City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Monday, October 5, 2026 **5:00 PM** **Room 22, Recreation Center**

Members Present:
Gregory Kleiner, Chair
Debra Bowie, Vice Chair
Marti Fiske
Gina Burke
David Morill
Jennifer Porschitz, Alternate
Dr. Mohammad Saleh, Alternate (remote)
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Alternate
Julie Odato (5:04 PM)

Staff Present:
Alyssa Bender-Jesse, Youth Services Manager / JCC Coordinator

Members Not Present:
Ritu Budakoti
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Councilor Bettina Chadbourne
Thomas M. White, Alternate

1. Welcome and Call to Order

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

Participating remotely, Dr. Saleh stated that he was at home due to illness, and no one was in the room with him.

2. Approval of September 14, 2026 Minutes

Mr. Morrill noted corrections to the September 14, 2026 minutes:

Line 56 - "…*to help loosen the artwork from the Art Crawl*…" should be "…*to relocate some of the artwork to a new location*."
Lines 148-150 – "*He will still be chair of the Pride working group, but he will be sharing the responsibilities with Kestrel Peavy, a Keene Pride representative*" should say, "*He will still be*

the chair of the HRC's Pride subcommittee, but he will be now co-chair of the Art Crawl Planning Committee, with Kestrel Peavy of Keene Pride."

Ms. Bender-Jesse replied that they are called "working groups" rather than "subcommittees," so that wording needs to stay, but she will make that correction.

Vice Chair Bowie made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of September 14, 2026 as amended. Ms. Fiske seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Julie Odato arrived at 5:04 PM.

3. Finance Report

Ms. Bender-Jesse reported that the only change is that Ms. Fiske bought more copies of the "Woven Through the Sweetgrass" book, which is reflected under Native American Heritage. She continued that it is now shown in this Finance Report because she has not submitted everything yet, but for fundraising for Pride, there will be $32.10. That is the $7.10 fundraised at the Pride event, and the $25.00 that was clarified in the previous meeting.

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

Ms. Burke reported that the Community Conversation the MDEIB hosted on September 26 had about 16 participants, and there was a lot of great discussion. She continued that on Friday and Sunday, the MDEIB co-hosted two films with the Monadnock International Film Festival. The benefit concert with David Nachmanoff is October 15, 2026, at Stonewall Farm at 7:00 PM.

Ms. Burke continued that the MDEIB is planning a social justice organization gathering, in response to the incident when ICE was in Keene and so many organizations jumped in. Since there has been overlap and duplication, it would be good to find out who is doing what. For example, rapid response, mutual aid, and communications. They want to gather the organizations, put faces with names, figure out who is doing what, and organize a list or database. The gathering will likely be November 10, 2026, from 5:30 to 8:00 PM at the library. She is working with the New Hampshire Center for Justice and Equity on a facilitator and food. They are working on a list of organizations to invite, and HRC members are welcome to add groups. She intends to send the invitation out by the end of the week.

Ms. Fiske stated that it would be great to see that list of groups, because people sometimes ask her where they could volunteer. If Ms. Burke has contacts, it would help for spreading the word. Ms. Burke replied that many of the groups need more volunteers and support, but might not want to publicly put themselves out there. They need to figure out what all the groups are doing and what they need, to then determine what a choreographed response would look like in Keene if or when incidents happen again.

5. Acceptance of Committee Event Reports

Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that the agenda packet has reports from the working groups. HRC members have an extra sheet about Keene International Festival (KIF), because she received it after the agenda packets were already printed and stapled.

In response to a question, Ms. Bender-Jesse clarified that the goal is for the chair of each working group to submit a written report ahead of the HRC meeting, even if they plan to be present at the meeting. She recommends the meetings include working group chairs giving a one-sentence blurb to summarize their report, if HRC discussion about it is not needed. The intention was that if a working group needed to give a lengthy report, it would be more efficient to have that in writing in the agenda packet and just give brief highlights at the meeting.

a. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Ms. Burke stated that she reached out to the Community Kitchen about hosting the breakfast and has not heard back yet. She assumes it will be fine. She reached out to Rabbi Aronson to compare notes and ask him to brief her on what he has done for this event in the past, and how. The working group meets in a week or two.

b. Black History Month

Ms. Porschitz stated that she and Ms. Burke connected and reached out to groups to potentially partner with, such as Keene State College (KSC), Dr. Dottie Morris, the Keene School District (KSD), and the Historical Society of Cheshire County (HSCC). She continued that some people in the KSD have concerns about funding DEI-related projects not already in the curriculum. She will continue reaching out to other teachers. The idea she and Ms. Burke had was to gather student art, in December and January, around Black History month and diversity, to then display in a public space.

