

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

**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA**

Monday, December 6, 2021 at 5:00 PM  
Room 22 Upstairs, Recreation Center

- This meeting will be conducted in person and by using the online meeting platform, Zoom. The public may view the meeting online at [www.zoom.com](http://www.zoom.com) and click on “Join A Meeting” enter Meeting ID 838 4094 3157
- To listen to the meeting, please dial (646) 876-9923 and when prompted enter Meeting ID 838 4094 3157
- If you encounter issues accessing this meeting, please call (603) 757-1835 during the meeting

Members:

William Hay, Chair  
Dr. Dottie Morris  
Janis Manwaring  
Dr. Mohammed Saleh  
Nancy Salwen  
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos  
Dr. Shaun Filiault  
Ritu Budakoti  
Marti Fiske

Staff:

Andy Bohannon, PRF Director

Guests:

Agenda:

1. Welcome and Call to Order
2. Approval of November 1, 2021 Minutes
3. Finance Report
4. Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee Report
5. Committee Programs
  - a. MLK Day
  - b. Holi Festival
  - c. Pride Month
  - d. Juneteenth
  - e. Keene International Festival
  - f. Indigenous People Day
6. New, Other Business
7. Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, January 3, 2022 at 5:00 PM

1 City of Keene  
2 New Hampshire

3  
4  
5 HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE  
6 MEETING MINUTES  
7

Monday, November 1, 2021

5:00 PM

Room 22,  
Recreation Center

**Members Present:**

Councilor Jan Manwaring  
Dr. Dottie Morris  
Nancy Salwen  
Dr. Mohammed Saleh  
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos (arrived at 5:13 PM)  
Marti Fiske, Ex-Officio

**Staff Present:**

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities  
Director

**Members Not Present:**

Ritu Budakoti, Alternate  
William Hay, Chair  
Dr. Shaun Filiault

8  
9  
10 **1) Welcome and Call to Order**

11  
12 Vice Chair Saleh called the meeting to order at 5:04 PM. Roll call was conducted.

13  
14 **2) Approval of October 4, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

15  
16 Dr. Morris made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of October 4, 2021. Councilor  
17 Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

18  
19 **3) Finance Report**

20  
21 Mr. Bohannon reported that the finance report is in the agenda packet, and everything is up to  
22 date, related to the Keene International Festival (KIF) and the HRC's expenses. The current  
23 balance is \$4,191.88.

24  
25 Dr. Morris asked, in regards to the expenditures for the Juneteenth event, if Mr. Bohannon  
26 received information from Amina Jordan-Mendez and Julissa Rodriguez. She continued that  
27 Nicole Young should not have been paid; she sent Mr. Bohannon an email about that. She asked  
28 if they were paid and the information is just not on this report, or if the HRC has not paid them.  
29 Mr. Bohannon replied that he sent the information to Dennis in the Finance Department. He

30 continued that he will run a report on that and see what happened with this. He did the audit for  
31 the KIF but not for the HRC. He will run that report and email Dr. Morris if there are any  
32 discrepancies.

33

34 Vice Chair Saleh stated that the Finance Report is accepted as informational.

35

36 **4) Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee Report**

37

38 Vice Chair Saleh stated that the committee members have before them a draft statement of  
39 inclusion that Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos wrote. He continued that the idea is for the committee to  
40 read it and see if they want to make changes to it. He continued that he recalls that the purpose is  
41 to encourage the statement to be read at the start of meetings, and the HRC can start by doing  
42 that themselves. Ms. Salwen asked if the statement would be for the City Council and all City  
43 committees, as well as the HRC. Vice Chair replied that is his understanding. Mr. Bohannon  
44 replied that it would be a recommendation from this committee to the Municipal Services,  
45 Facilities, and Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee, asking the MSFI Committee to recommend it to  
46 the City Council.

47

48 The committee discussed the wording of the draft statement of inclusion and discussed edits and  
49 changes. Councilor Manwaring stated that she is not sure if the City of Keene's mission is as the  
50 statement describes, or if the City even has a stated mission; and the draft statement is too long.  
51 People would be more likely to read it at the start of meetings if it was shorter.

52

53 Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos arrived at 5:13 PM.

54

55 Discussion continued about whether the City of Keene has a mission statement, and potential  
56 rewording of or elimination of that beginning part of the draft statement. The committee decided  
57 to strike the first few sentences so that it begins with: "As we begin this meeting..."

58

59 Heidi Schwieger, HRC guest, suggested that "differently abled, whether physically or mentally"  
60 be changed to "disabled," because "disabled" is the norm and the preferred term. Others  
61 suggested and agreed upon "those living with disabilities." Discussion ensued about the  
62 importance of person-first language, and other wording changes to the portion of the draft  
63 statement that reads: "...people of color, people of all cultures including indigenous peoples,  
64 people of all faiths or none, those [living with disabilities], those who identify as members of the  
65 LGBTQIA community, those who identify as women, and immigrants." Dr. Morris asked for  
66 "those who identify as women" to be changed to "Those who identify as women or non-binary."

67

68 Lengthy discussion ensued about the definitions of terms such as "immigrant," "migrant,"  
69 "refugee," "asylum-seeker," and "those not native born," what the best wording is, and how to  
70 use person-first language to be the most inclusive. The group decided to change "immigrants" to  
71 "those not born in the United States, regardless of citizenship status."

72

## HRC Meeting Minutes

73 Discussion continued about the statement's readability and person-first language. Ms. Fiske  
74 suggested "...people of color, all cultures, all faiths or none..."

