

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

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

**Monday, May 9, 2022**

**5:00 PM**

**Room 22,  
Recreation Center**

**Members Present:**

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair  
Dr. Shaun Filiault, Vice Chair  
Councilor Catherine Workman  
Marti Fiske  
Dr. Dottie Morris  
Hunter Kirschner (arrived at 7:00 PM)  
Rabbi Daniel Aronson  
Heidi Schwieger, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities  
Director

**Members Not Present:**

Jan Manwaring  
Dr. Mohammed Saleh  
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 6:38 PM. She stated that at the previous meeting about the RJCS Report, the HRC left off at recommendation 4.B.

***4.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.***

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the conversation was around making a list of free trainings and working with the City's HR Department. She thinks that Mr. Bohannon took an action. This one is covered for now. Her intention is for the group to go through all of the items and then circle back around and then do the next level of development and status check and discussion.

An HRC member asked if the terms "racial justice" and "DEI" (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) are used interchangeably. Discussion ensued about how DEI is a broader umbrella term that encompasses and assists with racial justice issues.

***4.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.***

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she thinks this can go along with the inclusion training, as something the HRC discusses with the HR Department. Mr. Bohannon stated that he reached out to HR this week. He continued that the provider of the City's EAP (Employee Assistance Program) used to provide three on-site trainings per year, and he will keep pursuing that avenue. The trainings covered these sort of things. He thinks the City changed EAP providers since then, which was about 2010, and he is waiting for confirmation. HRC members noted that 4.C. is talking about an audit of policies, more than employee training.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he spoke with Rebecca Landry (IT Director/Assistant City Manager) today. There is the Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition (MDEIB), and also, the Chamber of Commerce has formed a group focused on DEI, and they have done quite a bit of work. He and Ms. Landry were saying, "Okay, the meeting of the minds is going to happen, so that three groups are not going down the same parallel path." Those three groups are the City (HRC), the YMCA (MDEIB), and the Chamber. Discussion ensued about working together, working "smarter, not harder," and efficiency.

Dr. Filiault stated that this might be an area to reach out to the City Attorney about, because when you are talking about recruitment, pay, retention, and promotion, with regards to diversity and equity, you begin to quickly run up against federal law. Trying to increase diversity and equity in hiring [needs to follow] federal law. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that that is an important caveat, but they can still do a lot within the boundaries of federal law. Dr. Filiault replied yes, once they clearly understand what the boundaries are, which the HR Department and the City Attorney can advise on. Discussion ensued. Dr. Morris spoke about how recruitment efforts can include better/more strategic advertising, to maximize the pools of candidates. Mr. Bohannon stated that he will bring this issue forward at his upcoming meeting with the City Manager and City Attorney.

Ms. Fiske noted that 4.C. references the City "and Keene employers," so she wonders if the Chamber's DEI group and the MDEIB are focusing on those Keene employers, and the HRC can only focus on the City. Others agreed. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that they would have to verify this, and to her it is part of the conversation – how do they divvy this up, and share the responsibility in reporting? Discussion ensued. Dr. Morris spoke of Keene State College (KSC)'s experiences hiring people who come with a "trailing spouse" who also needs a job, and KSC's desire to create a network within a 35-40 mile radius where people could live in Keene or near it and their spouse could find a job. If HR people could come together to create that network, within federal guidelines, it would help. Employers recruiting candidates could then have a list of places where candidates' spouses could apply for jobs.

Mr. Aronson stated that the wording of 4.C. asks for a review of policies; it is not yet about proposing solutions. It is about identifying strengths and weaknesses. The question is, what are they focusing on? And if the HRC is focusing on just the City, the question is what that review would look like and who would do it. An outside auditor? Ms. Fiske stated that she is a City employee who recently tried hard to hire for an upper level position, and the hard part was recruitment. She thinks the City's pay and promotion policies are solid. All (departments) deal with retention issues. But recruitment is hard. She did not know where to advertise. She tried, for example, the Black caucus of the American Library Association and did not get any potential applicants from that advertisement and it doubled her budget. Something like what Dr. Morris is suggesting would be more valuable, in her opinion. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she wonders if other cities have good models of success for recruitment. Dr. Morris replied that the Town of Brattleboro put something in place about two years ago, and did some really intentional things to broaden their applicant pool, and now have a Puerto Rican HR Director, an African American female Police Chief, and another person of color (in another job), all from continuing to broaden the pool. They could talk with the HR Director about how they have done this. Councilor Workman noted that the new Town Manager in Brattleboro is also a person of color. Discussion continued.

