

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

**AD HOC RACIAL JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Thursday, September 24, 2020**

**4:45 PM**

**Remote Meeting via Zoom**

**Members Present:**

Richard Van Wickler, Co-Chair  
Dr. Dottie Morris, Co-Chair  
Pierre Morton  
Gail Somers  
Julia Atkins  
Eli Rivera

**Staff Present:**

Rebecca Landry, IT Director  
Shane Maxfield, Police Lieutenant

**Members Not Present:**

Aditi Saleh  
Tia Hockett  
Catherine Workman, Councilor  
Stacey Massiah

Rebecca Landry read a prepared statement explaining how the Emergency Order #12, pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04 issued by the Governor of New Hampshire, waives certain provisions of RSA 91-A (which regulates the operation of public body meetings) during the declared COVID-19 State of Emergency. The meeting was called to order at 4:53 PM. Roll call was conducted.

**1) Minutes from Last Meeting**

Ms. Atkins made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of September 3, 2020. Mr. Morton seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

**2) Veteran and First Responder Healthcare Presentation**

Co-Chair Morris welcomed Sheena Bice and invited her to give her presentation.

Ms. Bice introduced herself and stated that she oversees Clinical Operations for Veteran and First Responder Healthcare (VFR). She continued that every staff member is a Veteran, service member, first responder, or family member of a Veteran, service member, or first responder. That is what makes the company unique and focused. She shared background information of the company, started by Erik Golnick (CEO) and Eric Frieman, when the two of them struggled to

find good quality, culturally competent providers for Veterans and first responders and decided to start their own agency. They opened in NH in 2017 and have facilities in three other states, soon to be four.

Ms. Bice stated that first responders have had repeated exposure to high-risk situations that place them in harm's way, on a regular basis – that is the nature of the job. They have training in how to navigate, mitigate, and manage risk, but even so, they are still susceptible to a stress response. First responders are trained to be and used to being the protectors, and do not often reach out for help on their own. They act as enforcers, counselors, resources, functional support individuals, and so on and so forth, and need to be healthy themselves. First responders have mental health needs, due to the day-to-day crises and chaos, adrenaline rushes and adrenaline dumps; it all takes a toll. That all impacts mental and physical health. There are conflicting demands between work and family, due partially to working overtime and having non-traditional hours that cause them to miss family events and holidays, which can lead to family stress. First responders often feel isolated and misunderstood, and only connected with each other. Sometimes there are staffing shortages and people work overtime and do not get enough sleep, overuse caffeine and stimulants, etc. Stress elevates and arouses, which can help a person focus at work if the stress is a small amount, but when it is chronic, it makes it harder to stay focused and increases irritability and hinders relationships. Stress affects the nervous system, immune system, cardiovascular system, and can increase or worsen anxiety and depression. Chronic, unmanaged stress can lead to PTSD-like symptoms. The goal is to avoid that by making sure first responders get the support they need. One way to do that is in the Academy, by increasing the education and decreasing the stigma around getting help and addressing emotional wellness. That would have an impact on an overall cultural shift.

Ms. Bice asked if anyone had questions or comments yet. Mr. Morton thanked her and stated that he does have some questions. He continued that a person may have a ton of training, but if stress gets high, it seems that there would be value in having a well-rehearsed and practiced plan for how to deal with it. He asked if Ms. Bice could talk about some of the services that are available to first responders, specifically police officers, and whether they are free or part of a program. Lastly, he would like to hear about what stress actually does to first responders and their ability to perform their jobs, especially when they are constantly involved in critical and emergency or urgent situations.

