

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
Minutes March 17, 2022

The meeting was called to order by Chair Tina Burgos at 7:35pm

In attendance: Marlene Schultz, Cynthia Ganung, , Amelia Klein, Tina Burgos, Jen Howard Schroeder, Finn McKeon, Emme Ward, Kerry Hurwitch, Bud Schram.

Absent: Rinaz Mala, Katie King, Belinda Carroll.

Minutes from 2/17/22 were approved with one abstention.

Public participation - none

Anti-Russian Sentiment Cynthia and Amelia shared concern about anti-Russian sentiment generated by news and social media sources. Many people who live in Needham have Russian ancestry or ties. Cynthia stated that it is something the NHRC should be aware of and be prepared to respond to. Anti-Russian bias has been appearing in our community and region, such as businesses being targeted in Newton.

- Bias – implicit or intentional – is defined as unconscious favoritism toward or prejudice against people of a particular ethnicity, gender, or social group that influences one's actions or perceptions.
- It is promoted by media sources, such as taking action toward anyone who is Russian or affiliated with Russians, such as boycotting businesses that sell Russian products or targeting Russian people in local communities.
- In a recent Charles River Regional Chamber - CRRC newsletter, Gov. Baker expressed concern: “about shutting down some Russian immigrant family that's been here in Massachusetts for years and runs a business that may have some sort of Russian overtone.
- Another example of the impact of negative bias is how it influences children. At a previous meeting, Rinaz gave a striking example of how her children were approached by classmates who asked them “Are you a terrorist?” because of their Syrian background.
- A motion was made and approved to prepare and submit a statement to a wide range of media sources and networks in the community, including businesses. Amelia agreed to prepare a draft of a statement, to be reviewed by Tina and Kerry.

Community Conversations on Policing *A Connections: Cops & Community discussion series* was organized by Town leaders to engage community members in conversations around race, diversity, equity, and inclusion. The first presentation focused on “History of Policing: Then and Now.” Jen and Tina worked on the series. Members who attended the March 1, 2022 shared feedback:

- Very impressive, excellent orientation for the follow-up sessions, provided an in-depth, historical perspective of policing through a slide presentation, emphasized how community is shaped by history (Amelia)
- Recording the session allowed more members of the community to access information in the first presentation, helped the audience begin to understand the concept of *what is policing* (Cynthia)
- Organizers are seeking a presenter for the next session, preferably someone from the academic world to speak about the history of how police became involved in schools (Jen); Marlene suggested Northeastern criminology school as a possible source, and Jack Levin, a well-known criminologist

The next program of the series will be on April 5, 2022 7:00-8:30 pm in Powers Hall. Katie is developing a hybrid model and it will be live-streamed for those who do not want to – or cannot - attend in-person discussions. The second session will be interactive and participants will assemble in breakout rooms. One breakout room will be for Zoom attendants.

Discrimination Complaint Process Tina and Marlene provided feedback on progress in developing a process for the DCP which could be presented to the Select Board. Since they last met with the Select Board, Marlene put together a narrative in order to specifically clarify our responsibilities in the process. Misinformation existed that our role would be to make judgements and initiate actions regarding complaints – a “judge and jury” procedure. That is not the goal of the Committee. Julie developed a document (NHRC Complaint Process Buckets) showing areas where the Committee would enlist the advice of third party sources when a situation is not in the realm of our expertise. A concern of Matt Borelli was that cases involving local businesses would result in a business being accused of discriminatory practices. DCP principles could serve as a guide in determining 1) priorities in protecting the rights of complainants and 2) steps to be taken in resolving discrimination in the Town of Needham. Tina emphasized that we do not seek to resolve complaints in a manner that is detrimental to an individual business. The goal would be to seek a constructive, fair and just solution to a case.

