

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 7, 2022

5:00 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Jan Manwaring
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Dr. Shaun Filiault, Vice Chair
Marti Fiske, Ex-Officio
Hunter Kirschner
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Heidi Schwieger, Alternate
Councilor Catherine Workman, via Zoom
(5:06 PM)
Dr. Mohammed Saleh (5:06 PM)
Dr. Dottie Morris (5:09 PM)

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities
Director

Members Not Present:

Ritu Budakoti, Alternate

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Mr. Bohannon called the meeting to order at 5:02 PM. He stated that since the HRC did not meet last month, they need to hold elections for Chair and Vice Chair today. Roll call was conducted. Mr. Bohannon welcomed guests Patrick Brown and Janelle Sartorio, here on behalf of Keene Pride.

2) Chair Elections

Dr. Filiault made a motion to nominate Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos as Chair of the Human Rights Committee. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos nominated Dr. Filiault as Vice Chair. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) **Approval of January 3, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Fiske made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of January 3, 2022. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

4) **Finance Report**

Mr. Bohannon stated that there should not be any changes in the Finance Report. He continued that they did the MLK Day event at no fees, so the HRC total budget is \$3,891.88. The HRC is the fiscal agent for the Keene International Festival (KIF), and their current balance is lower than what is shown because there is a deposit he has not taken out, but for the most part, it is \$2,041.32.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if it is correct that they do not need to vote on this. Mr. Bohannon replied that is correct.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that it has been a few months, because last month the HRC did not meet due to lack of quorum. She continued that the HRC members had homework, but since it has been a couple months, she suspects that not everyone has done it. They were going to start working on the Education section of the RJCS report, she believes. She asked what the best use of their time is at this point. She has not seen the spreadsheet that they talked about. She proposed spending 20 minutes of the agenda on this topic.

Discussion ensued. Ms. Manwaring stated that she does not believe they have that much time today, given the other agenda items. Dr. Filiault agreed.

Dr. Filiault made a motion to table the Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee Report agenda item until next month. Ms. Manwaring seconded the motion.

Ms. Fiske asked if there was an update on the statement [on inclusivity] that the HRC had drafted. Mr. Bohannon replied that he shared it with Mayor Hansel, and at this point, the Mayor does not want to bring it forward. He continued that the HRC can revisit that with him. He only spoke with the Mayor briefly. One of the Mayor's points was that each committee chair has their own process of how they go about running the meetings, and he did not want to interfere with that. It may be worth another conversation with him, or another opportunity to review the statement and bring it back to him. Discussion ensued. Mr. Bohannon stated that if he had to guess, he thinks the Mayor found the statement too lengthy. It is worth taking a second pass at it and talking with the Mayor again.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the HRC asked him to see if Superintendent Rob Malay would come to a meeting to give an update on the schools, related to the RJCS report. He continued that he can

reach out to him and see if he is available for the next HRC meeting, if the committee wants. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos agreed.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called for a vote, and the motion passed unanimously.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked the committee to review the report within a day or two of the next meeting so they are prepared to discuss it. She continued that they had talked about parsing out action items, but she is not sure if that is happening. Discussion ensued. Mr. Bohannon stated that that could be a project for an intern. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if that is realistic to accomplish by the next meeting. Mr. Bohannon replied that he does not want to promise that, but he will give this some thought, and get back to Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos. Discussion continued about the sections of the report.

6) Committee Programs for 2022

A) MLK Day – Monday, January 17

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that it sounds like MLK Day event was a big success. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, they had approximately 45 or 50 participants, and a great conversation. He thanked Dr. Morris for getting Karen Jennings to work her magic with the panelists, who were all fantastic. The recording is on the HRC's website.

B) Holi Festival – Spring

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if it is correct that the Holi Festival is on hold this year. Mr. Bohannon replied yes.

C) Pride Month – May/June

Dr. Filiault stated that he spoke with representatives from an organization that is planning a Keene Pride event and went before the City Council a couple weeks ago. He continued that they have now reached out to the HRC to talk about coordinating efforts in planning Keene Pride events. He met with him for about an hour, regarding their mission for Keene Pride and what the HRC has been talking about. They are here today to talk.