Ms. Bice stated that regarding stress management training, VFR wants to have that in the Academy, and also provide interim training throughout a person's career. Training includes what the physical responses to stress are, as well as the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive reactions. Officer Wellness Programs address this. Stress responses can include flashbacks, nightmares, difficulty relaxing, difficulty falling asleep, and muscle tension, especially for law enforcement. Your body tensing up is a natural part of assessing a situation's risk/ramping up to respond. Hopefully your body relaxes once the crisis is over, but how often can your body go through that cycle before you have an injury? Running and jumping can lead to injuries/chronic pain, headaches, lack of sleep, etc., which can be problematic especially when combined with

overtime and not enough breaks and not using one's vacation time. Fear, anxiety, and irritability are common emotional responses to stress – every day there is the possibility of a serious incident, which is traumatic. People in law enforcement are exposed to chronic and cumulative trauma. Just putting on the badge, in this political climate, is hard, because you do not know what you will be faced with. To some people at some times, law enforcement officers are “heroes,” and to others at other times, they are “monsters,” and it can feel like betrayal. Disenfranchisement leads to burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious traumatization. Ms. Bice gave more examples and signs of possible stress responses and how family life can be negatively affected. She continued that these stress responses are not guaranteed – some officers might experience some or none. It depends on many factors, such as whether there is training, or buy-in to emotional health, or a support group, or support from an officer's department, and so on and so forth – all of those factors start the healing process or protect against burnout and other stress responses.

Ms. Bice spoke about what VFR offers, in terms of Intensive Outpatient Programming, which is a group five days a week that addresses co-occurring issues of mental health and substance use. VFR is entirely for Veterans and first responders (EMS, Police, Fire, Corrections); no one from the general population is involved, which upholds the integrity of the program. She continued that there are other outpatient group addressing anxiety, relapse prevention, preventing burnout and compassion fatigue, peer to peer, and more. They also have individual therapy and family therapy if that is appropriate. They refer to other facilities in NH and VT for residential care as is sometimes needed.

Mr. Morton stated that there is a lot of data that talks about all of the ongoing training that police officers and other first responders receive, but when one's amygdala is continuously activated from situation to situation, even with all of the training in the world it is difficult to overcome that. The Police and Policing work group has read about the importance of ongoing mental health awareness and services to first responders and he is really interested in learning more about that. Are there services police officers need to be offered on a weekly or monthly basis or as part of their benefits package?

Ms. Bice replied some things to offer are: the training in the Academy, and then ongoing wellness trainings, to say “Hey, it's okay if you get help and support; that will actually help you reach the end of your career successfully and move on into retirement.” She continued that the peer-to-peer programs some departments have are amazing. She spoke about how it works when an officer can go to another officer in the department and ask for support due to a difficult call, and get support from a peer who understands and can talk with them about it. A peer-to-peer program is hugely successful when coupled with a culturally-competent, vetted, trusted mental health counselor that is embedded in it. It also helps to cut back on or be cognizant of overtime, which can be hard, but is important. It helps when support staff are trained to pay attention to officers' behavior and look for warning signs of stress, like tardiness or an increase in dark humor; and it helps when officers get some time off in between critical incidents. She continued that she could go on and on.

Ms. Somers thanked Ms. Bice and asked: are the services directly available to first responders anonymously and separate from the agency they are with, or are the VFR clients typically the agencies? Ms. Bice replied that they are a private, community provider. She continued that they want officers and their family members to be able to access services from any angle – if an officer comes in for services voluntarily, VFR cannot reach out to his/her department about it without that officer signing a release of information. There are also situations where there is departmental involvement but they still need a release of information to protect confidentiality. They will not get anywhere with treatment if the officer worries that VFR will report everything back to their department or that it will impact their job. If there are no safety issues requiring VFR to get anyone else involved, they won't. That is case by case. They assess whether it makes sense to pull in the command, or if it is just an individual seeking services. They are in network with most insurances (she listed many) and in the Community Care network with the VA. They try to reduce the barriers to treatment and care for all clients that come in. Finances will not be a barrier to seeking services, at all.

Ms. Somers asked what proportion of the services are referred by command, versus individuals coming directly to VFR. She continued that she assumes most of the services are sought due to critical incidents, but Ms. Bice could speak to that, to put it into scope. How are clients generally referred? Are they doing more group sessions and on-going educational services? Have VFR noticed any new trends or changes in the care they are providing? Ms. Bice replied that she does not have those numbers in front of her, but in general, they get more referrals from the peer-to-peer groups than from command themselves. They are not doing Fit For Duty right now. They do departmental trainings/officer wellness, with suggestions for how to improve things like morale and retention and overall health and wellness, and VFR gets a lot of calls after those. The majority of the time it is the individual officer coming to them or the peer-to-peer counselor reaching out, and general word of mouth.