Ms. Burke stated that Dr. Morris told them about the great choir at the school she is now working at. Dr. Morris thought maybe the choir could perform at the HRC's event, so they are talking about that. She has been talking with Jenna Carroll of the HSCC, which has the BIPOC Monadnock Initiative. She and Ms. Porschitz were thinking of having a series of different things for Black History Month. Maybe they could involve students in a different way, if not through the schools.

Ms. Fiske stated that they could consider connecting with students through youth programs at the YMCA or the Rec Center. Discussion ensued about student involvement and other possible connections, such as alternative schools, and possibly having an event on a day other than the actual holiday, since many schools and City buildings are closed that day.

Ms. Odato stated that as a public school employee, she personally does not shy away from DEI topics, but the state of New Hampshire's anti-DEI legislation means teachers could be held accountable for introducing "inappropriate" themes. That could be a problem for some people. If

the Black History Month has something they want her to pass along at the elementary level, she would be glad to do so.

c. Juneteenth

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the working group is planning their seventh annual Juneteenth event. The next meeting is October 13, 2026, and HRC members are welcome, if anyone wants the link. Ms. Bender-Jesse replied that she wants to be on that email list.

In response to a question, Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos confirmed that the list includes Councilor Workman and two people from the YMCA.

d. Pride Event

Mr. Morrill stated that the Pride working group tabled at the Keene Pride festival a couple of weeks ago. The rain suppressed attendance slightly, but overall, it was well attended. The working group appreciates those who showed up to volunteer. This year, the HRC's Pride table unfortunately only received $7.10 in the donation jar, compared to about $71 last year. Regardless, they had many great conversations and connections with people.

Mr. Morrill stated that at the end of October, he will meet with the co-chair of the Art Crawl Planning Committee to start planning that event. They will then meet with a larger group in December.

e. Keene International Festival

Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that to give a quick overview, nearly 1,000 people attended the KIF, despite the rain pushing the event inside, which was phenomenal. She has heard a lot of positive feedback about the event.

f. Native American Heritage

Ms. Fiske stated that she is down to 12 copies of "Woven Through the Sweetgrass," with 15 on order. She met with Mackenzie Perkins, who will join the HRC next year and wants to be the next chair of the Native American Heritage working group. She passed on a list of what she has done in the past for Native American Heritage and connections she has made for potential events in the future, and she will keep communicating with Mr. Perkins about it. She also found a Library staff person to replace her on the HRC when her term ends.

6. <u>New Business</u>

a. Voting: New Event Chairs

Ms. Fiske asked how they are doing with getting new HRC members, as some members' terms expire. Ms. Bender-Jesse replied that Ms. Fiske, Ms. Budakoti, and Rabbi Aronson have terms that expire this year. She continued that the Mayor will be nominating Mr. Perkins to join. A Library staff member will replace Ms. Fiske. That leaves two vacant spots. Dr. Saleh or Ms.

Porschitz could potentially become a full member instead of an alternate. Thomas White has told her he will be resigning from the HRC due to personal reasons. If HRC members have names of people who might want to join, they can let her know. They might know someone with an interest in a specific HRC event, which the person could eventually chair, keeping in mind that no one works in isolation. The HRC works together and has many conversations about all the events.

Ms. Odato asked, regarding finding replacements for Rabbi Aronson and Ms. Budakoti, if they were HRC members as interested individuals, or as representatives of specific groups. For example, Ms. Fiske is a Library representative and will be replaced by another Library representative. Ms. Bender-Jesse replied that she is not sure, but she will find out.

Mr. Morrill stated that at Keene Pride, someone came up to the HRC's table and asked him about the different groups the HRC has. She asked him what there is for people with disabilities. That is something the HRC does not have a working group for. Vice Chair Bowie replied that is something for the HRC to consider.

7. Adjourn – Next Meeting November 2, 2026 at 5:00 PM

Ms. Bender-Jesse stated that she will be traveling on November 2, 2026. She is working on finding another staff member to cover the meeting for her, since having a staff liaison is a meeting requirement. She will let the group know.

There being no further business, Chair Kleiner adjourned the meeting at 5:31 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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