

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, October 3, 2022

5:00 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Dr. Shaun Filiault, Vice Chair
Councilor Catherine Workman
Dr. Mohammad Saleh
Marti Fiske
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Dr. Dottie Morris (at 5:11 PM)

Staff Present:

Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Director

Members Not Present:

Hunter Kirschner
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate
Heidi Schwieger, Alternate

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 5:08 PM. She read out loud: *“In our efforts to create a more equal and just society, we move forward with the firm intention to value voices, opinions, and experiences of all people. We choose to proceed with the awareness and humility that the statements and decisions we make will have a different impact for those with different life experiences.”*

Roll call was conducted. Ms. Fiske stated that she is participating remotely due to illness, and is alone in the room.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – September 12, 2022

Ms. Fiske stated that she has a clarification regarding lines 44-45. She continued that the minutes say something like she “had been charged with” contacting the person at the MDEIB for educational links, but her update was that she *had* contacted the person.

Dottie Morris arrived at 5:11 PM.

Dr. Saleh stated that he has a correction as well – the correct spelling of his first name is “Mohammad” with an A, not with an E as it has been spelled in the “members present” list.

Mr. Aronson made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of September 12, 2022, as amended. Councilor Workman seconded the motion, which passed with a vote of 5-0. Dr. Morris and Dr. Filiault stated that they abstain.

3) **Finance Report**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she does not think there is anything new; the finance report looks very similar to how it has looked before. Dr. Filiault replied that it is identical and has not been updated since June 30, 2022. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that Mr. Bohannon had mentioned that he has not yet paid people for Juneteenth, but he has been busy and out of the office a lot.

4) **Budget Development**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that this is multi-pronged. She continued that the HRC does not currently have a consistent method for allotting the budget they have, or the consistent expectation for how events will be funded. She and Mr. Bohannon have been volleying back and forth and do not have a unified proposal for how to do this. She suggests they table this until next month, but she welcomes people’s thoughts.

Dr. Filiault suggested forming a three-person subcommittee to develop a proposal to bring forward to the next HRC meeting. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she and Mr. Bohannon are developing a proposal and she suggests that they continue that, but if the proposal they give is not something the HRC wants they can form a subcommittee as Dr. Filiault suggests. Dr. Filiault agreed.

Dr. Morris asked if there will be ways to increase the amount of funding. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that the proposal is about how to spend the money that the HRC has, and what the marching orders for the different groups/events will be. For example, maybe each event will have seed money but then will be responsible for doing the fundraising for anything beyond that amount. Thinking with her lawyer’s hat, she wonders if there are conflicts of interest they need to be careful of, in terms of fundraising.

Dr. Filiault asked her to say more about that. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that for example, an event might be offered a donation from an entity that has a “bad history” with the matter that the event is addressing. She wonders if the HRC needs rules about fundraising. Discussion ensued. Dr. Morris spoke about how non-profit organizations frequently have to decide what to do when offered donations from groups that conflict with the non-profit’s values or mission, and shared an example of a battered women’s shelter that publicly rejected money from such a company and wound up with extra donations from people who appreciated the organization’s

integrity. Ms. Fiske stated that she believes the HRC does not need to create a process or guidelines for accepting donations, because donations to the HRC need to be approved by the City Council. Councilor Workman replied yes, donations are accepted by the Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee. Ms. Fiske replied that all the HRC could do is make a recommendation to Mr. Bohannon, who would be the one to bring it before the FOP Committee. Discussion continued about this process, and about the potential differences between grants and donations. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that this is definitely a topic that will need discussion. Dr. Morris replied that Mr. Bohannon did the research, so he would have more information.

5) Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition (MDEIB)

Councilor Workman reported that the MDEIB now has a webpage, found on the Keene YMCA website. She continued that it has the MDEIB's purpose, roots, goals, and a link so people can donate directly to the MDEIB through the webpage. The MDEIB also has developed a monthly newsletter, which people can sign up for through the webpage. She encourages HRC members to sign up.