Co-Chair Morris asked if members of the public had questions. Hearing none, she asked if anyone else on the committee had questions.

Ms. Landry stated that one of her challenges as the staff liaison for this group is to make sure the conversations eventually come down to focus on recommendations the group can give to the City Council to address specifically the issues that may be happening in our community around racial justice and community safety. She asked if Ms. Bice has any ideas to share about racial justice and community safety and how VFR impacts that.

Ms. Bice replied that the healthier the officers are, the healthier their interfaces with the community are. She continued that all of the things they have explored today are what they want to see implemented to improve community relations and racial justice – having training protocols, being supportive of officers, being aware of officers' needs, and making some of those recommended adjustments will all lead to healthier individuals. Having healthier officers leads to improved community relations. Officer training in how to manage situations is not enough;

there needs to be a focus on officers' health and wellness, and then the other aspects come into play.

Co-Chair Morris asked if there were other questions or comments. Hearing none, she thanked Ms. Bice for her presentation and all of the information. Co-Chair Van Wickler asked how a referral could be made to VFR for services. Ms. Bice replied that the VRF website has phone numbers/contact information, and she can send the committee a flyer. She continued that some people are uncomfortable with directly calling the office to seek treatment, because it is hard to ask for help, so there is a web inquiry form to fill out, and then a VFR staff person would reach out to that person.

### **3) Discussion: Public Input Opportunities**

Co-Chair Morris stated that the AHRJCS Committee has been hearing a lot about what is already happening in the community because they said they wanted that information before they started coming up with recommendations. She continued that they have not yet had a presentation on Education. They want to set up a process to get information from not only people who are delivering services, but also the recipients of services/community members.

Co-Chair Morris asked how the group wants to proceed with having a way for community members to provide input about their experiences. Co-Chair Van Wickler proposed they go on live radio with Dan Mitchell – this would be an interesting topic for him and his listeners, and he advertises his upcoming shows, so people would have the opportunity to hear about it ahead of time and call in live. He continued that a few AHRJCS Committee members could be panelists. He asked what others thought. Discussion ensued. Ms. Somers talked about/asked about the logistics of bringing that information back to an AHRJCS meeting and to the public. Co-Chair Van Wickler replied that every show becomes a podcast, which is a public record in a way. He continued that the Mayor's initial Zoom meeting (about racial justice) was very successful and did not need much substance from the hosts, because the public response was so overwhelming. They got a lot of great input.

Co-Chair Van Wickler stated that the committee is hearing a lot about how great local police are, and they have the best jail in the community, but there is systemic racism in this region. The committee cannot depart from that as being the objective of its work. It is great that the police are doing a great job, but the community still has issues. If they give the public an opportunity to speak they will hear the very personal stories that the committee does not know about. It could be a radio session or another Zoom forum like the Mayor did. Public input is essential. A major challenge is that people experiencing racism and difficulties are probably not likely to come to a forum and talk about it. How can the committee reach the people who are not comfortable talking on the phone on a radio show, or do not have access to Zoom?

Co-Chair Morris asked if the podcast of a radio show, if they went that route, could be part of the committee's public notes/record. Ms. Landry replied no. She continued that she loves the idea

of Dan Mitchell's show, but she cannot imagine how it could be part of the public record and a quorum of this body cannot go on the radio show because then it is a "meeting" and they would have to have meeting minutes and try to record it somehow. She likes the public forum idea better. But if a couple committee members have the opportunity to talk with Dan Mitchell, that would be great and they should go for it, but it could not be the means to create a public record. Co-Chair Morris asked if she means that a few committee members could go on the radio and talk about the work and announce when the public forum would be and encourage participation. Ms. Landry replied yes. Mr. Morton stated that he loves that idea.