Janelle Sartorio stated that she is with Keene Pride. She continued that their original recommendation that went before the City Council was to have a Pride week starting Monday, September 12, ending September 18 with a block party type of event, shutting off most of Main St. and Central Square to allow vendors, food trucks, and stages for performances. That is their big picture. They want to coordinate with local businesses and the City to decorate downtown, and they want to host multiple, smaller events throughout the week in coordination with local businesses and non-profits. It sounds like this is in line with what the HRC has discussed as well, but the big thing that Keene Pride and the HRC might differ on is just the scale of what they were thinking. Keene Pride has a grand vision of a large Pride event. They understand

there will be restrictions on what they can do, regarding size and scale. They are still in the beginning stages of planning. They look to the HRC for feedback and to see about partnering.

Dr. Filiault stated that the HRC tried to coordinate a Pride event for last year but ran against the brick wall that is COVID-19. He continued that he thinks it is difficult to plan a large-scale Pride event for Keene, particularly for an inaugural Pride festival. The difficulty is that it is Keene, NH. How many people could they draw into this area? They need to be cautious regarding the scope of the programming, especially since it is the initial Pride festival. Others who have organized Pride festivals in small New England towns recommend starting small and building up.

He continued that they are looking at a September event, because the June calendar is already saturated, and because a September timeframe allows coordination with Keene State College (KSC) so students can be involved. He agrees with the concept of a block party involving organizations throughout the region who are doing LGBTQ programming, some type of entertainment, and an after-party that is a little more adult-oriented. He would like the Library's involvement, like last year, with LGBTQ-themed books and resources; and potential involvement from downtown businesses like The Colonial Theatre. He thinks they should start with a small footprint and expand in the following years if it goes well. He thinks the HRC and Keene Pride have a similar vision, and it is just about how big they want to start for this first time.

Ms. Fiske stated that at a previous meeting, she brought up the idea of painting a rainbow Pride flag on Central Square in the street. She continued that she did some research on that. The Public Works Director did not see a problem and said that the committee would have to supply the artist(s) to do the work. They would have to set up a meeting with the Mayor and the City Manager. The protocol committee, which includes Fire and Police, would review the plans for the event and if there were any planned issues relating to parking, safety, food vending, electrical needs for a larger-type event, and so on and so forth. If it was just about road closure to paint the Pride flag and the event was somewhere like Railroad Square that would not block traffic, it would go to the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee. If it was something larger that would close down more roads, including Central Square, it would go to the Planning, Licenses, and Development (PLD) Committee for an event license. The City Council would have to approve it. A chalk flag would involve closing Main St. for a couple hours, and would have to be done early on a weekend morning. Since it is a City committee, there would be no charge for the overtime costs of Public Works staff to do that close down.

Councilor Workman stated that she is a member of the MSFI Committee. She continued that she thinks this would have support from the MSFI and PLD Committees, but it is always easier if they are not talking about closing down Main St.

Dr. Filiault stated that there might not be a lot of public support for closing down Main St. for any amount of time and for using public dollars on temporary paint, for an issue that remains

controversial to the public. Painting a public street seems like a lightning rod for an unnecessary purpose, when there are other ways to achieve the same outreach and messaging.

Dr. Morris replied that they need to establish what their purpose *is*, in order to determine whether painting the street would be in line with the purpose.

Discussion ensued. Some spoke in favor of creating visibility with banners and flags instead of paint on the street/closing down the street. Others spoke about how closing down a street for a festival has been successful for other events, such as A Taste of Keene, and how the public loves a block party environment.