75  
76 Dr. Morris suggested adding "children" to the list of underrepresented people, stating that she  
77 learned that there are more laws in NH to protect animals than to protect children. Ms. Salwen  
78 suggested "people of all ages," which thus includes children and seniors. Others agreed.

79  
80 Someone suggested the term "BIPOC" to replace/shorten "people of color, and people of all  
81 cultures including indigenous people." Discussion ensued and general agreement was that the  
82 general public is not familiar enough with the term.

83  
84 Vice Chair Saleh suggested they pause on this task for now, and review it again at the next  
85 meeting. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will circle it back to the City Attorney for his input and  
86 let him know that it will come back to the HRC Committee to review, before it goes back to him,  
87 before it goes to the MSFI Committee. It will be a bit of a process, but the HRC has tuned it up  
88 quite a bit.

89  
90 Dr. Morris stated that there is also the term JEDI – Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. She  
91 continued that many people are thus making "JEDI statements." Discussion ensued about the  
92 acronym and the possibilities.

93  
94 Mr. Bohannon stated that he wants to read the updated draft statement, for the record:

95  
96 "As we begin this meeting, we choose to proceed with the awareness that the statements and  
97 decisions we make will be perceived differently by those with different life experiences. We  
98 move forward with the firm intention to hold space for the voices, opinions, and experiences of  
99 those to whom space has historically been refused. These include but are not limited to people of  
100 color; of all cultures, including indigenous people; of all faiths or none; those living with  
101 disabilities; those who identify as members of the LGBTQIA community; those who identify as  
102 women or non-binary; those not born in the United States, regardless of citizenship status; and  
103 those of all ages."

104  
105 Mr. Bohannon and committee members thanked Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos for her work in  
106 creating the first draft. Mr. Bohannon praised the committee for their work on this statement as  
107 well.

108  
109 Vice Chair Saleh stated that there was another action item regarding the RJCS Report. He  
110 continued that on page 5 of last month's meeting minutes, the second paragraph states, "Ms.  
111 Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that before they move on to the next recommendation, she would like  
112 to have the action item for 1.C. to at least be to come back to this. Others agreed." Moving  
113 forward, they need to act on this item that they planned on acting on. Discussion ensued, and  
114 Ms. Fiske read recommendation 1.C. out loud: "That the City continue its commitment and  
115 efforts toward racial justice and community safety whether via an existing committee such as the

116 Human Rights Committee, a new equity and inclusion task force, or a joint effort of multiple  
117 community organizations and agencies.” Vice Chair Saleh stated that the HRC’s discussion was  
118 about data – how to gather it, the purpose of gathering it, and the importance of it. Ms. Cunha-  
119 Vasconcelos replied yes, and the question of whether there are existing sources (Police, schools,  
120 and so on and so forth) or if they need to find a way to collect the data, such as doing a climate  
121 survey.

122  
123 Vice Chair Saleh stated that last time when they discussed this they maybe did not consider the  
124 fact that recommendations 3 (Public Safety) and 4 (City and Community) have a similar idea.  
125 Mr. Bohannon asked for more information about what recommendations Vice Chair Saleh is  
126 looking at. Vice Chair Saleh replied that he thinks the HRC should also be looking at the 2<sup>nd</sup> and  
127 4<sup>th</sup> recommendations, instead of putting all of their efforts into 1.C.

128  
129 Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if he is suggesting the HRC finish doing a review of all of the  
130 action items in the document and see which ones have synergy and could be approached  
131 together, as the HRC develops its action items. Vice Chair Saleh replied yes. He asked if there  
132 was a reason why they decided to skip 3 (Public Safety). Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied  
133 because it is not really the HRC’s purview; it is the Police’s. Others agreed. Mr. Bohannon  
134 stated that the Keene Police Department’s accreditation with CALEA is extensive and the KPD  
135 has gone through training. He does not think this committee should be involved with the Police  
136 standards.

137

138 **5) Committee Programs**

139 **A) MLK Day**

140

141 Vice Chair Saleh stated that the idea is to try to replicate what the HRC did for Martin Luther  
142 King, Jr. Day two years ago. Dr. Morris asked if it will be in person. Discussion ensued about  
143 the event two years ago at the Library, with music.

144

145 Ms. Salwen stated that she emailed the author of Raising White Kids to see if she is available.  
146 She continued that she has not replied, but last year, she had expressed interest. She (Ms.  
147 Salwen) told the author that the event would be online, because that was her assumption. If she  
148 hears from the author in the next week or so, she will let them know.

149

150 Mr. Bohannon stated that he thinks the event should be online, out of an abundance of caution.  
151 He continued that he thinks they could reach just as many people this way. Last year 60 or 70  
152 people attended the online event, and there were that many in person (the year before). It would  
153 be possible to get a more diverse audience, and speakers, if the event were online. Ms. Fiske  
154 stated that last year, people shared the link, and the Elm City Rotary Club watched almost half of  
155 it as a club.

156

157 Councilor Manwaring stated that on a different note, State legislation was passed on race theory  
158 and implicit bias, and half of the committee for the Governor’s Advisory Council on Diversity

159 and Inclusion were quoted in the newspaper as saying “You just muzzled us.” People are  
160 confused about what “race theory” and “implicit bias” are, and they are now not allowed to talk  
161 about it in schools. Dr. Morris replied that the concept of “implicit bias” was developed in the  
162 1940s or 1950s, and all of a sudden, people are saying it is problematic. She continued that other  
163 states have passed similar legislation. Vice Chair Saleh asked if they should talk about this at the  
164 MLK event. Councilor Manwaring replied that it would be good to have someone who can talk  
165 about it, and empower people to question it.

