

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, October 2, 2023

5:00 PM

**Room 22,
Recreation Center**

Members Present:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Hunter Kirschner, Vice Chair
Dr. Mohammad Saleh
Marti Fiske
Rabbi Daniel Aronson
Gina Burke
Tedd Benson, Alternate
Dr. Dottie Morris (arrived at 5:19 PM)
Councilor Catherine Workman (arrived at 5:11 PM)

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities
Director
Alyssa Bender, Youth Services Manager

Members Not Present:

Jan Manwaring
Ritu Budakoti, Alternate
Heidi Schwieger, Alternate
Jennifer Nescimento, Alternate

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos read the HRC's statement: *"In our efforts to create a more equal and just society, we move forward with the firm intention to value the 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."*

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of September 11, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Rabbi Aronson made a motion to approve the minutes of September 11, 2023. Dr. Saleh seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) **Finance Report**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if Mr. Bohannon was able to do the updates he had discussed. Mr. Bohannon replied yes, he thinks so. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that it looks like Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is in good financial shape. She continued that she does not see anything of concern in the finance report. She asked if anyone had questions about it or things to discuss.

Ms. Fiske asked Mr. Bohannon about how to put in a request for payment, regarding paying the Indigenous People's Day panelists. Mr. Bohannon replied that she can send him an invoice.

4) **Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition**

Dr. Saleh gave the HRC an update on what has been happening with the Coalition, creating a document of the group's mission and goals. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked him to bring a copy to the next HRC meeting, if he can, or share it with Mr. Bohannon for him to distribute.

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

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that there is no status change. She continued that Mr. Bohannon has this action item, and he can update them next month.

6) **Acceptance of Committee Event Reports**

A) **Indigenous People's Day**

Ms. Fiske gave an update about the upcoming Indigenous People's Day event, a film screening at the Library. She stated that she sent the flyer to the HRC. She spoke about the filmmakers/people involved with the film who will be panelists at the event, paid with the HRC's funds. She asked the HRC members to share the event information on social media.

Councilor Workman arrived at 5:11 PM.

Dr. Saleh thanked Ms. Fiske for organizing this. He asked if Mr. Bohannon knows if there will be a declaration at City Hall. Mr. Bohannon replied that he does not know, but can find out. Dr. Saleh asked if there is anything else happening in town for the holiday, other than what the HRC is doing. Ms. Fiske shared information about another Indigenous film another group is screening locally. Ms. Burke asked the HRC members if they think there should be more happening for Indigenous People's Day, and whether it is the HRC's responsibility to help make that happen. Discussion ensued.

B) Pride Event

Mr. Kirschner gave an update about the Pride event that is two weeks away, a film screening at Keene State College. He listed the confirmed partners who are helping promote the event, spoke about the promotion he is doing, and asked the HRC members to help share the information on social media. He gave information about the coordinated programs that will be occurring with local schools.

C) Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Rabbi Aronson reported that the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day working group met recently. He gave an update about the event planning, stated that Father Gregg Boyle from Los Angeles is available and agreed to come speak at the event. The working group is discussing how to fit him into a broader program. They have some ambitious ideas. Discussion ensued about potential venues. Ms. Fiske recommended the Library. Rabbi Aronson replied that KSC is another option. In response to HRC members' questions, Rabbi Aronson spoke more about Father Boyle's organization and his work to prevent gang violence/help gang members develop positive skills and community connections.

Dr. Morris arrived at 5:19 PM.

D) Black History Month

Dr. Morris updated the group on the planning for a Black History Month event, on a to-be-determined date in February. It will be a performance by musical artist Crys Matthews, whose music has a social justice/civil rights flavor. She continued that she is working on something else for Black History Month with someone at KSC and will have more information about that another time.

E) Juneteenth

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos reported that the Juneteenth working group has their first meeting this month, to start planning next year's event.

F) Keene International Festival (KIF)

Mr. Kirschner gave an update on the KIF, which he served as an emcee for. He spoke about how the event went very well. Mr. Bohannon added that they received a lot of positive feedback about the event being held indoors this time, which was surprising to the working group and they are discussing the setup. They have some good ideas lined up for next year. Discussion ensued.

Rabbi Aronson asked about the expenditures, and Mr. Bohannon replied that the finance report has not been updated yet. Discussion continued.

7) **New Business**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos invited public input. Keene resident Nancy spoke to the HRC about her ideas on becoming a community reporter about various meetings happening around the City.

Jay Kahn stated that he is a candidate for Mayor. He stated that he is interested in the HRC and wants to see the issues they are grappling with. He spoke about his interest in increasing the community's readiness for accommodating immigrants and refugees.

Mr. Kirschner asked if the HRC is aware of the new Flash Vote platform that the City has rolled out, an entry point for increased civic engagement, which is great. He continued that however, the platform requires new users to list a gender, categorized as "sex," and the only two options are "male" and "female." It seems like a needless barrier. Rabbi Aronson stated that he is not familiar with Flash Vote. Mr. Bohannon explained that it is an online platform the City is using for various projects; it is a survey tool that asks up to five questions at a time and can be related to any project the City wants public input on. He gave more information about how it works and gave examples of projects it is being used for and how helpful it is. Discussion ensued about Flash Vote, including questions of whether the City could adjust the demographic questions to eliminate the gender question, and ideas about how the platform could be used to help the HRC with a community survey. Mr. Bohannon stated that he will email Rebecca Landry to inquire.

8) **Adjourn – Next Meeting November 6, 2023 at 5:00 PM**

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:49 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Andy Bohannon, PRF Director