An HRC member stated that she is unclear whether it is the HRC's job to help identify ways to do this review. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that is a good question, whether it is the HRC's job to call for the need, and allow the HR Department to do its own audit or determine what that looks like, and the HRC could serve as a resource and, for example, suggest that the Keene HR Department talk with the Brattleboro HR folks. Councilor Workman replied or asking the members of the Chamber of Commerce to start there, so each of the Keene members take a pledge to do their own internal audit, or something like that, and review of their policies. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it could be finding an auditor instead. Maybe the Chamber could find someone who is willing to do the audit for all of the members. It might be more cost effective that way. What the HRC's responsibility is in all of this is a good question, and it might be a question for the next round.

***4.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.***

Ms. Fiske stated that this came up in a DEI training she did recently. A group of lawyers in MA pooled their resources and created three or four intern spots for six months, and advertised in one of the major metro areas for these internships that included pay high enough to cover a person's rent. Because of that, those three interns ended up finding jobs in the region. This was possible because of the lawyers' pooled resources as a group. The Library has an internship program paid for Friends of the Library, part-time, in the Makerspace. It is not something that would draw applicants from afar. This is a funding issue. Interns have to be paid, and at a high enough wage to cover living expenses. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied yes, if the intern is from out of the area. She continued that students from KSC and other schools are already living here.

Discussion ensued about are colleges and how diverse they are or are not. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that a question might be how to create internships that draw these people into the community to stay. Dr. Filiault stated that there is an exceptional pool of interns with KSC, Antioch, and River Valley Community College. He continued that the Mayor wanted to create internships like this, but that was derailed by the pandemic. The HRC could work to make it happen.

Dr. Filiault continued that KSC's student body might be largely white but there is plenty of diversity of other types; they need to talk about diversities, plural, not diversity, singular. It is also about creating opportunities for students from the LGBTQI community, women, people of various religions, and so on and so forth, not just race. Discussion continued. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she agrees that the HRC's focus/goal is diversities, plural, but they will keep having this issue, because the RJCS Report is around race, and this meeting is around this document. Dr. Morris replied that this document is what the HRC was charged to focus on. Dr. Filiault replied that the document still addresses multiple diversities and recognizes the problems of homophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism, and so on and so forth. It focuses on race but has an eye on the other diversities. Sometimes race becomes most easily recognized because it is the most overt and visually recognizable, but there are less overt diversities that sometimes get swept under the rug. Dr. Morris replied that they should keep in mind that sometimes people of different races and ethnicities also are [LGBTQ, of various religions, women, and so on and so forth]. Dr. Filiault replied yes, there are multiple, overlapping diversities. Dr. Morris replied that oftentimes, people of color are ignored even within the groups [for people marginalized due to gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc]. For example, there is racism in the LGBTQ community, or other groups. Sometimes people forget, when they say, "We need to talk about this diversity and that diversity," that some people of color are also in those groups. It is a whole discussion. However, the Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee was charged by the Mayor to focus on race, so they did, and other [diversities] came up during the discussions when they had open forums, which is how they ended up in the report.

Mr. Kirschner arrived at 7:00 PM and Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos briefly brought him up to speed on where they are at in the meeting. She stated that Ms. Fiske brought up that this can be a funding issue, regarding bringing people in from outside the community at a pay rate that allows them to actually pay rent. They talked about the idea of tapping into the local colleges and the topic of the diversities found there came up.