166  
167 Discussion continued about possible speakers. Dr. Morris suggested Patricia Harris as a person  
168 who can explain critical race theory and might be available. Ms. Salwen asked if the group  
169 would be interested in inviting the musical performers they had two years ago. Discussion  
170 ensued about what an online sing-a-long would be like, and the preferred duration of a musical  
171 performance or sing-a-long. Dr. Morris suggested contacting Debbie Irving, author of Waking  
172 Up White, as a speaker. Ms. Salwen suggested the poet who came to Juneteenth. Dr. Morris  
173 stated that at Keene State College (KSC), she was trying to put something together with poet  
174 Magdalena Gomez; maybe the HSC could be involved.

175  
176 Mr. Bohannon stated that this is the November meeting, and the HRC will not meet again until  
177 December, so they have to come up with a speaker, presenter, or program, for December, so they  
178 can begin to publish the information. He continued that otherwise, they will be in last year’s  
179 routine of getting it out in January.

180  
181 Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos suggested they first decide how long they want the event to be.  
182 Discussion ensued, and the group agreed upon an hour. Mr. Bohannon stated that last year,  
183 having a speaker for 45 minutes and 15 minutes for questions and answers worked well. Dr.  
184 Morris asked if they should have a working group to work on this. She continued that she can  
185 reach out to Patricia Harris and Debbie Irving and report back. Ms. Salwen asked if the group is  
186 still interested in Jennifer Harvey (Raising White Kids author), if she emails back. Councilor  
187 Manwaring replied that they should find out what her fee is.

188  
189 Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos summarized that they want an hour-long event, with 45 minutes of a  
190 speaker and 15 minutes of question and answer; and they are looking for one speaker, and have  
191 three people in mind, off the top of their heads. One of the three has already been reached out to,  
192 and two are people that Dr. Morris will reach out to. She suggested that the first person to tell  
193 Mr. Bohannon that a person they reached out to said “yes” is the person they will go with. Dr.  
194 Morris and Ms. Salwen can communicate with each other about this. Dr. Morris replied that  
195 after she attends a book event on Wednesday, she might have another person to reach out to.  
196 Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if Mr. Bohannon is allowed to share the information with the  
197 HRC if a speaker has been chosen during the time before the December meeting. Mr. Bohannon  
198 replied yes. Vice Chair Saleh asked if they are ruling out the possibility of music or poetry.  
199 Others replied yes, unless they strike out with the three or four potential speakers identified.

200

## HRC Meeting Minutes

201 Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that although Ms. Salwen and Dr. Morris are the ones with the  
202 contacts, they should feel free to reach out to the rest of the HRC if they want help with  
203 something. Discussion ensued about another contact Dr. Morris has.

204

205 Vice Chair Saleh stated that at the last meeting, Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos had asked if the agenda  
206 could have the dates of the HRC's events listed, to help the HRC will planning. He continued  
207 that he does not know the date of the next event on the list, the Holi Festival – is it far enough  
208 away that they do not need to talk about it right now? Mr. Bohannon replied that they can  
209 probably move all of the (planning for the) events to future meetings. He continued that he  
210 worked with Jennifer Carroll and Ms. Budakoti on the Holi Festival. At the next meeting, they  
211 should begin to talk about Pride month and Juneteenth. He will add dates.

212

213 Councilor Manwaring suggested that at the next meeting, they plan to spend 20 to 25 minutes on  
214 the RJCS Report, and then the rest of the meeting could be for events planning, so they are not  
215 trying to cram the events planning into the last 10 minutes. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that  
216 her concern is that if they do that, they might not have even gotten through the action items in the  
217 RJCS Report by 2023. Mr. Bohannon replied that Vice Chair Saleh had a great idea earlier,  
218 about going through the report and seeing which items are ones the HRC can actually take action  
219 on, and from there, they could create a spreadsheet of the topics and actions and dates of  
220 completion. He continued that that has been done with several other committees, like the  
221 Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee and the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board.  
222 Maybe at the next HRC meeting, if people have reviewed the report, they could put all of the  
223 items up and go from there. Dr. Morris replied that it seems like Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos has  
224 highlighted what she thought were (items for the HRC). Maybe they could each highlight. Vice  
225 Chair Saleh replied that their homework from last time was to read #2 and #4 and have ideas. He  
226 asked if they should have someone created a template spreadsheet. Ms. Salwen replied that  
227 maybe they should wait to see what the nature of things are that they want to do, because they  
228 might not be action items. They might be whole projects.

229

230 Dr. Morris asked if she is allowed to send video clips of the potential speakers to the HRC  
231 members, outside of a meeting, to get their thoughts. Mr. Bohannon replied that since it is for  
232 the purposes of education, yes; they would not be taking any governing actions. The City  
233 Attorney says that is okay. Discussion ensued. Ms. Salwen asked how many HRC members  
234 would be allowed to get together to watch the video clips and discuss. Mr. Bohannon replied  
235 that they could all do that, as a “work group” related to this educational experience.

236

- 237 **B) Holi Festival**
- 238 **C) Pride Month**
- 239 **D) Juneteenth**
- 240 **E) Keene International Festival**
- 241 **F) Indigenous People's Day**

242

- 243 **6) New, Other Business**

## HRC Meeting Minutes

244

245 Vice Chair Saleh asked about the “more time” item on the agenda, Keene State College  
246 Outreach. Mr. Bohannon refreshed the committee’s memory about what that referred to, and  
247 asked if they wanted to remove that from the agenda. They agreed.

