

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

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

**Wednesday, December 2, 2020**

**6:00 PM**

**Remote Meeting via Zoom**

**Members Present:**

Dr. Dottie Morris, Co-Chair  
Richard Van Wickler, Co-Chair  
Tia Hockett  
Aditi Saleh  
Catherine Workman, Councilor  
Eli Rivera  
Pierre Morton (arrived at 6:39 PM)

**Staff Present:**

Rebecca Landry, IT Director/Assistant City Manager  
Shane Maxfield, Police Lieutenant  
Andrew Bohannon, Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Department Director

**Members Not Present:**

Gail Somers

**George S. Hansel, Mayor**

Co-Chair Van Wickler 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. He called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM. Roll call was conducted.

Co-Chair Van Wickler introduced himself and the committee and spoke about the committee's mission and work to date. He stated that tonight's public forum topic is Social and Community issues. He asked for ideas for implementing tools to open racial equity discussions that lead to progressive change in the Keene community. They also want to hear ideas for changing current programs and practices that perpetuate implicit bias. He welcomed public input on these topics, and explained the procedures for participating.

Erin Hoy stated that she is a Spanish Teacher at Symonds School and Franklin School. She continued that she got her master's degree in education but also has a background in social equity and justice. She would love to find ways to contribute to sharing more, so she drafted a workshop for fellow teachers, about classroom innuendos people do not realize they are giving off. That is something she has presented but it has not gone anywhere yet.

Co-Chair Van Wickler asked for more information about the workshop and what she means by “innuendos.” Ms. Hoy replied that it is about teaching them about the differences between assimilation and acculturation, and the difference between a hero and a villain if we are all fighting, and what it means to have a healthy disagreement. It is human nature to have stereotypes, but [the workshop teaches] how to recognize when it is uncalled for.

Co-Chair Van Wickler asked how long she designed the workshop to be for. An hour, two? Ms. Hoy replied that it is flexible. She continued that she could do so much with it, such as share documentaries. She could do a whole course on it. Co-Chair Van Wickler asked if her specific target is teachers. Ms. Hoy replied yes. She continued that an example is that teachers need to learn to pronounce students’ names correctly and understand how important that can be. Another example is that sometimes teachers do not realize they are doing this, but they might call on a boy and a girl and think that they are being equitable, but that is kind of missing the mark.

Co-Chair Van Wickler asked about her plan to market this. He continued that it sounds great. Ms. Hoy replied that she knows the district already has some things like this going on right now with teachers that are fairly new to the district, so that might be why her workshop has not taken off yet. This is something that takes a lot of thought. You have to be really mindful. People may not realize the need to be reeducated on these things.

Co-Chair Van Wickler asked if she could forward an outline of the workshop to Ms. Landry for the committee to review. Ms. Foy replied yes. Ms. Landry gave her email address and thanked Ms. Foy, stating that she looks forward to seeing the workshop outline. Co-Chair Morris agreed.

Ms. Landry stated that along the lines of Ms. Hoy’s comments, she thinks there must be people at Keene State College (KSC) and elsewhere who have racial justice and equity programs. The committee has not really tapped into that resource yet. She continued that perhaps that is something she can look into for a subject matter expert to speak at a future meeting.

Ms. Hoy stated that she did her master’s degree at KSC. She continued that she went through the World Educational Links program that does not exist anymore. The professors in charge of that program moved to Vermont. Co-Chair Morris asked if that is now the SPARK program. Ms. Hoy replied that she is not sure if it was renamed.

Co-Chair Van Wickler asked Ms. Hoy if she has ideas for how they might implement discussions publically on racial equity that would lead to progressive change. Ms. Hoy replied that there is a community education program where people can sign up for various topics, like cooking or pottery, and this is a topic that interests enough people right now and if they advertised they might get a good response.

Co-Chair Van Wickler replied that one of the biggest challenges with getting the community to discuss racial justice is that the people who show up are not necessarily the people who most

need to be a part of the discussion. How can they reach the white people who do not think that a conversation on racial justice is needed, and get them to the table? How can they get those people to share their input on what is going on? This committee is a good example; the guest speakers agree that we live in a good community and people say the Keene Police Department (KPD) is a good police department and that often there is equal opportunity. The committee does not hear a lot about why they have gathered, which is to improve racial justice and racial equity in the community. When pressed, everyone agrees that there are systemic racism issues here.