Mr. Aronson stated that all of these keep talking about the City of Keene and Keene employers, so somehow they need to coordinate. He continued that he envisions the chairs of the different groups – that is, Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos from the HRC, the Chamber of Commerce's DEI person, and [Pierre Morton, Vice President, and Catherine Workman, Co-Chair] from the YMCA's MDEIB. He asked if Councilor Workman could bring this to the MDEIB, to get the answer regarding Keene employers, while the HRC is focusing on the City's stuff. He asked if that makes sense. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied yes, but the HRC cannot move forward on that without the other groups' buy-in. It has not been a conversation yet. Mr. Aronson replied

that he suggests Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos and Mr. Bohannon have a conversation with representatives from the other groups so they can coordinate all of this. Councilor Workman replied that that can be one of the HRC's recommendations [for 4.D.] She thinks it is a great idea; they need a lot more collaboration fleshing out of who is doing what, especially for the next round of this, so they can start delegating some of [the RJCS Report's recommendations] to those other committees.

Dr. Morris replied yes, because at the last MDEIB meeting, they were talking about doing an assessment, but the RJCS Committee *did* an assessment, and the data is available to others. The Governor's Council did an assessment, too. It has been done. Ms. Schwieger stated that taking ownership creates community investment. Mr. Bohannon stated that he feels like the RJCS Committee did a lot of work, meeting for a year, diving deep. He continued that the RJCS Committee brought in many people from the community and there was a lot of conversation, and they specifically went from meeting to meeting on specific topics, some of which he participated in. The report came out and got handed to the HRC when the HRC was in a time of transition and not quite ready for it, and then all of a sudden this other group formed and took off with it, and the HRC does not know [what that group is doing]. That has caused some confusion within the entire network. Thus, there needs to be a group discussion with Luca Paris, whoever the representative is from the Chamber of Commerce's group, Dan Smith from the YMCA, Pierre Morton, Councilor Workman as Co-Chair of the MDEIB, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos, and himself, all at the table, to get on the same highway. Councilor Workman replied yes, a year ago when this report came out, the MDEIB did not exist, and the Chamber of Commerce did not have a DEI Officer. Many of these positions had not yet been created in the community. Thus, the HRC was the most appropriate group to take this on, and the group charged with all of the work. Now that they are starting to see these other formations, groups, and positions within employers in the community, the HRC can start to disseminate some of this work and really get focused, so no one is duplicating the wheel.

Ms. Fiske stated that to shift the lens a bit, they can view this as an "embarrassment of riches." They can look what happened as a result of this report - they now have groups they did not have before. There is no need for anyone to complain about how the groups are not working together; instead, they can be glad that all of these organizations are doing this, and talk about working together. Ms. Schwieger replied that maybe one of the roles of the HRC is to weave the effort together, because they were charged with a very specific task. Others agreed and discussion continued.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that this conversation has ended up more general than just about internships, and she thinks it may apply to the next item as well.

**4.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).**

Ms. Schwieger stated that this ties into Dr. Morris's conversation. Mr. Bohannon stated that the City has a new HR employee who is focused on recruitment, and he has seen a broader reach happening, but there may be some resources that they are not tapping. If the City only advertises locally, they are only reaching the local population. They are trying to broaden that, although some positions may not lend themselves to that. A good audit, as Mr. Aronson said earlier, would be able to provide information. Councilor Workman stated that she read an article recently about how NH and VT have become desirable for "climate refugees," and she knows someone who came here from CA for that reason, and picked NH specifically, just by word of mouth. That is something to think about. Also, there are local [non-climate] refugee organizations that help with refugee settlement and getting people set up with jobs and housing. Maybe the HRC can pull them into these discussions. Ms. Fiske stated that she thinks Bellows Falls is becoming a Refugee Center, which is a potential pool. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she has also heard about COVID-19 refugees moving to the NH area because there is more space here.

Councilor Workman stated that regarding the refugee population, she has a well-educated friend from Nigeria, but that education does not transfer to the US and her friend had to start at square one and prove themselves. Maybe the HRC can talk about a way to streamline that process. Licensing (for professions) is a whole conversation on its own, but there must be other jobs, and maybe the HRC can look at that when they look at transferable skills that 4.E. talks about. Dr. Morris stated that there is a lot to talk about with this, such as the need for people to understand the fact that testing is culturally informed, as shown by tons of research. Standardized tests like these are not good predictors of different groups, not just regarding race, but class. Dr. Filiault replied that the Boston Police hiring test was overturned as being racially and class biased and unusable and Boston had to come up with something different. Probably that case is a good one to start with, to look at the reasoning the court used and what they have offered as an opportunity to move forward. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that is a good idea, but of course, some of this is beyond their municipal control, and done at the State level. But the HRC can be an advocate for that change at the State level as well.

