

2023.01.19 – Needham Human Rights Committee Meeting Minutes

7:30 PM – via Zoom.

Attendees: Katie King, Cynthia Ganung, Jennifer Howard Schroeder, Tina Burgos, Rinaz Mohamed, Marlene Schultz, Kerry Hurwitch, Finn McKeon, Nate Hyman, Budd Schram

Tina: Any amendments to minutes? Heard from some folks. Motion to approve minutes?

Kerry: motion to approve.

Jen:

[Then everyone approves]. Minutes approved, with changes.

Tina takes attendance. Cynthia present. Jen present. Nate present. Rinaz present. Marlene present. Bud present. Kerry present. Tina present. Finn present. Katie present.

Tina: we will meet with those running for public office.

Cynthia: Three people running for two openings. Maryann running for re-election, Cathy running, and Josh Levy.

Tina: we will invite all of the folks who are running.

Katie: deadline to file papers is in February.

Tina: Cathy asked if she could attend one of our sessions. She teaches at the High School.

Kerry: A little different then – she isn't being invited.

Marlene: still makes sense to invite everyone.

Bud: is she coming to observe? Or Speak? If just to observe, no problem with not inviting, but if she is coming to speak, then we have to invite everyone so as not to show favoritism.

Tina: if she wants to speak, are you OK with inviting everyone? And they can say no if they don't want to attend?

Cynthia: I think because if they're appearing in other formats, if we could have them focus on NHRC, that would be good. Not a ton of time. Would be interesting to hear from all three of them.

Tina: Would be great if new member had a good idea of what we're doing. Some of our bigger initiatives are tied into select board goals. Discrimination complaint process, for instance – would be great if we could get some informal feedback from select board.

Kerry: good that there's interest in us!

Tina: Rinaz – you ready to talk about the multicultural fair? Nice to see advertisement on MLK Jr. event.

Rinaz: Festival, not fair. We're getting 100 yard signs next week. Will be all over Needham. We (NDI) received donations from the rotary club and immigration task force. All set financially. 20 participating countries. Mainly minorities in the town. Meeting this coming Monday on the 23rd, and another one in February. So we're kind of at our last stages. We know there are going to be a few performances. Just now organizing last touches.

Tina: Deadline for folks to submit interest?

Rinaz: Going to discuss this in next meeting. Committee divided into four groups: marketing, organizing, organizing day of, and a fourth category. Deadline is going to be mid-February. We are only taking up to 24 countries. But all the countries we were hoping would join have joined, which is great.

Tina: Logistically – do you need help with set up/clean up?

Rinaz: Yeah, and everyone is welcome to attend our next meeting. We have volunteers to help us. We already laid out the tables and measured. Miles and Katie helped. Needham channel will record. Got approval for the food. Coming together.

Tina: Anyone have any questions?

Tina: Cynthia – recap on Monday?

Cynthia: Was there an agenda for tonight? Really appreciated the presence of NHRC folks for that day. Amelia did a lot of great work. Three folks brought food. Getting insight from others – good to hear how things went on Zoom. Would like to hear what folks liked and what we could change. Very complex.

Marlene: I thought overall it was good. The woman from Wellesley was too long and boring. One paragraph would have been fine. The roses was unbelievably moving. That was wonderful. I don't know if Committee has thought about this – it's sometimes a day of service in other communities. We could think about incorporating that in the future.

Tina: I liked the Elliot School chorus. My kids I think for them Rama was a little too scholarly. We lost them. But I thought it was great. Variety of folks.

Cynthia: Michael O'Neil's presentation and what he did with the audience?

Tina: a little disjointed. I thought he was going to make a point and then he veered off. Not sure what he was hoping to say.

Marlene: I was disappointed. He wrote a speech, and that's what we should have heard.

Rinaz: I agree. I thought I wasn't following. Wellesley woman went on too long.

Cynthia: we gave her a time limit – not sure she realized less might be better.

Tina: Some feedback – I lost my kids. Maybe make clear to presenters that it's a family event. Audience is varied in age group.

Cynthia: Particularly interested in Michael O'Neil's presentation – was interested because as someone who identifies as queer or non-binary, the questions directed at the women were somewhat concerning. He's a very caring person, wants to reach people. We will talk to him. One feedback we had from a woman who came with her family: could we develop more connections between the people in the audience. We could do that – even just have people talk to people next to them. Hope we can keep having program in person.