Mr. Morton stated that regarding the people the committee wants to reach who are unable or unwilling to attend a public forum, one idea is for the committee to do a phone campaign and try calling the residents of Keene and ask them, say, five simple questions about their experiences, or send something in the mail, since they cannot go door to door due to COVID-19. Those are just ideas.

Ms. Somers stated that she agrees with Co-Chair Van Wickler's comments. She continued that there are true problems in the community and it all stems around systemic racism. They need to establish a way for those experiences to be brought to the surface. She has an idea but first wants to share an experience. She shared a story about how she and another brown-skinned friend went into a store having forgot their face masks in the car, and the employee stopped them the minute they went through the door to tell them they could not come in without masks. They went back to the car to get their masks, and on their way back into the store, saw a caucasian person not wearing a mask. She let the person know they wouldn't be allowed in without a mask, but the person refused to put one on. Ms. Somers and the person she was with then witnessed this caucasian, unmasked person choose an item and go through the check-out line with it, never once being told to wear a mask. She continued that she was appalled that this caucasian person was not called out, and she was. There is no avenue for sharing this kind of story. Her idea is: could the committee look at creating some sort of community board/place where people can bring these issues to? Then the committee could track these types of issues. People voiced a lot of experiences and concerns at the first Zoom forum and people occasionally send her stories. Could the committee create a standing, more permanent body people could go to with these stories and experiences, even after this committee sends its recommendations to the City Council and is done with its charge? The idea would be for this body to listen to people's experiences, and continue to work on resolutions and address areas that still need attention. She would like others' thoughts.

Co-Chair Morris asked if there is a way that they can set something up on a website, where it is anonymous, and allow people to input stories and it would flag this committee (for now) and that would be a part of the public record of concerns that people laid out. Her second question is: is it correct that Ms. Somers is saying one of their recommendations could be to create a council of people who will receive this type of information and continue some work on it? It sounds like Ms. Somers was talking about two things. Ms. Somers replied that is correct.

Ms. Landry stated that she is so excited, because Ms. Somers opened the door to a conversation she has been wanting to have. She continued that she really likes the idea of putting this recommendation into the report to the City Council, saying, we would like a place where people who are experiencing issues with systemic racism can have a voice. She suggests they bring in some people from the City's Human Rights Committee, which is an ongoing, not ad hoc committee. Maybe they would be a good place for people's stories to go to, anonymously or otherwise. She continued that regarding Co-Chair Morris's question about whether that would be possible (on a webpage), and she is the IT Director and thus will find a way to make it happen. They created an anonymous tips webpage for the Police Department and it has been wildly successful.

Ms. Landry stated that in response to Ms. Somers' story, she wants to say that she has heard from two friends who have recently been in very troubling situations that may not be "characteristic" of Keene but are an example of racism that many people in the community might not be aware of. A friend of hers who is a young, black person said "When I walk down the street in a hoodie, people put their hands on their wallets. When I go in a restaurant, the elderly woman asks to be seated away from me. People didn't ask me my name; they called me 'the black kid.'" Those are the kinds of issues she is really looking forward to learning more about and addressing. She continued that she is sorry Ms. Somers had that experience and that she was treated that way. It is about how they can educate people and create a whole new approach to being comfortable with people in general, not just people based on their color.

Ms. Somers thanked Ms. Landry and stated that she did call out that store employee, who was very apologetic and said she "didn't even notice" and that it is "hard to manage this new mask policy." She continued that underlying that, she thinks, is the fact that a brown-skinned person stood out to this (white) person more than a non-brown-skinned person. She would like to think there was innocence there but it just shows how deep-rooted some of these things are. She is glad to hear that Ms. Landry can relate and appreciates whatever IT support solutions they can get. This committee would not be doing any justice if they do not get to the very heart of these matters that are not going to surface otherwise.

Councilor Workman stated that she thinks everything everyone has said is phenomenal and she supports it all. For getting public input: if they are going to do the anonymous "tip line" idea, can they also do an anonymous survey? Does the City have the means to do that? Then they could compile the findings in an easy format. That could go up on social media, which might be more cost effective than mailings. They need to really look at bias in the community. They focused heavily in the beginning on the KPD and policing methods, but it is becoming more and more clear that it is an issue with community members as well and education is important for the community at large, not just institutions.