Mr. Bohannon stated that this talks about "City of Keene employers." Others replied that the language is "the City and Keene employers." Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the City does not have entrance testing for any positions. Mr. Bohannon replied that actually, there is entrance testing for Police and Fire, which definitely is needed. He continued that he does not know much about the Fire entrance testing, but the Police entrance testing has to meet CALEA (standards). They are a national certified program that does a complete audit of all of the KPD's services and how they conduct their business, and if the KPD does not pass it, they do not get accredited. It is rigorous and there are not many CALEA-certified police departments in the state. Councilor Workman replied that there are not many CALEA-certified departments in the nation. Ms. Fiske stated that she does not know what other departments have testing. The Library does not. Certainly there are some certifications needed, like for some Public Works employees, but she is not sure if there is additional testing beyond the certifications. Discussion continued. Mr. Bohannon spoke of City departments and positions that have opportunities for

employees to learn, study, and obtain certifications, and it is okay if it takes more than one attempt. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked who defines the testing – by department? The State? Mr. Bohannon replied that some is the State and some is national. Dr. Morris brought up the high school and its vocational opportunities; maybe that is something to think about. She continued that she hears teachers talking about the disparities between Keene students and students from nearby towns, and a lot of it is around class. It would be nice to figure out some of those key touchpoints, what young people are interested in, and provide that. Not everyone wants to go to college. Mr. Kirschner replied that there are wonderful programs and teachers at the [Cheshire Career Center]. Discussion continued. Mr. Bohannon stated that he knows this conversation is happening now at Keene High School (KHS), driven in part by teachers' desire to change the educational model, which they see does not work for every student, and all of the options at the Career Center. He gave more information about KHS's efforts and funding.

Discussion continued about entrance tests in general and the potential biases in them. Ms. Schwieger stated that when she thinks of reasonable accommodations for disabled people, she wonders if there is a differentiated tool that an employer could use, with the understanding that someone comes with a life experience that is not acknowledged in the testing. Dr. Filiault replied that there is litigation about that, waiting on a decision. He continued that the argument is that, for example, if 60 is a passing score, perhaps your life experience gives you 10 points towards that and right now your score is only 50. Ms. Schwieger replied that she was thinking more about how people are even accessing information on the test. Mr. Bohannon stated that there is a national test to become a certified Parks and Recreation professional. He continued that it is a standardized test but its administration is ADA-compliant, and everyone in the field that he is connected with via LinkedIn, which is a diverse group of people, post that they received the certification. He does not think there is bias within that test when you get to that level of certification. The organization would be sued if they showed implicit bias.

Discussion continued and Dr. Filiault stated that the HRC will never get a national licensing body to change its testing or the testing procedures, but he thinks they can be creative in ways to help students and applicants to be better prepared. This dovetails nicely with the internship opportunities and the educational opportunities they talked about in 4.D. An under-accessed resource in the community is River Valley, in addition to the Voc-Tech Center at the high school. Maybe the HRC should work more closely with River Valley and its students, who tend to be more socio-economically disadvantaged. They could target those students from an early stage of their educational career, give internship opportunities, and mentor them with an eye on preparing them for the test they are going to be taking, particularly students from socio-economically disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds. Dr. Morris replied that there are many methods to help people, and they are not directly coaching people on the test, but teaching them how to test. That is how she paid her way through her Master's program – she worked with a program designed by a professor she knew, preparing inner city kids on how to test, because many kids from wealthier schools were going to big, posh test-taking [centers], which inner city kids did not have access to. The program worked with inner city kids on various strategies for taking various kinds of tests. Discussion continued about testing. Mr. Kirschner spoke about

also working with open-access institutions that do not have the barrier of entrance tests, and increasing access channels from there. Dr. Filiault suggested they reach out to River Valley and ask them what the program-to-career pathways that the HRC, as a City group, can begin to work with, and about the programmatic avenues to begin to target students and bring them towards a career in City government, and what educational pathways would be appropriate. Others agreed and discussion continued about River Valley.