Ms. Sartorio stated that Keene Pride's purpose is two-part – the big goal is to raise awareness by having this big public event. Secondary to that is bringing tourism into the area, and to Keene businesses. The LGBTQ community has been underserved. This would be a strong show of public support. Keene Pride would like to have booths available for area non-profits to bring exposure to resources in the area. Mr. Brown added that some churches are interested in participating. They want this to be inclusive to anyone who supports inclusivity. He continued that they want to show that Keene is an open, welcoming community, to KSC students and visitors, and people who will visit specifically because they travel to Pride celebrations. He does not think closing Main St. for the event would be too disruptive if properly announced; there are more people who will take great joy from the celebration than people who will be inconvenienced.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the flags on light posts downtown belong to the Keene Rotary Club, not the City. He continued that they should keep in mind that flags for the Clarence DeMar Marathon are up for the whole month of September. Last year the HRC asked downtown businesses, via letter, if they wanted a Pride flag, for free, to put in their window. There were seven or eight flags given out, total. They hope to have a greater response this year.

Mr. Bohannon continued that Keene Pride has been asked to attend a protocol meeting with City services, and that will be more of a wakeup call than this meeting. Although it was a great success, A Taste of Keene was a lot of money. Even a small-scale event could cost the organizers \$5,000 to \$7,500. The Pumpkin Festival cost approximately \$41,000 to put on. Regarding closing Main St., emergency vehicles can only go south via Main St. and cannot use side streets, so blocking off that corridor cannot be done unless it is a major event. Railroad Square would be the easiest downtown location for a Pride festival. It would be easier to work with City staff to block off a portion of Railroad St. to the parking garage. Another option is Fuller Park in front of the Recreation Center, which does not have the costs associated with Main St. The protocol meeting is the next step, and would have to be held this month or next in order to have a September event. Protocol meetings are to ensure an event's success and safety, and address every logistical issue the organizers may never have thought of. He recommends starting on a smaller scale for this first Pride event and then growing in future years.

Dr. Filiault asked when Keene Pride wants the block party to be. Ms. Sartorio replied Sunday, September 18. She continued that some people have lingering concerns due to Pumpkin Festival [ending with riots], so they do not want to give the impression that this will be a “big party.”

Mr. Kirschner asked how much input Keene Pride is getting from local members of the LGBTQ community. Ms. Sartorio replied that their board is half queer, half straight. She continued that they have reached out to event organizers in Northampton, MA and the area. The board president came from NYC. They are still looking for additional input and welcome people’s input. Mr. Kirschner asked who the event is for – the queer community? Or is it about raising awareness? Ms. Sartorio replied that they want it to be for the queer community, but also for everyone. They want it to be a place where people feel comfortable in other people’s spaces.

Ms. Fiske asked if Keene Pride has youth (high school or younger) represented. Ms. Sartorio replied no, not right now, although they have reached out to the school systems. Mr. Brown replied and libraries.

Dr. Filiault stated that within the LGBTQ community, Pride has a particular meaning and a 50-year history that is important to be aware of. He continued that he recommends being careful about invoking the meaning and history of pride without really knowing it, because it is not just a party.

Dr. Saleh asked if there is meaning to the September timeframe, instead of June. Mr. Brown replied that there is already a lot happening in June, and KSC students would be gone. They are back in September. The KSC community is important to Keene Pride’s success.

Discussion continued about Pride’s history. Dr. Morris recommended the work of Guilford, VT filmmaker John Scagliotti, such as his Before and After Stonewall film.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that it sounds like they have a lot of questions [about the Pride event], and she is not sure they will be answered tonight. She asked Mr. Brown and Ms. Sartorio to report back next month about what they see as the HRC’s participation.

Dr. Filiault made a motion for him to continue to liaise with Keene Pride to develop a vision of what the interaction between Keene Pride and the Human Rights Committee will be. Mr. Kirschner seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Bohannon stated that in the meantime, he encourages Keene Pride to set up a protocol meeting. Ms. Sartorio replied that one is scheduled for the end of the month.

