

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

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

**Monday, April 6, 2026**

**5:00 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Gregory Kleiner, Chair  
Debra Bowie, Vice Chair (remote)  
Rabbi Daniel Aronson  
Marti Fiske  
David Morill  
Jennifer Porschitz, Alternate  
Dr. Mohammad Saleh, Alternate  
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Alternate  
Julie Odatto, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

Alyssa Bender-Jesse, Youth Services  
Manager / JCC Coordinator

**Members Not Present:**

Ritu Budakoti  
Councilor Bettina Chadbourne  
Dr. Dottie Morris  
Gina Burke  
Thomas M. White, 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."*

Chair Kleiner called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM. Roll call was conducted. Chair Kleiner asked Ms. Odatto to sit in for Councilor Chadbourne as a voting member. Ms. Bowie stated that she was participating remotely due to being ill, and she was at home, with no one in the room with her.

**2) Approval of March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2026 Minutes**

Mr. Morrill noted a typo on line 259: the correct address is "454 Elm St."

Rabbi Aronson made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 2nd, 2026, as corrected. Mr. Morrill seconded the motion, which passed by a vote of 5 to 0. Ms. Fiske abstained because she was not present.

**3) Finance Report**

Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that the finance report reflects the reimbursement check given to Dr. Morris for the Black History Month expenses. She continued that that line item is in the negative, but the balance remaining is not.

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

Chair Kleiner stated that Ms. Burke is not here tonight to give an update.

**5) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

Chair Kleiner thanked the chairs of the working groups for submitting their written reports, which are in the agenda packet. He continued that the MLK group has nothing to report, the Native American Heritage group has no new information, and Dr. Morris is not here to give an update about Black History Month.

- A) Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**
- B) Black History Month**
- C) Juneteenth**

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that there is one correction to make to the written update that is in the agenda packet. She continued that the showing of ARCO will be June 20 at 11:00 AM. John Lu has a question mark next to his name in the written report but has since been confirmed. The working group is working on getting food trucks for the event. She and Mr. Morrill can connect after the meeting to talk about visual artists participating. The working group is also working with people from 21 Bar and Grill who are interested in helping with fundraising. Historically, the working group has had a great, media-savvy fundraising team, but despite the Juneteenth event(s) being advertised in numerous ways, there are still people saying, “Oh, I didn’t know about it!” so they are trying to figure out how to get around that.

**D) Pride Event**

Mr. Morrill stated that the call for artists is out. He continued that there are flyers available today for whoever wants them and can share them. Ms. Bender-Jesse will send a PDF version with the QR code and a digital version with links to submission forms for artists. The Pride working group would appreciate the HRC’s help in sharing the information far and wide. He encourages people to also follow the Pride group on social media and share the call to artists on those platforms.

Regarding an HRC member’s question of whether the Pride event is appropriate for people of all ages so the information can be shared with the high school, Mr. Morrill replied that the closing

party is for people 21 and up, but the opening event is for all ages and open to everyone. He continued that the day after, June 13th, there will be a community mural art project, planned for the wall outside Madame Sherri's.

**E) Keene International Festival**

Chair Kleiner stated that the Keene International Festival (KIF) will be September 26th at 11:00 AM. He continued that Hunter Kirschner will attend the HRC's meeting in May to give them an update. Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that as Ms. Budakoti explained at the HRC's last meeting, she is no longer on the planning committee for the KIF, due to her new job. She continued that in May, Mr. Kirschner will give an update on the KIF planning, and in between this meeting and that one, HRC members can think about whether they want to join the KIF committee as the HRC liaison, and let her know. She will pass the information along to Ms. Fisk-Hennessey, who oversees the KIF.

**F) Native American Heritage**

**6) New Business**

Ms. Fiske stated that on behalf of the Library and the HRC, she had the opportunity to apply to be one of the [New Hampshire] Humanities' Community Conversation communities. She continued that Hannah Grimes had also applied, so they worked it out so that Hannah Grimes would partner with the Library and the HRC. She had hoped to talk with Ms. Burke about also partnering with the MDEIB. New Hampshire Humanities will provide the program, including the facilitator for the discussion and the questions, and it will be the job of the Library/HRC/Hannah Grimes/other partners to get people to the program, be involved, and host the place for it. She expects to receive a survey next week, and then will have an interview with the Executive Director to determine whether they can be one of the Community Conversation communities.

HRC members asked clarifying questions about the Community Conversation events. Ms. Fiske spoke about how the New Hampshire Humanities provides a facilitator and some prompts that help organize the conversation, and how it is pretty much a "self-running show" – the main role of the Library/HRC/partners will be to get participants there. She continued that she will find out more information. Discussion continued.

Chair Kleiner asked if there was any other new business.

Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that she does not have a full update, but she did submit the HRC's budget request to the City Manager and City Council, and has not heard anything back yet. She continued that at the last HRC meeting, they had talked about requesting an increase in funding specifically to make it equitable across all of the events the HRC supports. After running it by the HRC's previous staff liaison, Andy Bohannon, she talked with the HRC's Chair and Vice Chair and put forward the idea of asking for more money than the HRC had talked about before. Thus, the request was for \$5,000, instead of the \$3,000 the HRC had asked her to submit a request for. During her time with the HRC, she has seen that the HRC's events have grown much bigger, and now the HRC membership is at full capacity with even more people interested in joining. If the HRC receives the requested \$5,000, they would be able to significantly increase

the starting funds for all of their events. HRC members thanked Ms. Bender-Jesse. Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that she might reach out to HRC members to accompany her to the Finance, Organization, and Personnel (FOP) Committee meeting when their funding request is on the agenda.

7) **Adjourn – Next Meeting May 4th, 2026 at 5:00 PM**

There being no further business, Chair Kleiner adjourned the meeting at 5:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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