Mr. Aronson stated that he does not know what “applicant tracking systems” means. Testing would be a component, but what else goes into applicant tracking and what might fall through the cracks? Ms. Fiske replied that part of the tracking system is questions for applicants such as: Have you applied for this job before? Have you applied with this particular company before? What was your income at your last job? She continued that the City still asks that latter question. Some people who apply for Library jobs bravely decline to answer. The HRC could ask the City to reconsider that question. Mr. Bohannon stated that as an employer, he likes to know if an applicant was making, say, \$30 per hour at their previous job, because if the position he is hiring for only pays \$18 per hour, the person is not going to take the job. HRC members replied that is not necessarily true and gave several reasons why. Discussion continued about salary differences in private sector versus municipal jobs and the potential value and/or potential harm in the City continuing to ask applicants what their previous job paid, and what happens with “over-qualified” candidates. Mr. Bohannon spoke about CivicHR, the tracking service the City’s HR Department uses to track applicants, and how the information is available to the hiring manager in the department that is hiring and the HR Department. The City will soon be getting new financial software that will help that process and that data.

At 7:30 PM, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called for a five-minute recess. The meeting resumed at 7:35 PM.

***4.G. It is recommended that the City and Keene employers seek and generate incentives to promote equity in employment.***

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked: who are we incentivizing? Others replied, the employers. Dr. Morris stated that many private businesses use this model, and provide incentives for people to do the work, and it becomes part of people’s evaluations and then they get bonuses. Dr. Filiault stated that this recommendation is vague – what is the incentive? Who is being incentivized? What is equity? This is hard to apply to a public model, because he does not think you can incentivize an individual in the public sphere; it would create a perverse situation. For example, [people would ask] if that is the reason you are hiring a diverse individual. Dr. Morris replied that the way she remembers it, everyone has a set goal/expectation, which everyone is measured by, and if you meet that, you would get an additional incentive. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that when she worked in corporate America and had to set annual goals, if her goal was, say, “come in under budget on three different programs,” if she did that, she got a bonus. But what metric do you use that would not be an issue in a public setting? What would a metric look like? Dr. Morris replied that she does not have them at her disposal right now, but they do exist. Chair



Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if an action item could be to investigate this. Dr. Morris replied that they would really have to think it through. It might have been one of the recommendations in the Brattleboro report. They could talk with the HR person in Brattleboro. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the only metrics that come instantly to her mind seem fairly token, which does not get the job done.

Ms. Fiske stated that there is a way of incentivizing without money. Others agreed. Ms. Fiske continued that for example, you have to check many boxes when applying for a federal grant – like “I agree that I have worker’s compensation insurance,” and “I agree that I follow these different rules.” One incentive could be that you can apply for contracts with the City if you have a DEI statement, for example, or that you would automatically be put into the pool for consideration. Or they could say that no one can apply unless they have a DEI statement. They can look at this more in the way that the federal government does, saying that you have to check certain boxes before you can qualify for getting contracts or participating as a partner or something else. Discussion ensued. Mr. Aronson stated that that could be agency-level, not individual-level. Ms. Fiske replied yes, especially for the City – that could be an easier ask. Then people would have to do it within the town, if they want to be involved with contracts for the City. Dr. Filiault stated that he likes the idea, but he wonders if there is a “home rule” issue with the City requiring a diversity statement. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that they need to investigate that.

***4.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.***

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that this is sort of the flipside to the same coin of internships, recruitment reviews, and things of that nature. She continued that she feels that the same avenues will work for this. Others agreed. Councilor Workman stated that when the RJCS Committee was talking about this, it was to give businesses a blueprint on where to start, when they say, “I’ve never even considered this. How do I start making change?” She continued that when she is looking at all of these recommendations, she is just looking at that – creating a blueprint/manual, for people looking to diversify or change the current status quo, for what to start looking at internally, and what the jumping off points are. Many businesses say that they want to do this work but just do not know where to start and need support such as recommendations for good, reputable trainings.

Mr. Aronson asked what action the HRC wants to take for 4.H. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she thinks it is along the same lines as the others above – they need to have a conversation with the DEI person at the Chamber and the people at the MDEIB. The HRC needs to handle it for the City, and the other two groups need to handle it for businesses, whether it is identifying who should be reviewing these initiatives, systems, operations, and mission statements, or whether it is the HRC actively taking a look at them themselves or supporting that examination. That question might be a question for the next round, but it fits the same model.