Councilor Workman continued that the YMCA found an Undoing Racism workshop for many MDEIB members to attend, in person on October 7, 8, and 9. She hopes to report on the workshop at the next HRC meeting; it might be something the HRC can attend in the future. One MDEIB member who attended the online version of the Undoing Racism workshop, which was offered prior to the in-person one, said it was phenomenal. She (Councilor Workman) is really looking forward to it.

Councilor Workman stated that the other big announcement is that the MDEIB was awarded the Endowment for Health Opportunity grant to fund the MDEIB's branding, marketing, and social media efforts. She continued that they are still in the process of applying for funds so they can fund the Diversity and Equity Officer position they are looking to fill. She herself is currently the interim president of the MDEIB.

6) Acceptance of Committee Event Reports

Ms. Fiske stated that she sent the information [about the Indigenous People's Day event at the library] to Mr. Bohannon, electronically, but he was having trouble sharing it with the group. She continued that she had hoped each HRC member would be able to have the electronic copy of the event flyer so they could share it on their social media pages to help spread the word. Discussion ensued about the file format and how to share it. Mr. Aronson asked Ms. Fiske to send the PDF to him so he can share it with the Monadnock Interfaith Project. Councilor Workman asked if it is on the Keene Public Library's Facebook page. Ms. Fiske replied that they are waiting to post it on social media when the date is a little closer, but it is on the library's calendar of events. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if it is okay for someone to post the image [of the flyer] on social media, if they find a way to do so. Ms. Fiske replied absolutely.

Dr. Filiault stated that he has an update from the Pride group. He continued that October 11 is National Coming Out Day, and while the HRC is not sponsoring that, Keene Pride is. It is a worthwhile event for people to share and/or listen to stories, real or fictional, about the experience of coming out as LGBTQIA. It will be 7 to 9 PM at Nova Arts at Brewbakers.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if anyone had any more updates about events. Hearing none, she continued that it occurs to her that the Juneteenth working group is overdue for a meeting.

- 7) **Community Outreach**
 - A) **Outside Agency Networking**
 - B) **Kristallnacht**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she has been in touch with Tom White regarding Kristallnacht. She continued that at their last meeting, the HRC said they would be happy to engage with him. She proposes the HRC offer him a subcommittee (working group) to communicate with, because she is currently not able to facilitate the organization of the HRC's participation, by herself. She is Mr. White's only point of contact, as the HRC Chair, and there is only one more HRC meeting before the event.

Mr. Aronson asked if Mr. White said what he wanted from the HRC. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that initially what he wanted was the HRC or a subset of it to participate in the event, describing Keene's goals and what Keene has achieved so far. She continued that the HRC discussed this at their last meeting and thought about reaching out to the MDEIB, so she put Mr. White in touch with Councilor Workman.

Discussion ensued. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that it is still fairly nebulous, regarding the details of the event and the HRC's role in it. She continued that figuring out the details of the HRC's participation is difficult without being able to interface between Mr. White and the HRC in a more concrete and regular way. For example, if she is the only one talking with Mr. White, and then she can only talk with the HRC about it once a month (in person), that is not a constructive process.

Dr. Saleh suggested a subcommittee (working group) draft something for one or more HRC members to present at the event. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she received a couple emails from Mr. White, saying that there is still room for the nature of the participation to change, and she does not feel that she is personally empowered to determine what the HRC's participation is. She would like to request two or three HRC members to volunteer to form a working group for this, to engage with Mr. White regarding the nature of the HRC's participation.

Dr. Morris stated that it sounds like it should be a City committee, to talk about what the City is doing. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied yes, the Cohen Center wants a City representative. She

continued that the reason the MDEIB was brought up last time was that the HRC, as a City committee, is not empowered to make changes. The activism portion of it relates more to the MDEIB. Dr. Morris replied that whatever Dr. Saleh drafts can include information about the MDEIB. She continued that she will work with Dr. Saleh.

Mr. Aronson made a motion for the HRC to entrust Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos to go forward in a way that she sees fit, as the HRC Chair.