Tina: Thank you, Cynthia. Marlene – you wanted to mention ADL presentation.

Marlene: I went to the MA HRC meeting – I was interested in the speaker. I don't think anyone else from Needham was there. There was a speaker from ADL from the center of extremism. He presented on what is going on around Massachusetts. Three different white supremacy groups. Different things they were doing. He was in Chicago, but presented on Massachusetts statistics. Racism and Antisemitism on the up-swing. He was really good. I wonder if we would want to invite him to present to us. He talked about the Patriot front, the Nationalist social club, and the GDL. This center tracks extremist trends. Across the ideological spectrum. Strategically monitor, expose, and disrupt extremist threats.

Rinaz: I agree – when I attended ADL conference in Boston – they were offering.

Marlene: Name is Farley.

Bud: Was he joining via Zoom?

Marlene: Yeah he was in Chicago.

Cynthia: Wonder if we could do this as an educational session. Instead of fitting it into a meeting, I wonder if we could open it up to other people.

Marlene: that seems like a great idea. Depending on our timing – Thursdays are scheduled – he was not the whole agenda. He presented for an hour, and then half an hour of business.

Tina: We could choose a Thursday and dedicate it to this. We could market and advertise. We could invite as many people as we want. We already have dates on the calendar. Could transform this into a presentation by Mr. Farley.

Cynthia: Another way of doing that: start it at 7PM, and go through 8PM, so we don't short ourselves too much.

Marlene: that's a great idea.

[Bud may be frozen].

Marlene: we have March 16 and April 27. Rinaz – ok with you if we go after this guy?

Rinaz: important to talk. Two graffiti events happened in Needham High and we need to talk more about it. We can invite ADL the next month.

Finn: We've gotten a few emails in the past week – there was some racist graffiti on a pole down near memorial lot. Affiliated with the high school. Antisemitic stuff in the bathroom stalls. BB guns were brought to the school. Haven't gotten other emails.

[Emerson Ward joins]

Finn: we're talking about the stuff that's happened over the last few weeks.

Emerson: First time we've gotten emails but doubt it's the first time that it's happened. Frustrating to see this happen.

Tina: just informative emails?

Finn: yeah – travels through the student body pretty quickly. Wants to explain to the student body. Shows that Needham High is taking steps to remedy issue. We can go and ask – we had a lot more of these emails last year that spanned over a period of time – not sure what happened. Would be beneficial.

Emmie: School will send that out. Will say they're investigating. And we don't really know what is going on. Don't know who is actually doing this stuff.

Cynthia: How we used to have superintendent come to the meetings. Wonder if we could have this on the agenda next month – see if the school system could address us next month. What is the school doing, what can we do to support them. This may be a specific area. First want to see what Emmie and Finn think.

[Bud re-joins].

Emmie: Needham public schools is good at talking to students. At the same time, though, I could see myself going to have a conversation with the superintendent, but I don't know if I have a good solution. Sometimes its maturity level. Still good to have a conversation.

Jen: As you guys are talking – if we're going to have someone from ADL come to broader program – could be a concrete thing to bring to district. Could co-sponsor. ADL might be able

to draw the connection between racist/antisemitic graffiti and some of this hate that he is seeing. I'm sure the school is trying to show that they're taking steps. Not pushing this under the rug – being upfront. My guess is sometimes they couldn't figure out who did it, and sometimes there are privacy laws that would prevent them from publishing who the folks are who are doing this stuff. In terms of going to them and saying: what are we doing – a co-program might be a good idea. Not really sure if it's a student/member of school community. In some sense – beside the point. This happened. It hurt folks. Likely many who want to be educated.

Marlene: Need to keep educating school community.

Kerry: There's a principal coffee tonight – wonder if this came up.

Katie: I know school district has a policy/protocol regarding steps it takes when something happens. Superintendent (or someone else) might be able to talk through that document with us. Trying to articulate balance between privacy obligations. Katie agrees to send it around.

Cynthia: I remember they came up with it. Did a meeting with clergy association. Many of the houses of worship were concerned about this – and they shared it with them.

Tina: sounds like two things going on. (1) ADL presentation and (2) some sort of conversation with the school and figuring out how these incidents are handled. Maybe educating the community.

Rinaz: was wondering if ADL is doing workshops in school. What do they really do. We could invite them and plan something in Needham High. Could even be a yearly thing.