Ms. Fiske stated that she sees 4.H. as kind of a repeat from other items they have already looked at. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied yes, another facet, with the same tool kit to support it.

***4.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.***

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she loves the idea but has no idea how to do this. Dr. Filiault stated that the City Council has a methodology they use for non-profit evaluation/funding, and this could be another factor they add into their formula. Ms. Fiske replied that staff also have protocol meetings with community groups that want to use City property.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he believes that when the City is going through the design process for something like a park, Winchester Street, or the Comprehensive Master Plan, there are public forums. They put those into the RFP process. They have to publicize and promote and get people into the forums to discuss whatever the particular issue is, and he thinks the City as a whole does a good job of that. Whether individuals want to attend those sessions is a different topic, but the City at least puts it out there in a very broad sense.

Dr. Morris stated that this could be interpreted in a different way. For example, as they are planning the skate park, or walkways for nature walks, or something else, they need to make sure it is accessible. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, that is a high priority. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked for more details about the term “accessible.” Do they mean physically accessible for people in wheelchairs? Because this document is about race. Dr. Morris replied that she is just trying to do what they have been asked to do, to expand the report beyond race, so she is thinking about that, but she is also thinking about, for example, questions like what type of artwork is displayed, and whether it [reflects diversity]. For example, the process for doing the Walldogs murals was very intentional. At first, the design the Walldogs had for the Abenaki mural looked, to her and others, more Navajo. The person who designed it was trying to be inclusive, but when the designer heard that feedback, she/he/they then consulted with an Abenaki person [to improve/change the design], and that is how Keene got the wall that is there now. That is the kind of spirit that [4.I. is about] – making sure that if they are going to do something, it is done intentionally. The Walldogs mural is a perfect example of a good, inclusive, intentional process. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she has not heard any negative feedback about the Walldogs project or process, which is rare. Dr. Morris replied yes, because there were so many opportunities for feedback and everything was very clear. She continued that in the beginning of the process, someone said the art would be about “the good ‘ole days,” which was [worrisome], until they took the time to really explain what their intentions and plans were and how they were going to involve the community and think beyond, and it was a great process. She would like to see that process replicated.

Ms. Schwieger stated that the Keene Arts Core is sort of social art project, in the fall, inviting an artist who will do an intentional project with maybe a visual outcome or maybe not, but it is that

same intentional process. It is about identifying a need in the community and then working with the community about it, to have some sort of outcome. It is aligned with [what Dr. Morris is talking about], but it is a fine arts movement right now. It might be good to keep on their radar. The JDC is partnering with them, so she can let the HRC know about it. Others agreed and discussion continued about arts events.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that regarding what Mr. Bohannon was saying about projects having accessible public forums and the question of whether people want to attend being beyond their control, there can be an element of culture leading some people to not feel that they can come to those meetings or participate. She wonders if there is a way for the HRC to influence that, such as advertising the public forums or somehow communicating about those meetings. She is not saying the City has not already done that; she is just saying this is something to be conscious of. Because just because the meetings are happening does not mean that everyone feels comfortable attending.

Mr. Bohannon replied that if the City advertises in the Keene Sentinel, social media, the radio, and so on and so forth, they have touched all the bases they can to promote the event. How else would they promote the event? Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that something that occurs to her is something that came up in the last meeting, and maybe it is beyond their purview, but the HRC had talked about making a list of local community groups, such as different religious communities, different cultural organizations, and so on and so forth. It may not be feasible, but if there were a distribution network for that information through those organizations, that means specifically reaching out to those groups, and people might feel that they are [welcome at the public meetings]. Others agreed. Ms. Fiske spoke of how the outreach for one project might be a little different than the outreach for another, such as the skate park and dog park. Mr. Bohannon replied that he goes to the Lions Club, the Kiwanis Club, the Rotary Club, the Women's Club, and so on and so forth; he will go to any group that has interest. He hears what Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos is saying, about having a list of groups they could contact related to different things, and he will go and talk to anyone. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that an email list would work. Mr. Bohannon replied that first they would have to make sure groups want to be a part of it. They just need to find or create such a list, and he can definitely reach out. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that one of the HRC's action items from the [April 12 meeting about the RJCS Report] was to create that list, which will be an undertaking.