Previous cases were discussed as examples of ways the Committee played a major role in creating a neutral, non-threatening, safe “space” for a complainant to express a serious concern. Members expressed concern that this would not happen if a case was immediately handed off to another entity. Marlene suggested that the segment in the Complaint Process Buckets document titled: *Begin investigation with other resources* segment be reviewed further. Tina stated that as we make revisions, the SB would like to see all scenarios in order to comply with the Open Meeting Law. The Committee must decide if it wants to move forward with some restraints in order to respond to - and serve – People of Color and others whose rights have been violated. Flexibility will be a factor in how well our goals will be achieved, i.e., to serve as a support system. Marlene stated: We are there to help facilitate a resolution. A sense of trust from the SB as we move forward would be helpful. Tina will connect with Katie and Maryann Cooley to get feedback. Cynthia suggested that we share previous cases as examples.

Needham Resilience Network Cynthia reported on the “Kick-off” meeting with representatives of different groups in town. Nicole Argo and Beth Pinals worked very hard to seek and invite members of the community to join the meeting. Three goals were highlighted: 1) To develop an infrastructure based on relationships and interests across town; 2) To gain skills (being able to listen and agree across differences, and finding shared values to develop resilience, and 3) To be able to take action in situations where there is conflict. Especially around identity-based discrimination or hate. Tina indicated there was a lot of representation, such as Housing Authority, directors of each political party, school district, Council on Aging.

The recent student walkout would have been a good opportunity to test the model’s goals. A conflict ensued when students organized a walk-out (which was nation-wide) to protest the actions in Texas and Florida affecting Queer and Transgender populations and their families. The walk-out was not supported by school officials and the Superintendent discouraged public attendance. Lack of communication between groups was a key factor in the incident. Bud emphasized the importance of a school representative participating in NHRC meetings, as Dr. Gutekanst had done in the past.

BIDN At our December, 2021 meeting a representative from **Beth Israel Deaconess Needham** informed us that the hospital was conducting a Community Health Needs Assessment to identify and prioritize health-related and social needs of those served by the hospital. All non-profit hospitals are required to conduct an assessment every 3 years, and develop an implementation strategy that will address the needs of the communities they serve. Connecting to health, business and other groups in Needham provides us with opportunities to support one another and meet our charge. Tina and Amelia participated in a virtual Community Listening Session.

An overview of the most pressing health-related issues was presented at the session. Emphasis was on diverse populations and those experiencing inequities. Priorities focused on:

- Mental Health
- Community Connections and Information Sharing
- Social Detriments of Health
- Access to Care

Attendees reviewed gaps and barriers as well as resources and existing assets related to the above areas. One critical area highlighted in the breakout session that Amelia attended was *community connections and information sharing*. Several attendees shared their challenging experiences finding assistance and/or support as newcomers (and as an immigrant) to Needham. Amelia sent a list of key advocacy groups and organizations to the BIDN staff. Slides were shared with a wealth of information that would be of interest to the NHRC. Tina’s session focused on social factors that impacted access to health care, i.e. education, geography, social-economic status, race. The final report will not be posted until September. BIDN will be

sharing initial results at their Community Benefits annual meeting on June 15. A flyer with more information will be shared and Amelia will forward it to the Committee.

Needham Student Request Amelia shared an inquiry sent to the NHRC from a high school student looking for volunteer opportunities. She stated that human rights are something she is passionate about. The student is a Needham resident and attends Dexter-Southfield School. The Committee shared suggestions for how the student could engage in activities, such as attending a NHRC meeting, working with NDI or AMNT on collaborative projects, or book discussions. Tina suggested that she participate in a planning meeting together with Emme and Finn who are working on a project to develop a list of activities in honor of two important events that take place in June each year: JUNETEENTH and PRIDE Month. Amelia will share this information with the student.

Needham Housing Plan Working Group Cynthia reported that a meeting will take place on March 24. The meeting will present next steps based on housing assessment as related to affordable housing. A recording of the meeting will be available. This will provide a way for the NHRC to be actively involved in the community. Tina reported about policies that must be in place to acquire funding. Cynthia indicated the planning group is very diverse (representatives from the Select Board, Planning Board, Schools).

Recorder: Amelia Klein

This meeting was recorded and can be viewed at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgDkIXK9sJc&list=PL3PRZZjHC3yFBvCO0HJK_ZtxaPowZ6z5W&index=1