Ms. Hoy replied that she read an article in the Keene Sentinel a while back, about how racism falls on a spectrum. She continued that no one actually considers themselves to be racist, no matter how racist they may be. The key is to not target a person's character, but their behavior instead. You can address the behavior, but if you call someone [a racist and thus] attack their character, they will lash out, deny it, downplay it, and find three other examples of when they have done something that is not racist, and it diminishes the conversation. You can have a better conversation when you are not attacking the person's character, but are addressing their behavior in the moment.

Co-Chair Van Wickler asked Ms. Hoy – as an educator, what has her experience with racial equity been in the community? Ms. Hoy replied that as a Spanish teacher, she has experienced it some, but overall it has been embraced very well. The program has grown several hundred percent over the past few years. She grew up in Keene, and when she came back to teach here, the School District was trying to make it a 40% position and she said she could only do it if it was 80%. The School District agreed to that, and at first Spanish was only for Kindergarten and First Grade, and now it is K to 5 in all of the schools. The buy-in kids are having is spilling over to their families, too, and creating a lot of conversation, and the general public is becoming a little more worldly.

Debbie Bowie, of 659 Hurricane Rd. stated that she likes the idea of Ms. Hoy's workshop possibly being adapted for a community program. She continued that there are several avenues they can take, including the community education program. They can go and talk with different organizations in town, churches, and the Library, and present programs. She agrees that the individuals they are trying to reach may not attend. She runs a book group and everyone is in a different place. She is starting to see people recognizing the issues of being white in a white state. Everyone is on a different part of their journey. Sometimes she gets emails that nearly bring her to tears, regarding what people have begun to recognize about their white privilege. If they work as a community, it will spread. This takes time. Co-Chair Morris is probably one of the most patient people she has ever met. She herself wants things to happen quickly. They have to keep making progress and inching along and ultimately they will see change. She would love to see what Ms. Hoy's workshop has, and see how they can adapt it for community needs and then start going out into different groups.

Sarah Benning of 183 Court St. stated that since this is a committee to advise the City government, she will say that she would love to see from the City of Keene, and from positions in power in Keene, is strong anti-racist statements and commitments as a city, as City leadership, as the government. That would be a step toward reaching people who may not be tuning in voluntarily to these conversations. City officials have be the leaders in that conversation and have to step up and guide the wider community in that direction. She does not have all the answers as to what that looks like and what it means, but she would like to see strong leadership in this, in an effort to reach people who are not already trying to be part of this movement. She is white, in a predominantly white community of people trying to unlearn and relearn. She wants it to be clear with no uncertainty that what we need from City leadership is leadership on this issue.

Mary Gannon stated that she appreciates these forums. She continued that she really wants to echo Ms. Benning's points. It is so true. It is hard for white people to connect to why it is important for them to have this conversation, because there is so much baggage that comes with it for people with privilege. They are afraid, do not want to have to give something up, and do not want to feel bad. She lives in Winchester and they have been thinking about how to bring people in. They do not have real overt racial incidents that are happening there but they have a community that is changing and there are a number of people who want to figure out how to bring this exact conversation to their town. They want to have a public forum but they know it will be hard. Regarding how to reach people who do not think they need to be involved in this, one way is to help people understand that everyone is impacted by oppression, everyone is harmed by racism, and that they need everyone's voice to create the kind of communities they are talking about. She worries sometimes that forums and trainings do not always get the participation they want because white people or people with other privilege worry that they will feel bad or be shamed. She does not necessarily think they should be protecting people with privilege, but if they really want to get those folks to the table so they can begin those hard conversations, they have to think about how to let people know that these structural systems impact their daily, lived experiences. For example, their white students in school. That is one thought, but she really wants to second the idea about leadership. She was thinking about how powerful it would have been for her if she had seen the Mayor here at these forums. Maybe he was at one and she missed it.

Ms. Landry stated that the Mayor is here tonight. Ms. Gannon replied that is good, because people in positions of power and positions of influence can model what it means to be engaged in this work even when it gets hard.

