

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD HOC RACIAL JUSTICE & COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, July 16, 2020

2:00 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Dottie Morris, Co-Chair
Rick VanWickler, Co-Chair
Catherine Workman, Councilor
Julia Atkins
Tia Hockett
Pierre Morton
Eli Rivera
Aditi Saleh
Gail Somers

Staff Present:

Rebecca Landry, Assistant City Manager/IT
Director
Shane Maxfield, Keene Police Department
Steve Russo, Keene Police Chief

Members Not Present:

Stacey Massiah

George S. Hansel, Mayor

Dottie Morris called the meeting to order at 2:06 PM.

1) Welcome and Introductions

Richard VanWickler, Co-Chair-Former Superintendent Cheshire County Department of Corrections

Mr. VanWickler introduced himself and thanked Dr. Dottie Morris and each of the board members for participating in this important work. Mr. VanWickler stated that he prefers to be called Rick informed the board that he is the former superintendent of the Cheshire County House of Corrections. Mr. VanWickler asked that members present introduce themselves, what they do and to express three things that are immediately possible from the result of this Committee. Mr. VanWickler said that he is aggressive to speaking about institutional racism, also known as systemic and structural racism for thirteen years. He strongly believes that this Committee can make a difference. The three things that he would like to see from the result of this Committee:

- Public Information Campaign

- Strategy that develops and that can assist the community in understanding confirmation biases and what systemic racism is. To help people better understand white privilege.
- Assist the public to know more about what police training our officers go through and what their challenges are and their culture is like.

Dr. Dottie Morris, Co-Chair -Associate Vice President at Keene State College –Institutional Equity and Diversity

Dr. Morris introduced herself as the Keene State College Associate Vice President for Equity and Diversity. Dr. Morris said that the three things that she thinks about most are related to education and that she really loves children and the potential that children have. The three things that she would like to see from the result of this Committee:

- How do we work with children and how do we create a group of children who can think about these things in a different ways and can have an impact on the rest of society for a longer period.
- How can we be a healthier community? Not just physically healthy but mentally, socially and spiritually healthy. Dr. Morris said whenever you think of Dr. King's work whenever there is something like racism in that community we cannot be healthy.
- Finding ways for multiple voices to be heard, so that we can co-create something together. When you co-create, more people are invested in what we are trying to do here.

Gail Somers, Yahso Jamaican Grille.

Ms. Somers introduced herself as the owner of Yahso Jamaican grille located at 45 Main Street here in the city of Keene. Previously she had worked at a large local corporation here for many years. The three things that she would like to see from the result of this Committee:

- Police training. What is done, what is the strategy? Are there any opportunities that exist to make that better.
- Get local businesses and corporations involved. Where can we get them pulled in and tied in ideally to get some pledge or action from them to see where they stand and what part they will play in making Keene a healthier community concerning racial justice?
- Getting schools involved. What can be done to address this in the schools? Start young. What kind of education or exposure can we provide in schools to address this area?

Eli Rivera, Sheriff.

Mr. Rivera introduced himself as the Sherriff of Cheshire County for 8 years. He retired from the Keene Police Department after 22 years of service. The three things that he would like to see from the result of this Committee:

- Better understanding of how our community is doing.
- How can law enforcement move forward during the national crisis that has affected our local community as well? How is that message to be delivered and how do we create that

roadmap to success to ensure that our community is seeing the changes that we are making?

- How do we recognize and deal with unconscious bias?

Pierre Morton, Franklin Pierce University Executive Director of Career Development.

Mr. Morton introduced himself as a transplant from Phoenix, Arizona via Connecticut and on to New Hampshire where he is proud to call Keene his home. He is the Executive Director of Career Development at Franklin Pierce University in Rindge, New Hampshire. The three things that he would like to see from the result of this Committee:

- Make a recommendation to the City Council about creating parallel paths or making parallel paths in community policing. To be a voice in allowing the police to really do policing. To put together social service professionals and other professionals that can take some of the undue burden off our police department when it does not have to do with violence or threats to the public health issues. Making recommendations to the City Council to take undue burden off the police department by providing professional services where necessary.
- Develop a stronger police and community engagement platform. Places, spaces, programs, and platforms for the community to engage with regular police officers whether on duty or off.
- Create a regulatory or legal foundations as well as a monetary foundation for those who are going to come in and influence Keene in the arts and other areas to really feel comfortable, safe and have a sense of belonging. Start a community bank to allow people from lower incomes or those who may not have capital to begin to start small organizations such as what Hannah Grimes Center does. This would be a bank specifically for people that would like to add to our economic viability here in Keene.

