237 motion passed with a vote of 7 to 0. Councilor Chadbourne abstained.
238

239 Chair Kleiner asked if there was any other new business. He welcomed the two new members,
240 and continued that the committee membership is now full. He asked everyone to briefly go
241 around and introduce themselves. Introductions occurred.
242

243 As Ms. Bender-Jesse introduced herself and explained her role as staff liaison, she stated that her
244 one piece of advice to new members is to never hit "reply all" to the emails she sends to the
245 group. She continued that doing so would mean the group was having a conversation as a
246 quorum, which would make the email conversation a "meeting" and thus require a minute taker.
247 She also asks that anyone who knows they will not be able to make it to a meeting to let her
248 know as early as possible, to ensure there will be a quorum. She welcomes feedback.
249

250 Dr. Saleh asked Ms. Bender-Jesse to clarify who is allowed to participate remotely, and how.

251 Ms. Bender-Jesse replied that HRC members are expected to attend in person, because a meeting
252 cannot happen unless a quorum of members are physically present. She continued that however,
253 in certain circumstances when a member cannot attend, they can ask her for the link to the Teams
254 meeting to participate remotely. Brief discussion ensued. Ms. Bender-Jesse clarified that the
255 Teams meeting link is not available to members of the public, only for the Minute Taker, HRC
256 members, and invited guest speakers like last month.
257

258 Ms. Bowie asked if there are updates on the Elm St. property. Mr. Morrill replied that he
259 emailed the Mayor for an update on what is happening with the Sadoques family home, 54 Elm
260 St. He continued that he did not get much of an update – just that the Mayor is still working on it
261 with the Historical Society and Joyce Heywood. He was hoping to hear more details, and hoping
262 to hear suggestions on what the HRC can do. While he does not want to direct anyone to flood
263 the Mayor’s email inbox, he thinks it would be a good idea for people to contact him. When Ms.
264 Heywood spoke to the HRC at the last meeting, she said that one of the best things they can do is
265 show that there is support in the community for saving this house. It thus makes sense for people
266 to share their support for this with the Mayor. He himself submitted a story suggestion to the
267 Keene Sentinel, but he has not heard back from them. The more the word gets out there, the
268 more likely it is that something will happen.

269

270 **7) Adjourn – Next Meeting April 6, 2026**

271

272 There being no further business, Chair Kleiner adjourned the meeting at 5:48 PM.

273

274 Respectfully submitted by,
275 Britta Reida, Minute Taker

276

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

FY 26 Human Rights Committee Budget

Revenue

Item	Budget	
City of Keene	\$	2,000.00
Donations		
HRC		
KIF	\$	19,965.50
Fundraising		
Pride Festival		\$71
Rollover Balance 7/1/25		
HRC	\$	2,854.44
KIF	\$	2,980.00
Total Revenue		
HRC	\$	4,925.44
KIF	\$	22,945.50

Expenses

Item	Budget	YTD Used	Remaining
Martin Luther King Day	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00	\$ -
Black History Month		\$ 441.90	
Juneteenth	\$ 500.00		\$ 500.00
Native American Heritage	\$ 500.00	\$ 150.00	\$ 350.00
Pride	\$ 500.00	\$ 139.80	\$ 431.20
Extras			
Total Expenditures			
HRC		\$ 1,231.70	
Balance Remaining		\$ 3,693.74	
Total Expenditures			
KIF		\$ 5,871.87	
Balance Remaining		\$ 17,073.63	

HRC Subcommittee Reports

MLK Day:

No report

Native American Heritage:

No report

Black History Month:

No report

Keene International Festival:

Event Date: September 26th, 2026, at 11 am.

Hunter Kirschner is attending HRC in May to give updates on KIF!

Pride:

Our social media pages are up. Please follow us on Facebook and Instagram, from both your personal and organizations' accounts. You can find links to both here

[Linktr.ee/PrideArtCrawl.Keene](https://linktr.ee/PrideArtCrawl.Keene)

Our Calls for artists (both visual arts and performing arts) went out on April 1. Digital and printable flyers will be made available to you. Please share with your networks and any LGBTQIA+ artists you know. We will be posting on our social medias and sharing with appropriate orgs in the region.

Other than that, planning moving forward nicely. Opening event at Brewbakers on Friday June 12. Doors at 5:30. Show at 6:00. Mural painting community art project will happen on Saturday June 13 and Sunday if needed. We have a great design we're planning for the wall at Madame Sherri's. Closing party will be Friday or Saturday June 26 or 27. Location TBD. We're looking for downtown art venues as well as donations of both money and product for a raffle.

Juneteenth:

We are swapping out one of the acts for the concert. However, here is the info on the various events as of now

Main Event	Juneteenth Celebration
Location	Fuller Park
Rain Location	Rec Center
Date	Friday, June 19th
Time	5:00-8:00 pm

Featured Acts:	Jazzlyn Mota
	Samir Evans
	JohnLu (?)
Film Screening #1	Billy Preston: The Way God Planned It
Location	huntress (Library)
Date	6/18/2026
Time	6:00 PM
Film Screening #2	ARCO
Location	Huntress
Date	6/19/2026
Time	11:00 AM
Interpretive Walk	Freedom Journey Trail
Location	Keene Family YMCA
Dates	June 12-22
Time	All Day
Highlight	Self-guided tours
Related:	Dr. Johnston house historical marker ribbon cutting
21 Art Wall	
Philanthropist at 21	

Next steps are fundraising and marketing.