Co-Chair Van Wickler thanked Ms. Gannon and stated that when she and Ms. Benning were talking he was thinking about how large institutions in the community who hire employees could review their mission statements and make sure they include powerful messaging about racial justice. Not only is it about speaking out, but it is also about how people advertise on their websites and how they advertise to employees, and the way we conduct ourselves in meetings. These are critical, and yes, hearing from leaders is what they need. In a previous meeting the

AHRJCS Committee was talking about how to make Keene a community that invites all people to be a part of the community and be excited about being employed here, owning a home here, going to school here, and having a family here. These are all ways they can do that.

Rose Kundanis of 22 Woodbury St. stated that she has been part of a small group of people who were working to get Representative Annie Kuster to co-sponsor a bill in the US Congress to study reparations. She continued that that was successful and Rep. Kuster did become a co-sponsor. The same group, under the leadership of Alan Davis, is working to initiate a Talking About Race event at the Keene Public Library. Mr. Davis was a leader of the one that was in Keene at the Unitarian Universalist church. They have been in touch with the KPL and apparently the KPL has a grant they had applied for to deal with the question of race in programming at the KPL. This smaller group that is looking at the Talking about Race event is also looking to be part of that in the spring at the KPL. She thinks that the KPL is taking a leadership role and initiative and she hopes that a lot of people will be brought in with that programming opportunity in the spring.

Andrew Bohannon, Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Department Director stated that he is the staff liaison for the Human Rights Committee (HRC), which Co-Chair Morris is a part of as well. He continued that the HRC is providing leadership on subject matters of race and diversity. COVID stifled some of their plans for this year but they have partnered with the Keene International Festival (KIF), which was a great success in 2019 and would have been again in 2020 but will be back in 2021. They are looking to do Holi Fest, and are looking to do a Pride month, and have several events coming up. They have the Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration coming up in January. There is a lot that the group is constantly active with and talking about. Yes, the HRC is events-driven but he feels as though there is a lot more opportunity. They have some openings on the committee and some seats at the table for alternate members, too. Whether or not you participate in this committee or other committees in the City to provide some insight and leadership to that diversity that we all seek on the boards and commissions, it is really important that folks who call in and want to see some of the action get involved with some of these programs. These programs are out there, and the conversations are happening, and they welcome people to the table. The next HRC meeting is Monday night, at 5:00 PM, on Zoom. They welcome participation. Anyone who wants more information can call him or look at the City website's Boards and Commission's webpage, which has a link to the HRC page with agendas and meeting minutes.

Ms. Landry stated that Mayor Hansel has provided an opportunity for the HRC to make recommendations for people to participate whenever there are openings on the City boards and commissions, as a way to influence diversity in those bodies.

Co-Chair Morris stated that the HRC sponsored two or three trainings related to diversity, which were free and open to the public and well-received by the public. It is an active group full of people who are interested in learning. Several people showed up and were wonderful participants in the training.

Mayor Hansel thanked the committee for the great work they are doing. He continued that he has been getting updates from Ms. Landry and listening in when he can. It sounds like things are coming together just as he hoped they would. Regarding the HRC and how he sees these two pieces of work interacting: this work on diversity and inclusion is not going to end once the AHRJCS Committee generates its report. The process would be that hopefully the City Council adopts the report, and then he plans to put a body in charge to make sure the recommendations are implemented. The natural fit, to him, would be the HRC. Yes, there are openings coming up on the HRC, and there are alternate positions open. It will be a very important group if they take on the challenge of the implementing the plan and some of the recommendations. He hopes that everyone shares this with their networks so they can make sure they are making long-term progress, because this is a top priority for the City and something he sees them working on long into the future.

Ms. Landry stated that she gave her email address earlier, and if anyone is interested in becoming a member of the HRC or a different City board or commission, they should feel free to contact her. She continued that she can then put people in touch with the body they are interested in joining and provide them with the resources needed to apply for that opportunity.

Pierre Morton arrived at 6:39 PM.

Debbie Bowie stated that she has a challenge for everyone. She continued that she has been thinking about this a lot, with the group that she facilitates. She has 50 people on the book group email list, and about 20 to 28 people participate every six weeks. Regarding these conversations about the people who are not going to come [to discussions about racial equity], or to understand [the need for such conversations], she thinks about how they could show them [the need for discussions about racial equity]. Her idea is they could show them by implementing a simple policy that might benefit a person of color, or a person from a diverse background, and also many others. If someone in leadership can determine what that policy could be, however small it is, it might begin a pathway to understanding what change may occur, by improving, changing, or looking at things from a different perspective.