D) Juneteenth – June 19

Ms. Manwaring stated that the Juneteenth working group met with the YMCA on February 17, trying to decide how to work together on this. She continued that her impression was that the

YMCA was clear on what they were going to do. Their theme is something like “health and wellness.” They have another meeting on the third Thursday at 4:00 PM. She does not see the HRC really coordinating together with the YMCA. She thinks they are looking at separate events. Last year’s Juneteenth event at Railroad Square was successful and well received. She hoped the HRC would do the same thing. Last year, the HRC’s goal was to educate people about what Juneteenth is. This year they are thinking about moving beyond education to action. What action can they take, given the themes of inclusivity and equity? This is a big year, when it comes to voting this fall. Her vision is a small historical piece, and music and entertainment like last year. Jenna Carroll from the Historical Society is a speaker so far. She runs a program to find African American folks in Keene from 1790 when the census was first taken.

Ms. Schwieger stated that the Johnathan Daniels Center would be interested, especially if they will be addressing voting rights issues. She and Ms. Manwaring can talk.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that last year they wanted to have a voting registration table at the event and ran into some protocol issues. She continued that maybe they can really make it happen this year. Discussion continued. Dr. Morris spoke about the Black Heritage Trail.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they will meet with the YMCA monthly. Dr. Filiault asked for clarification on the YMCA running their own Juneteenth event with the theme of “health and wellness.” He asked if that is essentially an advertisement for the YMCA, run in June. Discussion continued, including about how the Chair of the Monadnock Region Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition was affronted by this, and spoke about how without acknowledging harm, healing/health does not happen. Councilor Workman stated that she thinks the YMCA’s “health and wellness” theme for Juneteenth came from a national coalition that plans Juneteenth. There is a lot that could be done under the theme of “health and wellness,” on a community level, such as addressing the health disparities of people of color, mental health, and so on and so forth. Mr. Bohannon replied that he thought of the health disparities, too, but the HRC just did a panel/presentation about that for the MLK Day event. Maybe there is a way to do it differently for Juneteenth? He will let the committee decide. Dr. Morris stated that Mr. Morton speaks of the importance of having a solid understanding of and acknowledgement of the historical pieces; it is not okay to just pick up as if that did not matter. Discussion continued.

Ms. Manwaring stated that the Juneteenth working group needs to get together and get going with finding music and speakers. They will send out an email to schedule a meeting.

Councilor Workman stated that something she learned while doing research for Black History Month, which she did not get to fully flesh out - a great opportunity to highlight for Juneteenth, is that Keene is thought to be one of the towns listed in the Green Book as a “sundown town.” She is trying to find out if that is still an Ordinance, and if it is, get it abolished and have that done for Juneteenth. Mr. Bohannon suggested starting with the City Clerk Office’s. Discussion continued.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked that the Juneteenth working group meet before their next meeting with the YMCA. Ms. Fiske asked if the theme will be established within the next month. Ms. Manwaring replied yes. Ms. Fiske replied that knowing the theme will help the other groups and organizations that want to help, like the Library.

E) Keene International Festival – September 24

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she does not think anything is needed from the committee about the Keene International Festival yet. Mr. Bohannon replied that the KIF is doing some board recruitment, if anyone wants to join. A few people have left. They could use help with logistics and fundraising. They have people lined up to ask, but need people to help do the asking. They have some good programming/planning scheduled with The Colonial Theatre.

F) Indigenous People Day – October 10

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she wanted to quickly touch on this, because the HRC has historically run out of time with this. Ms. Fiske stated that she had agreed to chair the working group for this. She continued that she had not yet starting looking down this runway, but now she will. Ms. Manwaring stated that since they are doing Pride on September 18, and Indigenous People Day is October 10, it will be really tight. Last year she attempted to get Sherry Gould, an Abenaki basket maker, to present. Dr. Morris stated that elsewhere in the state is a project of taking the original, indigenous name of a local lake, for example, and including it with the current name of the lake. She continued that it would be nice to find, say, three major landmarks in this area to including the original, Abenaki names of them. Discussion continued about others doing similar work.

7) New, Other Business

A) 2022 Meeting Calendar

Ms. Manwaring made a motion to accept the 2022 meeting calendar. Dr. Filiault seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

8) Adjournment – Next Meeting Monday, April 4, 2022 at 5:00 PM

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 6:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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

Additional edits by, Katie Kibler, Clerk's Office