248

249 7) **Adjourn – Next Meeting Monday, December 6, 2021 at 5:00 PM**

250

251 There being no further business, Vice Chair Saleh adjourned the meeting at 6:10 PM.

252

253 Respectfully submitted by,  
254 Britta Reida, Minute Taker

255

256 Reviewed and edited by,  
257 Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director



7/1/19- 6/30/20	HRC	KIF	7/1/20- 6/30/21	HRC	KIF	7/1/21- 6/30/22	HRC	KIF
<b>Balance 7/1/19</b>	\$ 4,574.00	\$ -	<b>Balance 7/1/20</b>	\$ 4,096.73	\$ 3,411.00	<b>Balance 7/1/21</b>	\$ 3,391.88	\$ 2,541.89
	This was entered at 4574.70							
<b>Income</b>			<b>Income</b>			<b>Income</b>		
City of Keene	\$ 500.00		City of Keene	\$ 500.00		City of Keene	\$ 500.00	
Donations KIF		\$ 6,847.83	Donations KIF		\$ -	DONATIONS KIF		\$ 5,000.00
subtotal	\$ 500.00	\$ 6,847.83	subtotal	\$ 500.00	\$ -	subtotal	\$ 500.00	\$ 5,000.00
<b>Total Income</b>	\$ 500.00	\$ 6,847.83	<b>Total Income</b>	\$ 500.00	\$ -	<b>Total Income</b>	\$ 500.00	\$ 5,000.00
<b>Expenses</b>			<b>Expenses</b>			<b>Expenses</b>		
International Festival		\$ 3,436.83	International Festival		\$ 869.11	International Festival		\$ 5,500.57
			Pride Flags - 15	\$ 104.85		Pride Month	\$ -	
			Juneteenth Presenters \$200	\$ 800.00		Juneteenth	\$ -	
			Steve Schuch					
			Hadi Lanceric					
			Jonah Wheeler					
			Jalissa Rodriguez					
			Amina Jordan-Mendez	\$ 300.00				
Martin Luther King Day			Martin Luther King Day	\$ -		Martin Luther King Day	\$ -	
Peter Blood	\$ 500.00		Dr. Jim Waller					
KSC Dining	\$ 477.27							
<b>Total Expenses</b>	\$ 977.27	\$ 3,436.83	<b>Total Expenses</b>	\$ 1,204.85	\$ 869.11	<b>Total Expenses</b>	\$ -	\$ 5,500.57
<b>Net 19-20</b>	\$ (477.27)	\$ 3,411.00	<b>Net 20-21</b>	\$ (704.85)	\$ (869.11)	<b>Net 21-22</b>	\$ 500.00	\$ (500.57)
<b>Balance on hand</b>	\$ 4,096.73	\$ 3,411.00	<b>Balance on hand</b>	\$ 3,391.88	\$ 2,541.89	<b>Balance on hand</b>	\$ 3,891.88	\$ 2,041.32

City of Keene  
New Hampshire

# Racial Justice & Community Safety Committee Report

*March 18, 2021*

***Committee Members:***

Dr. Dottie Morris, Co-Chair

Richard VanWickler, Co-Chair

Catherine Workman, City Councilor

Julia Atkins

Tia Hockett

Pierre Morton

Eli Rivera, Sheriff

Aditi Saleh

Gail Somers

***City Staff:***

Rebecca Landry

Shane Maxfield

## INTRODUCTION

As the nation witnesses acts of racism from unfair lack of access to resources and opportunities to brutal acts of violence against people of color, an examination of Keene, the community we call “home”, is important. It is essential to engage in sincere efforts to understand the lived experiences of people of color living and/or working in the community, to analyze systems, and to develop an effective and sustainable plan to address any concerns as key steps in creating an equitable and anti-racist community. The Ad Hoc Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee (the “Committee”) began meeting in July 2020 upon being charged with “developing recommendations to prevent or correct systemic and cultural inequities in Keene.”

Racism for many people in Keene is invisible while, for others, racism is present in their lives. The Committee held open forums during which people of color shared personal experiences in schools, in the workplace and in public settings that illustrated the realities of both blatant and implicit bias in our community. The City of Keene elected officials (in collaboration with others in business, education, law enforcement and others) have such an important responsibility to engage the greater community in stopping racism and bias; in moving toward equity, diversity and inclusion; in ending unfair treatment of people of color and making Keene a better place for all people.

This brief report serves to make recommendations that will both create a racial equity lens for the City, businesses, and individuals throughout the community and also build a foundation for what will, ideally, be beginning steps in a long-term, sustainable, and effective approach to advancing racial equity.

## THE PROCESS

### 1. Buckets

The Committee realized at the onset that the substantial and important work required would benefit if organized into key categories or bucket lists based on input received in the June 2020 public forum hosted by Mayor Hansel. The public provided comments in the forum that were grouped by the Committee along with members’ thoughts into the following “buckets”, and additional public forums were later held for each individual category.

- **Community Education and Schools**
  - Fairness and opportunity for all students, faculty and staff
  - Prevention of achievement and opportunity gaps
  - Strategic programs and curriculum that prevent implicit bias and that promote a culture of fairness
  - Multi-racial leadership development
- **Laws, Policy and Policing**
  - Advancement of racial equity
  - Development of policies that facilitate the integration of racial equity into decision-making
  - Identification of impacts desired of policy solutions
- **Social and Community Justice**
  - Implementation of tools to open racial equity discussions that lead to progressive change in the community
  - Identification of ways to change programs and practices that perpetuate implicit bias

### 2. Speakers

The Committee invited a number of guest speakers and subject matter experts with the intention of educating the committee and public on current practices and identifying opportunities. There were also

members of the SAU29 School Board, local teachers, City department heads and others who participated in the meetings.