Bud: ADL and Facing History both do educational programs for schools.

Marlene: I assume that Needham is in touch with ADL. I would like to hear from the schools first. Before we bring in ADL. Would like to give public schools what they're doing.

Tina: Marlene is going to line up the person.

Cynthia: I would suggest we wait to get in touch with ADL. There was some tension/conflict previously. The town and the HRC ended relationship with ADL. Don't want to take a lot of time here – but that's why there may be mixed feelings. Not something we can quickly or easily do.

Marlene: Not to put Jen on the spot – Jen has a spot with superintendent. Has been on real coalition. Jen - would you feel comfortable asking someone to come to our meetings to talk about the policies?

Jen: Yeah – happy to. After mask thing at diversity summit – not sure what he's thinking about me. Maybe Tina and I could both reach out. Would you rather hear from him or Mr. Seacott?

Marlene: I'm sure there's stuff going on at the middle school too.

Cynthia: Maybe we can ask him who he thinks he should send?

Tina: He would be happy to do it.

Cynthia: can also ask about educational programs for the school and the community.

Jen: was just thinking – if we were having candidates come before April meeting – we have a couple of meetings between now and then – maybe makes sense to have candidates come in March? And do an ADL thing in April or February?

Tina: Just have to figure out which is better for them – Feb. or March?

Jen: policies and protocols are up on the district website – there is an equity page. There's a plan.

Marlene: But I like hearing about implementation, not just policy.

Tina: Book discussion – anna approached me on Monday to ask me about this. Said: I think they're scheduled out through March?

Jen: Next one is in March.

Tina: Thought there wouldn't be much participation past June.

Jen: Book that is going to be discussed in March is "under the skin." Anna is looking for us to pick something for May. Her instructions: They need 3 month lead time to make sure that they have enough time to get books, put out flyers. Five months.

Jen: Marlene suggested "Horse" – I have it on my kindle but haven't read yet. Any other suggestions?

[None].

Jen: was reading review of book – Doctor in Boston who started the Boston Healthcare for the Homeless.

Marlene: Dr. Collins.

Kerry – he was just on NPR.

Jen: Not sure – he's local – may be able to get him come out and speak. "Rough sleepers" is name of book.

Marlene: He's been doing this for 30 years.

Bud: Next fall – Joseph Rosenblum – worked for Frontline and the Globe – wrote about “Redemption” about MLK Jr. We had a Zoom meeting with the temple – did a good presentation. Another one – cotton and the economy.

Jen: Committee should decide.

Cynthia: Rough sleepers would be good – not sure we’ve done health needs of homeless people.

Jen: That’s what I thought was interesting too – Rough sleepers would be sort of different. Dispelling assumptions about unhoused folks.

Marlene: Could get someone from Rosie’s place to help you.

Bud: Or Pine Street Inn.

Tina: Let’s go with rough sleepers.

Jen: Does the library need to approve the book?

Tina: Bud – tell us what’s happening with Greater Boston Interfaith Organization and Affordable Housing Initiative.

Bud: They decided this year to have a multi-pronged state-wide housing justice campaign. Housing justice: ability of all people to have safe, sanitary place to live. Really want to let our group know this is in process. Maybe do teach-ins in local houses of worship (maybe in Needham). No action items, but just wanted to bring it to the group to let folks know.

Marlene: Temple Beth Shalom also a member of interfaith.

Bud: Everyone’s looking for allies here. Trying to coordinate with Temple Beth Shalom.

Tina: If they have a teach in here, let us know. Cynthia wanted to go through select board goals. Amelia did send me – her quick notes – first five bullets capture what NHRC has been doing all along. Areas for continued focus are #3, #5, #7, #8, #9, #10, in collaboration with other groups. Cynthia – anything in particular?

Cynthia: Ask Katie – if we have questions, can we approach individual select board members. We could bring things up here in general. So for instance – Kevin Keene brought the thought about renaming Hemlock Gorge.

Katie: Anything that says FY24 means that we aren’t working on it until 2024. So Select Board usually sets goals for two years. So you should reach out to select board members.

Cynthia: 4.5 – explore benefits of creating dedicated DEI person. Not sure what this means: “staff exploring contract service options.”

Katie: We would staff FTE through annual budget practice. Or we could do contract services. We do trainers that train on diversity issues. We have an employee resource group. We have a contracted person who facilitates those meetings and plans that agenda.