Tia Hockett, Community Member.

Ms. Hockett introduced herself as being born and raised in Keene along with her family. Ms. Hockett works at National Grange Mutual Insurance Company and part time at Home Goods. Ms. Hockett said this is new to her and she is very excited to be here. The result that she would like to see from the Committee:

- Education is key. To develop more programs to put out to the public to get discussions going to get children involved. Ms. Hockett participates in a mentorship program in Vermont, which do many events there. She would like to see some of those events here in Keene as well.

Catherine Workman, City Councilor.

Councilor Workman introduced herself as a new City Councilor of seven months. She is excited about the work we are doing and excited to be a City Councilor at this time. Councilor Workman's daytime job is a Family Service Specialist for The State of New Hampshire. She has worked for

seventeen years in human services as a case manager for various special populations. Councilor Workman's academic background is in sociology and criminal justice with a Masters in psychology. The three things that she would like to see from the result of this Committee:

- Implicit bias exists. See more diversity in hiring practices in Keene.
- Educational Programs in schools. The children really are our future.
- Further diversity in Keene not just special events. Ms. Workman loves that the community honors and recognizes different cultures but would like to see that woven into everyday life in Keene. Celebrate our differences.

Julia Atkins, Keene School Board.

Ms. Atkins introduced herself as working for United Natural Foods and as the Vice Chair for the Keene School Board. She is a mother and grandmother and wants a better community for her child and grandchild. The three things that she would like to see as a result from this Committee:

- Education. Being able to recognize what systemic racism looks like. It is difficult for people in the community to understand that it does exist in our community. It is not an everyday thing but it exists.
- Have or work toward a community review board as it relates to the Police Department. Having someone from the community to be able to give and provide feedback would be beneficial.
- Educate students and families.

Aditi Saleh, Keene High School Student.

Miss Saleh introduced herself as a junior at Keene High School. The three things that she would like to see as a result from this Committee:

- Better education throughout the schools. Starting in elementary school through middle and high school.
- Hearing from more perspectives and backgrounds.
- Having discussions so that we are more comfortable talking about racism and racial bias.

Rebecca Landry, Assistant City Manager/IT Director and Staff Liaison Racial Justice and Safety Committee.

Ms. Landry introduced herself as an Assistant City Manager and she is excited to be a part of this Committee. Ms. Landry thanked Aditi for being the youngest person to come forward and participate. Ms. Landry stated that she is here to support the Committee to recognize where there may be redundancies and where there are common themes. All of the concerns and recommendations will be brought to the City Council. Ms. Landry would like to know how to address and better handle racism and racial comments and experiences in schools. This is an opportunity for the schools to be involved in the process.

Shane Maxfield, Keene Police Department and Staff Liaison Racial Justice and Safety Committee.

Mr. Maxfield introduced himself as a Lieutenant with the Keene Police Department. He is looking forward to the opportunity to be educated and learn and maybe educate and teach a little bit as well. Mr. Maxfield believes it is important to for communication in a community and this is an outstanding avenue for that.

2) Public Meeting Rules.

Tom Mullins, City Attorney, reviewed the RSA 91-A Public Meetings rules with the Committee.

3) Committee Charge-Mayor George Hansel

Mayor George Hansel thanked all present for participating. Mayor Hansel appointed all present to this Committee to bring together all your vast experiences and different perspectives. Mayor Hansel stated that contained in a letter that he received when newly elected was a part that stuck with him. It stated if you really want to be successful in being the Mayor you need to enable and empower the people in this community that really care about it and put them in a position to affect positive change. That is what this is about. The City of Keene facilitating this conversation. Bringing you all to the table to come up with some recommendations to address or prevent systemic inequalities in the City of Keene. The charge before this Committee is to develop recommendations to correct or prevent systemic or cultural inequities. Develop a roadmap for the community to take and act on. Mayor Hansel stated that he is there to support in anyway but will be unable to attend all meetings but he will listen to them.