- Steven Russo, Keene Police Chief  
Chief Russo reviewed the KPD use of force training and policy as well as KPD's Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) accreditation.
- Elizabeth Dragon, Keene City Manager  
The City Manager reviewed City hiring and recruitment practices; the charge and activities of the City Human Rights Committee; the importance of the KPD's CALEA accreditation; the NH Commission on Law Enforcement, Accountability, Community and Transparency created in June 2020; and the KPD body camera trial program.
- Sheena Bice, Veteran and First Responder (VFR) Healthcare  
Ms. Bice provided a presentation overviewing the purpose of VFR Healthcare highlighting the high-risk, high-stress nature of first responder jobs and the importance of mental healthcare in this field.
- Robert Malay, Superintendent of Schools, NH SAU 29  
Superintendent Malay reviewed school curriculum, staff training and inclusionary opportunities; recent Keene School Board activities; and disciplinary data, policies and opportunities.

### 3. Public Forums

The Committee held three public forums in November and December 2020, one for each of the subject buckets identified herein. The Committee unanimously values the importance of public input in identifying the local Keene community's specific challenges and opportunities, and strongly recommends that the City provide ongoing opportunities for the public to provide input in a manner that is open and safe for members of our community. The input received was revealing and helpful, however, there is concern that more people might have participated if they felt their input had the potential to affect change and, importantly, if they were confident their input would not subject them to racist treatment or criticism resulting in negative outcomes.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS

There were common themes that became evident throughout the Committee's process of collecting information to form recommendations. Acceptance of these observations as truth is critical to the success of any actions taken to advance our community toward equity and inclusivity for black people, indigenous people and all people of color.

### 1. Racism Exists In Keene

Based on the lived experiences spoken by people of color in Keene, the Committee concludes that racism exists in Keene. The public is calling for community leaders to immediately take a clear anti-racism position by addressing systemic, cultural and individual manifestation of racism.

*"There are people of goodwill who haven't experienced racism. If it's not part of your everyday consciousness, there is a blindside. We often think that racism is about a person's behavior. Some people, we think, act in explicitly racist ways toward racial minorities. Those are the 'real' racists, we tell ourselves. But racism is not merely a function of individual attitudes, and it can't be eradicated by changing hearts and minds. Racism is the social, legal, political, and economic distinctions that mark and maintain unequal access and entry points to privacy, property, protection, prosperity, and*

*personhood. Racism is embedded in structures, institutions, and ideas, especially those about work, deservingness, representation, redistribution, and government's role."*

(source: [global.cornell.edu/themes/silence-racism](http://global.cornell.edu/themes/silence-racism))

The Committee received clear public testimony from members of the community who experience racist slurs, aloof comments about slavery, school curricula that are inadequate regarding the important experience and influence of black Americans, lack of anti-racism policy, fear of reprisal for any response to racist activity and lack of racial diversity in important services such as medical services, for example. These are just brief examples of the bigger picture of racism that plague many quiet American communities, and Keene is no exception. A recurring acknowledgement amongst both Committee members and the public is that there is a need for everyone to understand that everyone is harmed by racism. It will take our community as a whole to make changes that effectively improve equity and inclusivity for all people of color which will, in turn, make our community better for all.

## 2. Implicit Bias Must Be Identified

Many members of the Keene community have not experienced racism and, yet, may unintentionally perpetuate racial inequities, discrimination and biases. The purpose of identifying sources and practices of implicit bias is not to cause conflict, but to ultimately unearth unconscious bias and teach people and organizations to use a lens of equity in working together as a community to promote health and wellbeing for everyone. The creation of processes to "call in" each other (or organizations) into dialogue when addressing problematic and potentially harmful behaviors will help affect positive change.

## 3. Open Dialogue Requires Significant Expansion

In every meeting of the Committee, the need for open and ongoing dialogue was identified as paramount to achieving progress toward eliminating racial inequities and improving outcomes for all racial groups. The group considered the use of one-time surveys, regular climate surveys, citizen and stakeholder groups, student groups and other inclusive opportunities for open dialogue. The activity is community engagement, but the specific goal here is for victims of racial injustice to have safe and effective channels to share their personal experiences and ideas and for people who may have implicit biases to listen, learn and engage.

## 4. Community Education is Essential

The Committee received numerous ideas from members of the public highlighting the importance of community education. Ultimately, overcoming racial inequity and bias in Keene will require disrupting local complacency and expanding the knowledge base of everyone in the community. Educating citizens, organizations, leaders and community groups about the experience of people of color in our community as well as teaching how to identify implicit bias and adoption of newly embraced policies, procedures and practices rooted in the principles of equity are essential.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee makes the following recommendations to the City Council and to the community at large based upon information gleaned from its research, discussion and public input. Though this is the result of the work of a City committee, the recommendations will be most effective as adopted by an intended audience including all businesses, educational institutions and government agencies throughout Keene and the greater region. It is acknowledged that this will likely include some overlap and coordination with additional local and state initiatives focused on racial justice.