Dr. Filiault stated that he thinks creating such a list is a great idea, but his concern about reaching out to a list like that for these types of projects is that there will always be someone left off the list, who feels left out, and it is unrealistic to reach out to every group on the list for every project. There will always be some subjectivity for which communities are impacted and which are not, for who is reached out to for a particular project. Discussion ensued. Mr. Aronson stated that the bottom line is to be intentional in that process, and not just [quickly go down a checklist]. It is true that someone could feel left out, but all they can do is try to be as intentional as possible with who they reach out to.

Mr. Aronson stated that he wants to add the phrase “emotional safety” to all of this. He continued that it is not just about inclusivity and access; it is also about ensuring that all of the processes are safe for all people, so people feel safe speaking up and feel safe using the skate park, wandering through the arts corridor, and so on and so forth. Dr. Morris replied that she cannot remember who set it up, but someone set up alternative ways to give the RJCS Committee feedback, so if people did not feel comfortable coming to a meeting, they could submit information in several different ways. Maybe some people do not want to be part of a public record or be easily identified.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he can have a conversation with Ms. Landry, who was the one who set that up. Mr. Kirschner stated that to Dr. Filiault’s point, he hopes the HRC would be building larger relationships with these groups aside from the asks, because yes, they will make mistakes and harm will happen, so it is about what they do in response to that. Ms. Schwieger replied that it is like a living organism, and maybe it would start to self-identify the missing links and generate its own expansion. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that erring on the side of not communicating because they are worried about offending someone is not the best way to go forward. She continued that they want to be reaching out to someone, and the possibility of missing someone does not seem like a good enough reason to not reach out to anyone. Ms. Fiske stated that as a City employee who is constantly trying to get communications out and keep the email list up to date, she thinks it might be easier if they encouraged people in the groups to subscribe the City’s social media accounts, the email list for City news, and so on and so forth. That might be easier, because the list would be impossible to keep up; it would change constantly. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she hears what she is saying, but she also thinks the HRC needs to intentionally reach out to people to ask them to subscribe and maintain that connection. Ms. Fiske replied that is what she means. Unless there is a special project that touches on a certain thing, they cannot reach out to everyone, every time. There are so many projects across the City. But they can encourage groups to subscribe to the City’s news.

Dr. Morris stated that the MDEIB is trying to create an events list, because there are so many events, and there is not a central place in which to find them all listed. Maybe this could be a similar kind of thing – having one central place to give feedback on everything [various projects]. Ms. Schwieger stated that she knows a woman who started a tiny arts letter about eight years ago, and now it is massive, because it exponentially evolved and people wanted to be listed on it and new categories were created. This kind of thing can happen.

Dr. Filiault stated that this conversation has expanded to the topic of communication to the HRC, but he thinks it is a worthwhile conversation, because it relates to the question of how they can solicit feedback for City projects. He continued that he thinks they do need to have a centralized way to communicate with the HRC. It would also be worthwhile to have either a HRC email address or for each member to have their own City email address, so they can reach out to key constituencies. Many of them are representing a key constituency/diversity, and a way to solicit feedback would be to talk to those members of the constituency or diversity they represent, about how people feel about a certain project. It would help if those people could email HRC members

and talk to them, but it would not be appropriate for HRC members to give out their personal email addresses, and just having an email address up on the City's website saying that people can email the HRC with thoughts about diversity in the City. A Facebook page would be good, too. That would be a better way to solicit feedback, rather than constantly trying to run out and talk with everyone and sending people to come to talk to the HRC in all the ways people feel comfortable talking. Discussion ensued. Ms. Fiske stated that the only contact information the HRC's webpage currently has is Mr. Bohannon's phone number, not even email. Mr. Bohannon replied that the City does not put staff members' emails on the website. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the problem is that it would fall on one individual to review all of the [emails to the HRC]. Ms. Fiske replied that it goes to a central place and then the IT Department creates a listserv, so when you do a form on the Library's website, for example, that form, depending on which box you check, goes to different batches of people. So something could be set up to automatically go to HRC members. Mr. Bohannon replied that department heads determine who the communication goes to. Anything related to parks, cemeteries, and programs goes to him and Kristy Morrison, his administrative assistant, and if they need to send something to someone else they will, but he and Ms. Morrison try to respond as quickly as possible. The City will not give HRC members City email addresses. However, the HRC could talk with Ms. Landry about generating how to promote the HRC.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that if the HRC collects that input, the question becomes what their process is for addressing it. That is much bigger question. Ms. Fiske replied yes, especially when their plate is so full with all of the community programs they are doing. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that there is an open question to discuss with the City Attorney the differences between committee and commission and what the HRC is empowered to do and not do. She absolutely supports the idea of having a way of getting input from the community directly, but before they roll anything out, they need to carefully consider not just how the information comes in, but how it is processed.