4) Sharing of Ideas

Dr. Dottie Morris, Co-Chair-Associate Vice President at Keene State College –Institution for Equity and Diversity:

Dr. Morris asked how we want to do the work that we as a Committee are charged to do.

Gail Somers, Yahso Jamaican Grille:

Ms. Somers suggested narrowing priorities. Find a way to decide what items to tackle first. Find a way to develop a list of order.

Pierre Morton, Executive Director for Career Development Franklin Pierce University:

Mr., Morton noted that there are common themes and ideas spoken of that can be put into buckets Such as community, education, children and policing. Mr. Morton suggested listening and taking in information.

- Collect data.
- Meet with the community.
- Talk with the City Council and Civic leaders on the suggested buckets.

Decide which of those buckets or elements of those buckets are low hanging fruit or what would be most impactful for the Committee to choose.

Catherine Workman, City Councilor:

Ms. Workman would like to hear or invite members of the Human Rights Committee to speak. They have been influential in highlighting diversity in the community. Ms. Workman suggested working in partnership with the Human Rights Committee or inviting them into the conversation.

Julia Atkins, Keene School Board:

Ms. Atkins informed the Committee that the Superintendent is working on things for the school system and that the Committee should make sure they are not duplicating work. Have a conversation with the School Board and see where they leave off and where the Committee can pick up. Invite the Superintendent or School Board in to discuss what they are working on.

Rebecca Landry, Assistant City Manager/IT Director and Staff Liaison Racial Justice and Safety Committee:

Ms. Landry informed the Committee that the Keene Police Department did a workshop last Tuesday night for the City Council that provided a detailed view of CALEA certification, training and how they handle situations. To educate yourself on how things work there this is a great place to start. The video is two hours long. She stated that a video recording of the workshop is on the City website and a link would be sent to the Committee members for their reference.

Richard VanWickler, Co-Chair-Former Superintendent Cheshire County Department of Corrections:

Mr. VanWickler suggested that due to the length of the video that it would be better to watch it individually when Committee members have the time to do so.

Steve Russo, Keene Police Chief:

Chief Russo informed the Committee that he would be happy to send over the Powerpoint of the workshop the Keene Police Department put on for the City Council so that the Committee did not need to spend two hours watching the video. Chief Russo said the Powerpoint does not include the question and answer segment so he does suggest watching the video if time permits.

Rebecca Landry, Assistant City Manager/IT Director and Staff Liaison Racial Justice and Safety Committee:

Ms. Landry informed the board that a member of the public was present and would like to speak. Katie Conley was given the floor.

5) Public Appearing before the Committee:

Katie Conley:

Ms. Conley stated that she was very new to this and realized that now may not be the time but she expressed her interest and wanting to help the community reach the city of Keene especially through education. Ms. Conley informed the Committee that her background is early education. Ms. Conley would like to see more diversity provided starting with books the kids read and come into contact with. She would also like to help the teachers keep diversity alive and present. She stated that she would share further ideas in future meetings as appropriate.

Rebecca Landry, Assistant City Manager/IT Director and Staff Liaison Racial Justice and Safety Committee:

Ms. Landry asked what the Committee would like accomplished by the next meeting.

Rick Van Wickler suggested tasks for next meeting:

- Bucket Lists
- Prioritize Categories and Mission
- How to collect and pull in information

Committee Schedule:

Committee has agreed to meet weekly for the next 30 days.

Next meeting will be Thursday, July 23, 2020 at 5:30 PM.

Pierre Morton, Executive Director for Career Development Franklin Pierce University- made a motion to adopt the Rules of Procedure. Eli Rivera, Sheriff seconded the motion.

Unanimous roll call vote to adopt Rules of Procedure, passed 9-0.

Meeting adjourned by Dr. Dottie Morris, Co-Chair at 3:21 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amy Lawliss, Minute Taker

Reviewed & Edited by Rebecca Landry. Additional Edits by Katie Kibler, Clerk's Office