Co-Chair Van Wickler asked Ms. Landry if she has a sense of what the commitment would be, for someone interested in joining a committee. Ms. Landry replied that it depends, and comes down to what the meeting schedule is for the committee someone is interested in. She asked for Mr. Bohannon to give some information about the HRC's schedule.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the HRC meets the first Monday of every month at 5:00 PM. He continued that they are meeting on Zoom. It is not a heavy commitment. For those who may not realize that the City has a HRC, it used to be the Jonathan Daniels/Martin Luther King, Jr. Committee. It was created in about 1996 for the purpose of living out the ideals of Jonathan Daniels and Martin Luther King, Jr. and celebrating what they had accomplished. The group has really changed, and ebbed and flowed over the years. Like Dr. Morris said earlier, they offer a

lot of things for the community and are working on getting the word out further. Last year's KIF is a great example; there were almost 1200 people at the event. Those types of things encourage people to start the conversations, and the HRC is looking at more opportunities to do that. He is excited about the direction they are going; it definitely aligns with the conversation they are having here tonight as well as the Mayor's vision. He came forward to the HRC when he first was elected. It is all in alignment and they will all continue to work toward making Keene an even better place to be.

Co-Chair Van Wickler stated that some people might be interested in joining the HRC but fear they might not be qualified. He asked for Mr. Bohannon's thoughts. What qualifications does one need to be a member of the HRC?

Mr. Bohannon replied that you really need to be willing to participate, share your ideas, and be open to discussion. Being able to work with others that may have differences of opinions but share a goal. That is kind of how it works in real life. If you are interested in human rights in general, it is an opportunity to become engaged in a small role in the City. Someone may aspire to other leadership, but this is a great way to get familiar with local government, share your ideas, and make an impact on the community.

[Former AHRJCS Committee member] Julia Atkins stated that she is thinking about ways she can still contribute. She continued that she sent the committee a video – Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man. She thought it was very impactful. It gave both sides an opportunity to ask questions in an open and honest way, and had some real feedback. It would be great to have something like that in Keene with different areas of the population. Emmanuel Acho has a book in addition to the videos. She challenges Debbie Bowie's book club to read it. She continued that when she thinks about social justice and what we need in our community, there are books she has looked for in the KPL and has not found. Maybe they could have some type of book drive involving the community, to bring more diverse books into the library. The other thing she thinks about regarding social justice is housing. Keene's housing is difficult, depending on people's income levels. When they talk about wanting to bring people to the community, they need to think about whether they can house them and whether the people will be able to afford housing in Keene. That is something to keep in mind.

Co-Chair Morris asked for the title of Emmanuel Acho's book. Ms. Atkins replied that it is Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man. She continued that he also has a lot of videos on YouTube. What she likes about Mr. Acho and how he has the conversations is that he gives some of the best explanations on why something can be offensive or how we can work together. He does a really good job with that in the videos, and his book is really helpful for people who are looking for ways to assess whether they do or say something that is offensive without knowing that it is offensive. Mr. Acho gives good explanations for why something is offensive, and ideas for how to come together, such as sharing a meal with someone who does not look like you. Inviting someone over for dinner and getting to know them breaks down barriers. It may seem simple and small, but it is impactful.

Ms. Landry thanked Ms. Atkins and stated that she really appreciated her sending the Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man video. She continued that the first question Mr. Acho asked in the video was “When was the last time you invited a Black family over for dinner?” That is just getting the issue right out there. It is fantastic. It is an open, honest, and safe conversation and it is really great to have that perspective and she plans on sharing the video with her children. She likes Ms. Atkins’s idea, also, of finding ways to do those kinds of things at the local level and somehow seeing how they can incorporate that into their recommendations. The second point she wanted to make is that one of the departments included in her portfolio as Assistant City Manager is the Library. The Library Director, Marti Fiske, has been in the position for about a year and she is 100% confident that Ms. Fiske will take that recommendation seriously. She will speak with Ms. Fiske about what the KPL is probably already doing to look at their collection. If Ms. Atkins has specific book recommendations or information about a library she thinks is doing a great job, she can contact her. The City takes that challenge seriously and they want to accommodate that need.