***4.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.***

HRC members noted that 4.J. has been accomplished. Ms. Fiske stated that the Library has instituted a requirement that they have a minimum of 30% of new purchases reflect diversities. She continued that it is very expensive, but they are currently seeking an audit of their collection so they can see what exists in the collection and see ideas for titles to purchase in the future. They are seeking funding for that and using financial donations as part of the diversity collection. They have been averaging 35-40%, depending on the topic, which exceeds their required minimum. Ms. Schwieger asked if it is the topic, or authorship, or both. Ms. Fiske replied that it reflects the author, storyline (fiction), and/or topic (nonfiction).

Mr. Aronson stated that last year for the wellness festival, he was going to have a children's story hour with stories about self-esteem and topics like that. He continued that the Library's Youth Department is great and gave him about 30 books, with all kinds of people represented. It was a great experience for him. He asked if there are audiobooks, too. Ms. Fiske replied yes, and the children's collection has been easiest to (increase the diversity of), because it has just been built in. It has been part of school curriculums for a long time, to publishers have been creating the content. Where the Library has been struggling is with adult content. Because the publishers for adult content tend to only publish things they think will sell. The Library sometimes struggles to find certain types of diversity, especially in fiction, before the current climate happened. Oprah's Book Club was an amazing thing for diversity, for adult fiction. Regarding nonfiction, the problem has sometimes been, for example, getting a book that is not just about cooking in Pakistan but written by an actual Pakistani person, or gardening books that do not just have people who look like Martha Stewart.

Mr. Kirschner asked Ms. Fiske what her engagement with the community has been like, in expanding the Library's collection. Ms. Fiske replied that whenever they do any book talks, they include a diverse range of titles, as do the book discussion groups. They have been having a lot of community conversations focusing on race, equity, and diversities. The Library's weekly newsletters highlight the titles. Mr. Kirschner replied that he hears a lot of what the Library is doing for the community, but his question is what the Library is doing *with* the community. What feedback have they sought or are they seeking for this purpose? Ms. Fiske replied that the Library purchases almost anything that a community member asks them to. Mr. Kirschner asked if that practice is well promoted. Ms. Fiske replied that there is a link people can use to make a request. She continued that in addition, if someone asks for an interlibrary loan for a book the Library is unable to get from another library, they will purchase it. Councilor Workman stated that a member of the RJCS Committee made a big donation to the Library last year [to increase diversity in the collection]. Ms. Fiske replied that that person moved out of town and she lost contact with her and never received that donation, but the Library is using all of its donations in this way. There is someone who has been sending the Library titles, particularly on Jewish history, for decades, in honor of his parents. Any monetary donations the Library receives have to automatically go through that diversity 30% minimum.

***4.K. It is recommended that the City review Cheshire TV programming and encourage additions and changes that promote diversity and inclusion.***

HRC members noted that they cannot address 4.K. because Cheshire TV [went off the air]. Ms. Fiske replied that on Thursday at the Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee meeting, the agenda includes discussion a group that is putting in a bid to become the new public access station. She continued that it is an outside organization. Mr. Bohannon stated that they would provide access to the public to come in and do their own recordings. Dr. Morris stated that maybe the HRC could supply some content. Discussion continued.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the next step (with the RJCS Report) is circling back around and starting at the top, and defining the next level of granularity. She continued that they need to pick another day to meet for two hours again. Discussion ensued. The group decided on Monday, May 23, from 7:00 to 8:30 PM.

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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