

Needham Human Rights Committee Meeting Minutes

May 19, 2016, 7:30 PM
(Recorder: Ashok Mehta)

Marlene Schultz, chaired the meeting in the conference room of the Broadmeadow School, Needham, MA.

Committee members in attendance: Amelia Klein, Marlene Schultz, Abdul Cader Asmal, Cynthia Ganung, Barry Ehrlich, Bud Schram, Jeremy Sutherland and Ashok Mehta

Guests: Helen Giagosian and Joseph Tierney

- **Minutes** of the April 28, 2016 NHRC meeting were unanimously approved.
- **Public Participation:** Two guests, Helen Giagosian and Joseph Tierney introduced themselves to the NHRC committee members. Helen Giagosian came to know about the NHRC from the announcement in the Needham Housing Authority newsletter. She wanted to learn more about activities of the NHRC and showed interest in joining the committee. Joseph Tierney was protesting about the use of term Islamophobia by the NHRC in the past events. Barry Ehrlich & Jeremy Sutherland successfully explained to him that the use of term Islamophobia did not reflect any bias or hatred of any kind.
- **Old Business:**
 1. Committee Membership: Matt Schroeder (Needham High School student) applied for the NHRC membership
 2. Webpage: No update
 3. IJTF June 1 program (The Global Refugee Crisis: Voices from Massachusetts): Cynthia and Amelia provided the update on the event, which is co-sponsored by the HRC and the Immigration Justice Task Force. Barry and Cynthia volunteered to provide snacks and coffee for the event. Amelia and Cynthia discussed ways the HRC could participate in the Needham Refugee Resettlement Partnership programs. Options included: organizing public forums (such as the June 1 event), advocacy work, supplying resources such as furnishings for an apartment, volunteering on-site in Lowell, networking and /or providing employment opportunities. A motion was made: *The Human Rights Committee will collaborate with the Needham Refugee Resettlement consortium.* The motion passed – all were in favor. The Committee members agreed to spread the word about refugee resettlement efforts in MA and support clothes and food collection drives for refugees. Furthermore, the NHRC agreed to explore future support/partnership with organizations (like International Institute of New England) working for resettling refugees in MA.

- **Election of Officers:**

1. Marlene/Amelia explained the role of chairperson for the NHRC and asked for nominations for electing a chairperson. Marlene read out a letter she had received from Jennifer Howard (committee member) in which Jennifer had expressed a strong commitment to human rights issues and her desire to lead the NHRC. Abdul welcomed Jennifer as a potential new chair, and recommended that either Marlene or Amelia stay on as a Vice-Chair to maintain stability and continuity in the NHRC leadership. After some discussion, Bud made the following motion: *Jennifer will serve as the new chair, Marlene will serve as vice-chair*. The motion was passed, with all in favor. Members also agreed to rotate the role of clerk (recorder for meetings) among committee members.
2. Protocol for Public Comment: Marlene circulated a draft document on the protocol for public participation at the NHRC meetings. There was a lively discussion on the draft led by Barry, Jeremy and Bud. It was decided that the draft will be updated based on the recommendations and presented again for discussion at next meeting.

- **Reports:**

1. Follow-up on Forum on Islam: Amira is continuing to work on it
2. Diversity Initiative: Nothing new to report
3. Needham Schools: Jeremy mentioned that racial slurs were heard/noticed in Needham schools and the school administration was aware about the issue.
4. Town Issues: None

- Meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM