

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

**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday, December 6, 2021**

**5:00 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center/via Zoom**

**Members Present:**

William Hay, Chair  
Councilor Jan Manwaring  
Dr. Dottie Morris  
Nancy Salwen  
Dr. Mohammed Saleh  
Marti Fiske, Ex-Officio  
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos (Arrived Late)

**Staff Present:**

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities  
Director

**Members Not Present:**

Ritu Budakoti, Alternate  
Dr. Shaun Filiault

**1) Welcome and Call to Order**

Chair Hay called the meeting to order at 5:07 PM. Roll call was conducted. Dr. Saleh stated that he is participating remotely from his office in New York and no one else is in the room with him.

**2) Approval of November 1, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of November 1, 2021. Ms. Salwen seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

**3) Finance Report**

Mr. Bohannon stated that nothing has changed, other than the correction that Dr. Morris had inquired about at the last meeting, related to the Juneteenth presenters. He continued that all of those were correct. Amina Jordan-Mendez was paid and he added that to the Finance Report. They (correctly) did not pay the other individual whom Dr. Morris spoke about. Everything is all set.

Ms. Fiske made a motion to accept the Finance Report. Councilor Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

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

Mr. Bohannon stated that last month, the HRC created a nice statement. He continued that he contacted the City Attorney and now has to connect with the Mayor and the City Manager regarding the committee's statement. The City Attorney did not necessarily weigh in on the statement's subject matter; he said to see if the Mayor and the City Manager want to have this statement created and read at the meetings. He (Mr. Bohannon) still has homework on this.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos arrived at 5:11 PM.

Mr. Bohannon stated that secondly, the City has a declaration that was done in August by the City Council. He continued that that does hang in City Hall, the Library, and the Recreation Center's lobby. He does not think it is the same thing (as the HRC's drafted statement), but he wants everyone to be aware that this statement related to social justice does exist.

Dr. Saleh stated that he has a comment about the draft statement. The committee debated the different phrasing and terminologies, but he questions the clause "those who identify as members of the LGBTQIA community." As people are being more considerate and inclusive, and adding more sexual orientations that people are identifying with, that (terminology) can change. He wonders if there is any value in rephrasing it as "diverse sexual orientation." Then, if any change happens in the structure of the "LGBTQIA" letters, they do not have to redraft it.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it sounds like it would have to have to include sexual orientations and gender identities. Discussion ensued about how to edit this. The group agreed on the wording of "those of all sexual orientations and gender identities." A member asked if they should then remove the clause about "women and non-binary people," since they are included in the wording. Discussion continued, and Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos spoke in favor of specifically acknowledging women and non-binary people due to the ways in which the voices of women and non-binary people have historically been unheard. The group decided to use the language "all sexual orientations and gender identities, including those who identify as women or as non-binary."

The draft statement now reads:

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

Dr. Saleh stated that it sounds good to him now. Others thanked him for the good catch.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he will send this draft statement to the Mayor for his feedback. He continued that he will get a report back for the January meeting, and they will see where this goes. This has been a great conversation.

**5) Committee Programs**

**A) MLK Day**

Dr. Morris stated that she reached out to some folks (to ask them to be presenters for MLK Day), but they did not get back to her.

Ms. Salwen stated that the person she reached out to did reply, but her fee – even with a sliding scale consideration – is likely too high for the HRC’s budget.

Dr. Morris stated that since none of the folks she reached out to got back to her, she had a different idea – having a panel on healthcare. She distributed copies of information she put together about this idea. She continued that the healthcare panel could be based on Martin Luther King, Jr.’s quote “Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhumane.” The panelists she has in mind are all from NH. She reached out to all of them, and all but Bobbie Bagley said yes, they are in. She told these folks that it was a committee decision. They all will do it if the committee says yes.

Discussion ensued and the committee spoke in favor of Dr. Morris’s idea. Committee members stated that it is a timely topic, given the COVID-19 pandemic and the current situation with reproductive rights. Dr. Morris shared more information about the people she had in mind – Karen Jennings, Psychology Professor from KSC as the moderator; and Kirsten Durzy, Epidemiologist with the NH Division of Public Health; Dr. Trinidad Tellez, Health Equity Strategist; Dr. Marie Ramas, Medical Director of the GateHouse Treatment Center; and Dr. Bobbie Bagley, Public Health official with the City of Nashua, as panelists. She continued that she thinks these folks would do it for a price that the HRC could afford.

Ms. Fiske asked what the HRC’s budget is. Mr. Bohannon replied that they do not really have one, but they could build one. He continued that they have some funding. The HRC once had \$15,000, but spent it down over the years. The HRC has the ability to fundraise if needed. There are local businesses that have supported the program in the past. If there was some expense for the MLK Day event, they could use funds from the HRC’s account or go out and fundraise.

Discussion ensued about whether the HRC should or needs to pay panelists, performers, speakers, and others for the events they do; how much people should be or need to be paid; and how to differentiate between which speakers, panelists, performers, and so on and so forth would

be paid or unpaid. A Committee member asked for “Fundraising” to be an HRC agenda item next time. Another spoke about how performers/artists should be paid for doing events, but for doctors, speaking on a healthcare panel might be considered a public service that is part of their work/mission.

Committee members and Mr. Bohannon thanked Dr. Morris for her idea and for putting this together. Mr. Bohannon stated that it is great that they have a moderator, panelists, and a title. He asked if they need to have a narrative that goes with it. Dr. Morris and others replied yes. Mr. Bohannon suggested a three- to four-sentence paragraph to get people in the right frame of mind so they know what this event will be about, and then the HRC can publish it. He can begin to have his create team build a flyer. Dr. Morris asked if he needs photos. Mr. Bohannon replied that he will see if his team can find photos, and send the flyer to Dr. Morris, and she can send it back to him with the narrative, and they will go from there.

Discussion ensued about the narrative. Dr. Morris suggested they set up a time for a couple HRC members to meet with these panelists via Zoom, to figure out the details a bit more. Chair Hay and Ms. Salwen volunteered. Dr. Morris asked if Chair Hay will be doing the introduction to the event, or if Dr. Saleh wants to do it. Dr. Morris, Chair Hay, Ms. Salwen, and Mr. Bohannon discussed the day and time for that planning Zoom, and decided upon Wednesday, December 15 at 11:00 AM, or Friday, December 17 at 12:00 PM. Dr. Morris stated that she will reach out to Dr. Jennings, Kirsten Durzy, Dr. Tellez, Dr. Ramas, and Dr. Bagley. She continued that Dr. Bagley is very busy and likely unable to do this, but they can go with the other three panelists.

### **B) Holi Festival**

Mr. Bohannon stated that he has not had a conversation with Ritu Budakoti or Jennifer Carroll about this, so he does not want to speak out of turn, but supplies were ordered for this event in 2021 and then it was canceled, so they still have them. He continued that he will have more information at the January meeting. To answer the Committee’s questions, this event had been at KSC, but now will be on the front lawn of the Rec Center. The festival is about one hour and 45 minutes, on a Saturday. He does not know the exact date; that is something he needs to work with Ms. Budakoti and Ms. Carroll about. It is usually March but might be April. Brief discussion ensued.

### **C) Pride Month**

Councilor Manwaring stated that she has a handout of when various towns are holding their Pride events in 2022. She continued that she thought Pride month was May, but usually it is June.

Ms. Fiske asked if the Pride flags were all the HRC did for this last year. Mr. Bohannon replied that in addition to the flags, they were looking to schedule a film, but those efforts fell short. He

continued that he does not know what the Committee is looking to do for Pride month, but they still have flags, and should have that program go again, and maybe initiate that a little sooner. If they want to do more, Railroad Square or another park would be a good venue.

Ms. Fiske stated that there are often parades associate with Pride. Discussion ensued. Councilor Manwaring asked if any other organizations around here do Pride events. Dr. Morris stated that Northampton paints some of the crosswalks [in rainbow colors]. Ms. Salwen suggests they go to Northampton as a group to see what they do, to get planning ideas for Keene for the following year. Others expressed enthusiasm for that idea. Discussion continued about locations for field trips, and the possibility of painting a crosswalk or crosswalks in Keene. The field trip to Northampton will inform their plans for next year, and this year, they will do something simple.

Dr. Morris suggested they start earlier this year than last year. Councilor Manwaring stated that last year, Dr. Filiault's original idea was a drag show, which she thinks is great. Others agreed and suggested they at least research that idea. Ms. Fiske stated that with outdoor screens they should show the same film in multiple locations, if COVID-19 is an issue. Mr. Bohannon replied there is also the amphitheater behind Railroad Square. Ms. Fiske asked/spoke about licensing fees. Mr. Bohannon spoke about how having the film license does not allow them to market the film showing, but they could post the information on social media. Discussion continued about locations in which a film would be licensed to be shown. Ms. Fiske advocated for adding a location further afield from the Library and Rec Center.

Ms. Fiske suggested they chalk paint a rainbow flag in one location, whether on Main St. or another spot, because it is quite visible. Discussion ensued. Mr. Bohannon stated that they should have that conversation with (Public Works Director) Kürt Blomquist.

Ms. Salwen asked if the Pride flags/banners can be put up in the official way that other flags are, around the (poles). Mr. Bohannon replied that those flags/banners are handled by the Keene Rotary Club. Dr. Morris replied that they would have to fundraise for that. Mr. Bohannon stated that usually KSC puts flags up around that same time for their graduation, so they would have to maneuver around that. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that there are many light posts around town. They could alternate – one for KSC, one for Pride, one for Juneteenth, and then there would be fewer Pride and Juneteenth flags and they could save money.

Chair Hay stated that Pride is a great film, about a strike when Margaret Thatcher shut down the mines in Wales and many gay people from London went out to support them. He continued that it is a true story. Ms. Salwen stated that they could do a watch party on Zoom of that movie or another great movie. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos replied yes, that is what Dr. Filiault was trying to achieve last year. Discussion continued about how it did not work last year. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if anyone knows if Dr. Filiault is planning anything. Dr. Saleh replied that he had a conversation with Dr. Filiault, who is detaching himself from the Committee, as he received a communication about how his term is ending soon and he is choosing (not to renew).