Ms. Atkins stated that she will take it even further and pledge \$500 to the Library to help build that book category. Co-Chair Van Wickler stated that that is amazing and thanked Ms. Atkins. Ms. Landry and others thanked Ms. Atkins for that wonderful pledge.

Sarah Benning thanked Ms. Atkins, and stated that to build on some of that, she is thinking about housing opportunities but also business incentives in Keene and the Monadnock region and ways to build equity and bring equity into business opportunities here. COVID has put the brakes on a lot of things, but regarding the skate park, the arts corridor, and other community-driven projects going on, there is room to expand that and present the opportunity for other kinds of businesses to take advantage and come to Keene and really benefit and improve our community and contribute in different ways. She would like to connect with Ms. Atkins separately from this meeting – she is an artist and does a lot of fundraising for different causes within town and would love to connect and grow Ms. Atkins’s Library contribution. She has been thinking a lot about Library programming and it would be great to crowdfund more of that. She is part of a great national and international online community that has been supportive of other fundraising efforts and she would like to bring the Keene community into that as well. In terms of library programming, the library in Portsmouth has a great indigenous educational series, monthly programming that she has expanded her learning through. She has found a lot of value in it.

Co-Chair Van Wickler stated that part of what they are looking to do this evening is: they want to change programs and practices currently in the community that perpetuate implicit bias. He is asking if there is anyone from the public who can think of a program or a practice in the community currently that does this, and to give this committee examples so that they can address it.

Erin Hoy stated that implicit bias ties in with tribalism, and the first “uh-oh” moment she really noticed with that was the [New England] Patriots’ “Deflategate” a few years back and how a lot

of local Patriots fans were really on board with that and ignoring the truth because they were just so loyal to their team.

Co-Chair Van Wickler thanked Ms. Hoy for the example. He thanked Mr. Morton for joining the meeting.

Mr. Morton stated that it was important to him to be present. He continued that he was excited to hear Ms. Atkins's suggestions and wanted to chime in with his support of her suggestions. It is something "we" [Franklin Pierce University] are thinking about doing at the university level, having those difficult conversations with students – not (just) with a black man, but also a woman of color, a First Nations member, and other under-represented students. Speaking specifically about people of color, our community needs that. He is a fan of that entire series [that Mr. Acho does] and it would be great to do it on a community level. First he would also recommend that they look into reaching out to those people who have different opinions about race. Those are the people who will really be affected by these types of conversations and the proximity to a person of color in our city. He is thinking about ways to reach out to those folks, who are not going to come out to these types of events but actually might benefit from these conversations.

Councilor Workman stated that she wanted to touch on something said earlier, regarding leadership making a clear statement. She continued that she shared with the committee members at one of their first meetings that she herself is biracial and she has always found that because she is white-passing, many times people will make inappropriate comments in front of her, thinking it is a "safe" space for them to do so and that she may share their sentiments. She always addresses it and never ignores it, but does not call out the behavior; she calls people in to a conversation. Instead of having cancel culture and call-out culture, they need to really pull people in and have that uncomfortable conversation and see where they are coming from and what their perspective is. She will ask her friends, for example: what is your background? Have you traveled outside of Keene? Where have you gone? What have your experiences been? Have you ever had a negative experience? What was a positive experience you had with someone of a different nationality or cultural background? It is about being mindful to not call out, but to call in. Other things she was thinking about, regarding the library and other workshops, and also pulling in Cheshire TV, and seeing what their programming looks like. Is there a spot where they can do something on Cheshire TV and have something very similar to Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man? The Keene community does have implicit bias. They focus heavily on racial inequities, but this committee is also about community safety, which includes perceptions of substance of misuse, homelessness, and prejudices and stereotypes and it is important for them to have those conversations as well.

Co-Chair Van Wickler stated that this has been a healthy night of input. Ms. Landry stated that it is very encouraging. Co-Chair Morris agreed. She reminded people to check out the HRC. Ms. Landry gave her email address and phone number again, so people can contact her if they have further feedback or questions or want more information about the HRC or other committees.

Ms. Atkins stated that Ms. Landry can share her contact information with Ms. Bowie or anyone else who wants to connect with her.

Co-Chair Van Wickler asked if anyone had anything else to say tonight. Hearing nothing further, he thanked everyone for their participation and adjourned the meeting at 7:06 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,  
Rebecca Landry, IT Director/ACM