## 1. Government Leadership

- A. **It is recommended that the City of Keene take a position against racism starting with a strong anti-racist statement.** The Committee received multiple suggestions that the City Council issue a strong and clear public statement stating its anti-racist position and commitment to racial equity and inclusion. The public is looking to the City for leadership at a time when acts of racism around the nation are a cause for alarm and a call for change. In addition to issuing a statement, it is recommended that the City Council adopt a Council Goal specifically focused on achieving racial equity in Keene.
- B. **It is recommended that the City work with community stakeholders to establish clear community racial equity and inclusivity goals and that the goals be widely adopted by the City and Keene agencies and businesses.** This report is just the beginning of a process. Next steps will require identification of clear and measurable goals and accountability measures together with other organizations across the community as well as a plan for implementation and review of progress made over time. This process can only be successful if built upon information gathered in section 2 of this document, “Public Input and Community Education”, which aims to specifically identify the local challenges and biases to overcome.
- C. **It is recommended that the City continue its commitment and efforts toward racial justice and community safety whether via an existing committee such as the Human Rights Committee, a new equity and inclusion task force, or a joint effort of multiple community organizations and agencies.** Again, this report is just the beginning - just the first step. There is much work to be done and much motivation to make a difference. A strategic approach to moving Keene toward racial justice and inclusivity will require consistent effort, analysis and adjustment including regular follow-up on the recommendations in this report. There is also much data available that, when collected and analyzed, can help identify where and to what extent bias exists in our community. This data will help build awareness of the situation and emphasize the danger of complacency.
- D. **It is recommended that the City promote diversity in its boards and commissions membership and responsibilities.** Racial diversity amongst City committee members will provide important diverse perspectives that benefit the community and will help build sensitivity to and eliminate implicit bias over time. Committee charges and responsibilities should be evaluated to determine if they welcome diversity and provide realistic opportunities for inclusion.
- E. **It is recommended that the City promote festivals that celebrate racial diversity.** The International Festival and Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast are good examples of existing local celebrations that welcome and promote racial equity. Juneteenth, Holi Festival, Pride Celebrations, Cinco De Mayo, and other celebrations provide additional opportunities to appreciate diversity and to overcome stereotypes, build awareness and encourage unity.

## 2. Public Input & Community Education

- A. **It is recommended that the City, school systems (k-12-college) and community organizations and groups provide regular, safe and open opportunities for difficult conversations about local, personal racial justice experiences allowing input to be in-person or written, anonymous or personally identified.** The purpose of this effort must be specifically focused on welcoming and encouraging testimony from black people, indigenous people and people of color about their experience in Keene – including those who are reluctant to share or who may not trust that their input will improve racial equity in Keene. It is also of utmost importance that those who wish to share anonymously have the opportunity to and that they feel comfortable doing so.

There are members of the public who are reluctant to speak about their concerns. People have stories that they are not sharing. Personal conversations are needed to get tangible feedback, but being vulnerable and exposed is not comfortable. The committee did hear some testimonies and agreed that bringing these personal experiences to light will be necessary to disrupt local implicit bias and complacency, to build a broader awareness of the true extent of the problem in Keene. This will require multiple platforms such as anonymous surveys and strategic dialogue including public bodies and key stakeholders. There are two important objectives here: to provide a safe and welcome means for victims of racism to share their experiences without fear of negative consequences, and to engage those who do not experience racism in order to increase awareness of the existence and the consequences of silent racism.

- B. It is recommended that the City meet regularly with other businesses to share local observations and data and to develop, implement and measure organizational and community programs designed to 1) improve racial equity and inclusivity and 2) build public awareness of and knowledge to combat implicit bias.** Keene is not alone in its motivation to address racial inequity and to improve inclusivity. There are well established programs and standards that can establish key objectives and a framework for this work. Examples include the NH Governor's Advisory Council on Diversity and Inclusion, the New Hampshire Commission for Human Rights, the "Restorative Justice Vehicle for Dialogue, Organization For Chief Diversity Officers Tenets", and the "Race and Equity in New Hampshire Series", to name a few. Businesses engaged in this process should include the following, at minimum.

Government Agencies	Regional NAACP
Schools	Regional ACLU
Churches	Cohen Center For Holocaust and Genocide Studies
Healthcare Providers	Keene State College
Chamber of Commerce	Franklin Pierce University
Keene Family YMCA	Antioch University New England
Keene Police Department	River Valley Community College
Cheshire County Sheriff	Keene Public Library

This will likely require implicit bias training for the people involved, and meetings should be facilitated by a professional with racial equity experience and skillset.

- C. It is recommended that the services of local colleges and universities be engaged to conduct community racial equity and inclusion climate surveys every two years and that survey results and findings be shared with community leaders, the City Council, the general public, and organizations listed in section 2.B. for their education and response.** Racial equity climate surveys measure a community's – or an organization's – or a group's – level of adoption of a racial equity lens in its employment, programs and services. A regular effort is important to both increase people's receptivity and cooperation which yields better information and to assist in identification of specific needs and opportunities to advance racial equity.

In June of 2020, for example, Living Cities administered their fourth such annual climate survey and provides the following feedback which shows how helpful this approach can be in designing programs that address the specific needs of an organization or community.

*"In comparison from past years, we saw that staff were more willing and have more language to name tensions that they're holding as well as dissonances they are seeing within the*

*organization. Many of the dissonances named are a direct result of how adding elements of pro-Black culture without actively dismantling white supremacy culture is insufficient to grow an organizational culture that is pro-Black... Last year, staff reported deepened understanding of interpersonal, institutional and structural racism. This year, we saw even deeper analysis and interrogation on what it might take to address the different levels of racism and how much they are interconnected. At the same time, staff felt the tools they have for addressing racism within the organization are insufficient.”*

(source:<https://www.livingcities.org/resources/372-internal-scan-2020-racial-equity-and-inclusion-competency-survey-results>)

### 3. Public Safety

- A. **It is recommended that the Keene Police Department continue its CALEA accreditation and continue to publicize what is required for the CALEA accreditation as well as its most recent assessment report.** CALEA accreditation is voluntary, and in August of 2020 the KPD was one of just fifteen NH law enforcement agencies with this accreditation, which it has held since 2009. It requires a lengthy annual review and regular audit of policies, procedures and records for the ultimate purpose of fairness in the application of justice. Among the many practices carefully reviewed by CALEA are hiring processes and use of authority and force, for example.