Ms. Landry replied yes, they have Survey Monkey they can use, and she really likes the idea of using social media, because they can use geographic tools to target people who are in this area, and they would get a better response on social media than they might get from people coming to

a meeting or calling into the radio. However, all of those options are good ways to reach the public. She would love to hire a college to do a scientific survey but she does not know if there is funding available, but if the committee wants, they can ask, and see what the City can do. Mr. Morton replied that he would like to talk with Ms. Landry – “Cost be darned, we can figure this out.”

Mr. Morton stated that what Ms. Somers shared was powerful. He continued that they should be cognizant of the fact that if they have an anonymous tip line, which yes, they need, they also need to put into place the ability for them to act on what they hear. This will go awry if for three months people are sending in stories, and then the months go by and nothing happens, no education comes about, nothing real comes of it. It would have the reverse effect times five. He definitely thinks they should do this, but there should be some sort of response to the incidents that people share.

Co-Chair Morris replied that that is why one of Ms. Somers' recommendations was to have something ongoing beyond the tenure of this group. They can recommend the creation of an ‘implementation committee’ of sorts. Ms. Somers replied yes, and part of the responsibility would be to document and follow-through on the things that come to the surface.

Ms. Atkins stated that she thinks it is a great idea. She continued that partly what happens, as many of them know, is that people think of something as a “one-off.” Having a means of being able to collect the information and share it people means they can see and show that it is not a one-off incident – they can determine how frequently these incidents happen, the type of incidents, etc., in our community. We live in a great community and it does not happen all the time, but it does happen, and has some pretty daunting effects. So loves the idea of being able to collect the data and share it, because people have a better understanding when they know more than just one incident.

Councilor Workman stated that if they do the Zoom format to collect public input, and it is very clear that that systematic racism happens in the community, she suggests the committee focus these upcoming forums on recommendations – what does the community want to see moving forward? What does the community think they need to resolve or mitigate this from continuing? Because with limited time and given how big the community interest is, they could be there for another 3-hour meeting just hearing incidents from the public. It would help to have a clear agenda and say they are specifically looking for what the community thinks could be a resolve for this.

Co-Chair Morris asked what people think about breaking the public forums up by the bucket areas – one week they would do education and get input on education recommendations, and another week would be law enforcement, etc. Would that help? Councilor Workman replied that she thinks it would, and it would also help people plan for their participation, based on their interests and experiences – for example, educators would know they wanted to call in during the forum focused on education. After the forums the committee could come back together as a



group to look at people's feedback and ideas and compile the information to use in their final report to the City Council.

Co-Chair Morris asked who will follow up. She asked if Co-Chair Van Wickler knows Dan Mitchell and if he can contact him about the radio show idea. Co-Chair Van Wickler replied yes. Co-Chair Morris asked how they want to plan the workshops, and choose the dates, and whether they want to break it down by topic area or not. Ms. Landry replied that she could pull together a suggested time frame and scope for those things, tentative dates for the three workshops based on the bucket areas with a brief introduction for each, making sure they frame the workshops toward seeking recommendations for the committee to consider putting in the report to the City Council. If the committee wants, she could put this together and bring it back to the committee for their approval. Co-Chair Morris asked what people think. Committee members replied that that sounds good.

Ms. Atkins asked if the Education working group is going to meet before the next committee meeting to flesh out their ideas. Co-Chair Morris replied that is a great idea, and any one of the Education working group members can reach out to the others to set that up. Ms. Atkins replied that she can reach out, if someone else could set up the Zoom. Co-Chair Morris replied that she can set up the Zoom.

#### **4) Next Meeting – Agenda Items and Schedule**

Brief discussion ensued about the date and time of the next meeting. Co-Chair Morris announced that the next meeting is October 15 at 5:30 PM.

There being no further business, Co-Chair Morris adjourned the meeting at 6:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,  
Rebecca Landry, IT Director/ACM

Additional edits,  
Katie Kibler, Clerk's Office