Dr. Saleh stated that several HRC members' terms are ending at the end of this month, including his own, which is something they need to confront. How is this handled? Does a member who wishes to serve for another term communicate that to the Mayor, or does the Committee need to ask the members whose terms are ending to consider continuing? Mr. Bohannon replied that Dr. Saleh should have received an email from him; he will resend it. Councilor Manwaring stated that anyone who wishes to continue needs to ask to do it. Discussion ensued about whose term is ending when.

**D) Juneteenth**

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that it would make sense to reconstitute this subcommittee for January. Councilor Manwaring agreed.

**E) Keene International Festival**

Mr. Bohannon stated that the Keene International Festival will be on September 24, and they are good to go. Chair Hay stated that the Keene Immigration and Refugee Partnership is working on something they will try to do around that time. He continued that Becky White, a photographer who has had two books about immigrants from NH, is agreeable to doing an exhibition in Keene. The Historical Society is excited about it and maybe other organizations will get involved. He shared more information about Ms. White's work. He continued that if an exhibition of Ms. White's work could cross-pollinate with the Keene International Festival, that would be great.

Dr. Morris stated that some people struggle with Ms. White's work, wondering if she is allowing people to tell their stories, or if people's stories are being told through Ms. White's perspective. She continued that she had thought about bringing Ms. White to KSC, and that was the feedback she received from someone. She personally does not know. Chair Hay replied that Ms. White's second book just came out in 2020, and when she is telling people's stories, she clears it with them before she puts it in. Dr. Morris replied that she was just raising the question she was asked; she personally does not know the answer.

**F) Indigenous People's Day**

Mr. Bohannon stated that the Mayor does a proclamation that morning. He continued that he does not know if the HRC wants something more than that. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she thinks this day/issue merits the same or similar treatment as, say, MLK Day. She continued that at minimum, there should be a discussion.

Discussion ensued about possibilities. Dr. Morris spoke of a program starting at the KSC, by two people who worked closely with the project that involves including the original, Indigenous names of landmarks, mostly lakes. There are also some great folks on the Commission on Native American Affairs. Maybe they could tap into that committee. Ms. Fiske stated that there

is also the NH Intertribal Native American Council, out of Laconia. Dr. Morris replied that that is the one the couple doing the program at KSC, Paul and Denise Pouliot, are affiliated with.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she had another idea. She has talked a number of times with Sherry Gould, who is on one of those councils. She is an Abenaki woman and a basket maker. She thinks it would be great to get her perspective on what it is like to be Abenaki and a woman.

Dr. Morris stated that Marge Bruchac, an Indigenous woman formerly at UConn, and now at UPenn, has done work with the Smithsonian. She loves talking with people and is a great speaker. She gave more information about her.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they have plenty of time to plan for Indigenous People's Day, which is great. Chair Hay replied yes, they can do better than just having a proclamation read in front of City Hall. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos suggested they form a subcommittee for this. She continued that there are many things the HRC wants to do, but their budget is not likely to support it all. They should look at fundraising.

Ms. Fiske stated that she will talk with the Library's Program Director about maybe doing something for Indigenous People's Day and hosting something at Heberton Hall. Others expressed interest in that. Ms. Fiske added that she thinks the Program Director has worked with Joe Buchac before.

Dr. Morris added that there might be some folks at Antioch to reach out to as well. She continued that Winona LaDuke attended Antioch.

## **6) New, Other Business**

Chair Hay recommended the book *The Burning*, about the Tulsa massacre.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked that "Fundraising" be an agenda item next month. Mr. Bohannon asked where on the agenda folks want that. The group decided to have it right after the MLK Day agenda item. Chair Hay asked folks to give it some thought and come with ideas.

Dr. Saleh stated that he has something else to add. The HRC discussed the diversity/inclusivity statement, but they then skipped ahead and went into other agenda items. Part of their goal, as they discussed previously, is to implement the other recommendations from the Racial Justice and Community Safety Report. There is a lot. They had talked about creating a spreadsheet. He did not do that, but if people are still interested, he can try to do that. Having a spreadsheet would help them track things better and maybe help trim things down, since there is a lot of overlap. They should give some time for that discussion next month. He asked if they should plan to have the meeting be 15 minutes longer. It is hard to have a good conversation in an hour.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if they can schedule the meeting until 6:30. Mr. Bohannon replied yes. He continued that he has a spreadsheet he uses with some other committees that could fit right into this. He will send Dr. Saleh a copy and Dr. Saleh can see if it will work. He may be able to help support Dr. Saleh with this. Dr. Saleh replied that would be a good starting point.

Dr. Saleh asked if others agree with meeting for 90 minutes next month. Others replied yes.

7) **Adjournment – Next Meeting Monday, January 3, 2022 at 5:00 PM**

There being no further business, Chair Hay adjourned the meeting at 6:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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