The Committee’s efforts involved a general overview of KPD reports, training practices, use of force and other policies. The City Council and public are encouraged to visit the KPD website, “About” and “Resources” pages which include detailed information about training required by the KPD and its most recent CALEA assessment report which provide in-depth information including recent data and activities. The Committee found this information to be helpful in its review.

- B. **It is recommended that the KPD and other local law enforcement and first responder agencies engage external resources to conduct a review of recruitment and job application processes to identify and correct any possible bias that may limit applications from or the advancement of black people, indigenous people, and people of color.** Diversity in law enforcement personnel is essential for effective law enforcement and for community relations. Chief Russo made it clear that the Keene Police Department is actively seeking applicants, and racial diversity is desired, but a shortage of applicants in general continues to be a challenge in law enforcement in and well beyond the Monadnock region. In addition to the CALEA accreditation process which includes a thorough review of hiring practices, there is an opportunity to look more closely at the recruitment and skills testing processes used by the KPD and other local law enforcement and first responder agencies to attract a diverse workforce. There may be opportunities to reach a more diverse applicant pool, to improve the message of racial equity and inclusion within recruitment programs, and to post job openings with services that have a more diverse following. It is also recommended that the Keene Police Department review and update its recruitment video with these goals in mind.
- C. **It is recommended that the KPD provide public education on what methods are trained and used by the KPD to limit any necessary response to what is reasonable within various circumstances.** Committee discussions included a review with the KPD of what is commonly referred to as “use of force”. There were questions about what is legal and what is not, what is considered reasonable response to resistance and what is not, how KPD personnel are trained to respond in various circumstances, and how data regarding incidents involving use of force is recorded. It became clear in these discussions that the KPD has specific and ongoing training, review and reporting requirements regarding its response to resistance activities and policies that the public is not



generally aware of, and that could aid in improving public knowledge of KPD practices.

- D. **It is recommended that the City Council support the need for more community mental health services and any opportunities to assist the KPD in its response to emergencies requiring these services.** This recommendation is specifically focused on community safety and addresses the concern that some emergencies that involve psychological or behavioral crises have the best possible outcome for all involved when assisted by or managed by mental health professionals.

The Committee considered mobile crisis intervention services that could possibly provide immediate stabilization in cases of psychological or behavioral crisis. These types of services, however, do not transfer the responsibility of response from law enforcement to the mobile crisis resources because, in times of emergency, the dispatching of services must be immediate and, thus, cannot include a level of questioning or decision making required to determine whether mental health services might be needed. The immediate dispatch of law enforcement response continues to be required to meet public safety requirements and expectations. The potential promise of fewer crises if there are more community mental health resources, however, is a good reason to support any increase in these services to our community.

- E. **It is recommended that the KPD continue to engage the services of organizations such as the Veteran and First Responder Healthcare organization to support the needs of KPD personnel.** First responder jobs come with high risk, big expectations and nontraditional work hours. Recognition of stress response and engaging support services when needed is important for first responder health which is directly related to job performance and community relations.
- F. **It is recommended that the KPD continue to engage directly with Keene youth and families to maintain and build upon community relations and acceptance.** The KPD has a great track record with programs such as the Police Athletic League (PAL), for example, which helps children in the community build relationships with and see the human side of Keene's law enforcement personnel. The very visible reporting of nationwide incidents of racism including law enforcement makes it incredibly important now to build and maintain a positive rapport between the KPD and Keene children and families. It is understood that the COVID-19 pandemic limits these types of opportunities, but, even in this difficult and unusual time, the KPD can use creative ways (such as a pen pal program, for example) to proactively connect with Keene youth and families and is to be commended for their efforts thus far.

#### 4. City and Community

The path to racial equity in the Keene community will require organizational change, and it will require leaders amongst Keene's employers to serve as catalysts for change. The goal is to create and use a racial equity lens and implement a community process to empower businesses to advance diversity and inclusion. The following recommendations are intended both for the City of Keene as well as all Keene businesses. Many of these actions will require the assistance of experienced diversity and inclusion consultants.

- A. **It is recommended that the City assign an administrative role within the City government moving forward the mission of diversity, equity and inclusion set forth by this Committee.**

- B. **It is recommended that the City and Keene employers regularly conduct diversity, equity and inclusion training for employees that fosters an open and welcoming workplace culture for all people.**
- C. **It is recommended that the City and Keene employers review employee recruitment, retention, pay and promotion policies to achieve improved diversity and equity amongst applicants and throughout organizational personnel at all levels.**
- D. **It is recommended that the City and Keene employers expand and regularly provide internship positions that specifically attract underrepresented populations and create career opportunities.**
- E. **It is recommended that the City and Keene employers identify where skills are transferable amongst potential applicants to help provide opportunities and widen the applicant pool (military to law enforcement, for example).**
- F. **It is recommended that the City and Keene employers update traditional skills testing procedures that may unnecessarily disqualify black, indigenous and people of color and that the parameters of applicant tracking systems be broadened.**
- G. **It is recommended that the City and Keene employers seek and generate incentives to promote equity in employment.**
- H. **It is recommended that the City and Keene employers review and update initiatives, systems, operations and mission statements to identify practices that limit or thwart diversity.**
- I. **It is recommended that the City intentionally factor diversity into community driven development projects such as the arts corridor and the skate park, for example.**
- J. **It is recommended that the Keene Public Library as well as school libraries expand collection diversity, that feedback be sought from the community for this purpose, that the Keene Public Library facilitate reading groups to promote diversity within its collection, and that libraries seek financial donations to help expand the collection diversity.**
- K. **It is recommended that the City review Cheshire TV programming and encourage additions and changes that promote diversity and inclusion.**