Mr. Aronson continued that the way that she sees fit might be to work with Dr. Morris and Dr. Saleh. There does not necessarily need to be a working group/subcommittee for what is essentially a ceremonial offering for the Cohen Center. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that her reasoning for doing it this way is because at the last meeting, HRC members had some reservation about the HRC's participation, because the nature of it was fairly nebulous. Some members did not want to commit to the HRC's participation until there was more information. Those members are not present today. If those who are present today are comfortable with she, Dr. Morris, and Dr. Saleh working together to move forward with the HRC's involvement, they can update the HRC at the next meeting. She asked Mr. Aronson to restate his motion.

Mr. Aronson made a motion for the HRC to entrust Dottie Morris, Dr. Mohammad Saleh, and Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos with moving forward as they see fit to represent the HRC at The Cohen Center's Kristallnacht commemoration. Dr. Filiault seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Dr. Morris asked for clarification of the process. Will Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos reach out to Mr. White to say they have a subcommittee (working group)? Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied yes, and she will CC: everyone and they can start having a more concrete conversation. Dr. Morris stated that because the event has been virtual for the past two or three years, she thinks Mr. White is trying to reconceptualize it.

Mr. Aronson stated that he and Ms. Fiske had worked on polishing the document [that Ms. Fiske had drafted regarding community outreach]. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if it is ready for sharing with the HRC. Mr. Aronson replied that he has a copy on his Google drive. Discussion ensued about how and when the HRC can read and discuss it, given the public meeting laws. Ms. Fiske read it out loud:

"The City of Keene Human Rights Committee (HRC) invites Keene residents and organizations to contact us regarding community needs related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The HRC's purpose is to encourage the elimination of barriers to a diverse and inclusive society and to support underrepresented groups who may feel unwelcome in Keene. Your input will help the Committee create educational events that uphold these principles of social justice, nonviolence, equity, diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism. The Committee welcomes volunteers at its events."

Each January, the Committee celebrates and honors Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jonathan Daniels with an annual lecture. Recordings of the last two years' presentations, Building the Beloved Community and Democracy's Role in Promoting and Protecting Civil and Human Rights, can be found at [address]. The Committee also hosts a Juneteenth celebration downtown at Railroad Square and has been a longtime supporter of the Keene International Festival. This year, the Committee reviewed the Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee report and will release an executive summary of further recommendations, actions, and resources later this year.

The next meeting of the HRC is [date], on the second floor of the Recreation Center at 312 Washington St., Keene. Meetings normally occur on the first Mondays of the month. Communications may be sent to abohannon@keeneh.gov."

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked for discussion or a motion to approve.

Dr. Saleh made a motion to approve the statement as read by Ms. Fiske, for publication in the Keene Sentinel before next month, and the Monadnock Shopper. Ms. Fiske seconded the motion.

Dr. Filiault stated that for clarity, this is for next month, so not exactly as read aloud. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that the motion can thus be to accept the statement read by Ms. Fiske, amended with next month's date, for publication in the Keene Sentinel and the Monadnock Shopper.

The motion passed unanimously. Councilor Workman thanked Ms. Fiske and Dr. Saleh.

Dr. Filiault stated that he is working on the executive summary. He continued that he will have it out at the next HRC meeting. Dr. Saleh asked him what it is about. Dr. Filiault replied that he is referring to the executive summary for the Racial Justice and Community Safety Committee Report. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that the HRC had agreed that due to the fact that they are not empowered to do anything, and do not have the power to execute any of what they are suggesting (from the RJCS Report), the best way to move forward is to provide the City Council and the Mayor with an executive summary of the HRC's findings and recommendations. She continued that Dr. Filiault had volunteered to draft it. Dr. Filiault replied that bringing it down to one or two pages is a monumental task. He continued that the HRC made many intellectually dense recommendations.