## 5. Education

Building and appreciating racial diversity in ways that create real opportunities and promote long term community success starts with youth and, therefore, must involve Keene's schools. This will be a very effective driver for long term positive outcomes in racial equity in the Keene community. It is understood that the City of Keene does not govern Keene public school policy, however, racial equity and community safety throughout our city will require efforts outside of City Hall.

The following recommendations are made as a reflection of comments and concerns received by the public for the consideration of Keene school leadership, and the City Council is respectfully asked to support these recommendations upon any opportunity to do so. The Committee appreciates the participation of Keene School Board members and SAU29 Superintendent of Schools, Robert Malay, in the discussions had on this topic.

- A. **It is recommended that Keene schools develop specific anti-racism policies and appeal to the State of New Hampshire to establish a standard anti-racism policy as a baseline for all schools.** The Committee heard concerns from the public that the current general anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies in Keene schools are not sufficient in handling situations of racism. The use of racial slurs and other types of racist behavior call for a clear and specific response that sends a message of zero tolerance, tends to the needs of the victims and helps to break down implicit bias. The reports of racist behaviors and the fear and hesitation that victims and victims' parents have to report incidents give credence to the need for specific anti-racism policy and practice.
- B. **It is recommended that Keene schools review discipline data regularly and address systemic issues of racial inequality.** The purpose of this recommendation is to take a proactive approach to address inequalities in schools at all levels rather than a response-oriented approach. Superintendent Malay reported that a new model at the Keene High School includes a Dean of Students position that oversees all student discipline that will help make progress in this direction at that particular school.
- C. **It is recommended that Keene schools facilitate and maintain recurring student forums for student input and conversations about racial equity and inclusion at all levels.** Much like public input is key to achieving racial equity and inclusion in the greater community, student input is key to making progress in this direction within the schools. The intent is to provide a safe and welcoming means to build awareness of the problems that exist and to reveal and correct implicit bias in the school system.
- D. **It is recommended that Keene schools conduct regular, anonymous equity and inclusivity climate surveys and youth risk behavior surveys.** Parents and students of Keene schools represent a significant portion of Keene's population. This provides the schools with an opportunity to use annual surveys to measure racial equity and inclusivity awareness and experience and to implement programs to affect positive change.
- E. **It is recommended that schools thoroughly review special education, food security and other student and family assistance programs to determine where racial bias exists and make efforts to correct it.**
- F. **It is recommended that Keene schools review all curricula with a lens of racial equity and change or replace curricula as necessary to eliminate bias and help ensure all students feel respected and included.** This is an issue that came to light during Committee meetings and public forums where it was made clear that students of color have found themselves in uncomfortable situations due to biased or inadequate texts and topics. The National Education Association conducted an initiative to eradicate institutional racism in public schools and provides helpful information and resources to help with this type of effort. Superintendent Malay suggested Social Studies content as a good example of material that needs updating to eliminate bias that has been otherwise overlooked to date.
- G. **It is recommended that Keene schools ensure equity in the education system by promoting diversity amongst faculty including concerted outreach to organizations and institutions where diversity exists.** Having teachers of color can help schools improve curricula selection, mentor all students and challenge implicit bias. The opportunity exists to review position descriptions, postings and recruitment practices, remove any inherent bias and adjust as necessary to appeal to a more diverse pool of candidates to the extent possible. It is understood, however, that faculty diversity is stagnant nationwide – Keene is not alone.

- H. **It is recommended that Keene schools conduct social equity and justice training for teachers and implement culturally responsive pedagogy.** The Committee heard from a local teacher who noted that the use of common social innuendos, stereotypes and practices of assimilation occurs in schools, and that there are training programs available to help teachers recognize and adjust these practices. The goal is a comfortable and enriching academic experience for students of all races.
  
- I. **Additional creative programs and approaches in schools that promote awareness and support of diversity and inclusion are encouraged,** such as international pen pal programs with local elementary students, for example.

## CONCLUSION

“The whole of us is affected when the least of us is affected.” *(Gail Somers, Keene Resident)* The specific number of complaints received does not reflect the impact or severity of the problem – this is one of the challenges. Our City has limited diversity to begin with, and that fact means we may not get mass complaints. This does not make the reality of racism in Keene insignificant or unimportant. Ultimately, the goal is to “build a community that is safe, just and accessible to all through ongoing community and government commitment that is codified, measurable and accountable in and for every single member of our community. This puts forward the values we believe in.” *(Pierre Morton, proud member of the Keene community)*

The Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee presents this report to the City Council with both sincere concern and optimism. Keene is a beautiful and safe community, but the existence of racism and implicit bias cannot be denied. It is important that the City assume a leadership role in affecting change that builds racial equity and inclusion. Committee members agreed that there is much work to do, and it is difficult to stop meeting because there are many opportunities for further examination in addition to positive community energy on this topic, however, in the important interest of making an immediate impact, these recommendations are advanced. The continuation of this process with community involvement and to include ongoing examination, dialogue, measurement and change will be key to long term movement in improving racial justice and community safety for Keene.