Dr. Morris stated that she has a question for Councilor Workman, because she is trying to understand. She continued that the HRC will present the executive summary to the City Council, but then what? Does the Council determine whether to act on it, or does it just go to the Mayor? Dr. Filiault replied that most likely, the HRC will give it to the Mayor, who will give it to the appropriate Council committee or staff member. The Council might accept it as informational. Councilor Workman agreed and added that the Council committee it gets referred to can decide

if there is more action to it, or to give it to another committee, or to the MDEIB. If a Council committee makes a recommendation about it that goes back to the full Council.

Discussion ensued about the process. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the Mayor might appoint a special committee to address this. Councilor Workman replied yes, but that is essentially how the ad hoc RJCS Committee came about. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that it might make sense for the Mayor to pull City staff members from the various departments who are affected by this, to come together as a committee tasked with acting on it. Dr. Saleh asked if the intention of the executive summary is to reword it so the information is more actionable, instead of vague and philosophical. Dr. Filiault replied that the intent of the executive summary is to make sure it is actually read. People may be more likely to read a one- or two-page document instead of a 25-page report. It took weeks for the HRC to go through the RJCS Committee's report. Unfortunately, it will probably just be accepted as informational by a Council committee, but at least it will have been read into the public record. Councilor Workman replied and be accessible on the City website.

Dr. Morris stated that the RJCS Committee was charged with this work, and then the report got passed to the HRC, and now they are passing it to the Council, who passes it somewhere else and it may or may not get acted upon. She continued that she is confused and frustrated, because a lot of time and energy has gone into this already. The report is two or three years old now. Much of the information the public offered (to the RJCS Committee) was to act upon. She does not understand all this politicking, when people are hurting in the community. It makes no sense to just keep passing this report/these recommendations around, knowing it may or may not be acted upon. She continued that if her confusion sounds like anger, that is because it is.

Councilor Workman replied that she understands, and she thinks everyone who is working on this issue is feeling that. They talk about the "Where do we go from here?" questions in the MDEIB, too. It is important to note how far they have come in the last couple years. The MDEIB did not exist then. Luca Paris is doing a lot of work with the Monadnock Economic Development group and the Chamber of Commerce and businesses. She hopes they start to come together, so everyone is not just doing their own project and their own mission. Joining forces is what can create some impactful change. Many of the recommendations are not things that any one group can force businesses, agencies, or stakeholders to initiate. The work is to continue to raise awareness and continue to form these partnerships.

Dr. Saleh stated that he agrees with Dr. Morris's sentiment. He continued that maybe they can add commentary like this to the executive summary, such as saying the HRC appreciates the City's effort and that they are charged with the RJCS Committee report, but without having executive powers they are not in a position to take action and they are strongly asking for an active endeavor from the City. Others agreed.

Mr. Aronson stated that since the MDEIB owns the community piece of this in a big way, and the Chamber of Commerce has the commercial piece in a big way, it might make sense to focus

the executive summary specifically on actions the City could take and then make a recommendation that the document land on the City Manager's desk. Others agreed.

Councilor Workman stated that if the HRC decides, say, that they really want the report to go to the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee, they should put that in the executive summary and state the reason why they see it fit for a specific committee or to the City Manager. Ms. Fiske replied that they should definitely CC: the Mayor, though, since the RJCS Committee was his committee originally. Others agreed.

Dr. Morris stated that the Mayor was the one who charged the RJCS Committee and charged the HRC with writing the plan for implementation, and typically, the person who charges a person or group to do certain work is the person who the work returns to, for a decision on what to do with it. There are people who do not realize how far this (racial justice) work has gone, because they are hurting. She spoke about a student who recently expressed the pain they are feeling due to hearing so many racial slurs in this town. When are they ready to take action? Instead of dancing around and having meeting upon meeting upon meeting? That is where she is coming from. She has lived here a long time and has many personal connections, to the point where if she is in a situation, she knows who to take it to, and who can take action. However, someone like a 19-year-old student has a different experience.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos thanked Dr. Morris for her words. She continued that what she is saying is reasonable and justified.

8) **New Business**

9) **Adjournment – Next Meeting Monday, November 7, 2022 at 5:00 PM**

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 6:01 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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