Cynthia: So may be a discussion re: staff person filling the contract role.

Katie: Yep – so for future cycles – FY25 at earliest.

Cynthia: Amelia and I were looking into Indigenous people's day. 4.10 – options for recognizing Indigenous People's Day and Columbus Day/Italian Heritage Day.

Katie: No action on this one to date. Select board goals – can't advance them all at the same time.

Tina: I have a question – 4.6 & 4.7 mention NUARI. Is NUARI going to re-convene to develop that?

Katie: Both goals were recommendations in NUARI's report. That's what NUARI asked the Select board to take those steps. NUARI will be reconvened once or twice a year to check in on status of what's going on. Most of these goals – point people are Kate or myself. But this is a nine page document – just speaking to DEI issues. HR director is running point on the staffing issues.

Jen: To build off of what Katie is saying – is there a role for NHRC? Maybe for 4.6 and 4.7 – members of NHRC could be part of focus groups or something like that.

Katie: I can circle back on plugging the NHRC in formally. Some of this is at the staff level – but when we have a more concrete plan that makes sense.

Tina: Any idea where things stand for Juneteenth committee?

Katie: Marcus gave an update – he is interviewing candidates. Constituted a planning group and working through applications.

Bud: For everyone's information – 259 holds on “the rough sleepers”

Jen: Lot of NPR listeners in Needham. Another thing that struck me – NPD – not that there's anything active that we're doing – looks like Chief is doing a report back in February on recommendations that came out of 2020. Maybe it would be good for some of us to attend to see what the Chief has to say in relation to where we were a couple of years ago?

Tina: Has that date been set?

Jen: Feb. 21?

Katie: yes, that is correct.

Marlene: Are those meetings hybrid?

Katie: yes.

Tina: questions/comments?

Cynthia: big appreciation for Katie and Kate for embracing these things that NHRC is focused on.

Katie: those goals get re-visited every six months. Trying to really prompt town boards and committees – what do you want the select board to give attention to? So many NHRC goals.

Tina: we have 12 minutes. The reason why we put this on the agenda – Marlene and I are meeting next Tuesday with the Select Board to give overview of the process. With the assumption that we are going to make some minor tweaks. We have a lot of details we have to work out. Operational stuff. We have the intake form – want to start thinking about the process timeline. Those were two things that we discussed last month. Amelia had two thoughts: (1) with regards to – there's an area where you choose which rights you think were violated? Where is: medical, real estate practice/housing? Police?

Marlene: One option is to just include narrative – don't make people choose.

Tina: this came from best practices for other towns. Any thoughts about general question box?

Cynthia: can be open ended – just include as examples. Wouldn't have to put them in a box.

Marlene: I think that's a good idea.

Jen: Why do we need to pick something?

Marlene: the reason we want this information – we want to give them an idea of what rights we might be able to handle.

Tina: data collection & reporting – regardless of whether or not we go forward with a case – we need to document what happened, what it is. These types of incidents were reported – we're seeing an uptick in antisemitism, etc. Data collection. One thing that came up – Nichole & Beth – just wanted to touch base to see how NRN could support. One of their points – they don't like the name "Discrimination Complaint Process." They are thinking its more – they want more support.

Marlene: what is their suggestion?

Tina: we need more time for it. Hotline – too much of a sense of panic. Danger. Support – we don't want to think we're automatically an ally.

Marlene: Every other human rights group – calls it the Discrimination Complaint Process.

Kerry: I agree with Marlene. Good point to say other places are saying it that way.

Cynthia: Good place to start.

Tina: so are we good with that?

Marlene: this is what the Arlington guy talked about.

Jen: Not related to this particular point.

Tina: OK that is what we are going to call it. Jen?

Jen: One thing we should add: one-two sentence vision of what this process is going to be. Intentions regarding what we're doing. Something that contextualizes this. Something in here early on that says that this is not confidential.

Katie: Going to make that suggestion as well. This document is going to be a public record. Form is a public record. So name would be public. Initial conversation could be a phone call.

Bud: we discussed this at the last meeting – want to make sure people have options before they create a public record.

Cynthia: good to give them a resource to talk about it first.

Marlene: they do the phone intake. Belmont does that. That's easier for people.

Tina: so the process might want to be kicked off with a telephone call.

Bud: Do they sign?

Tina: there's a space to sign. Maybe we start with a conversation.

Marlene: but think about people who come for public participation and articulate a complaint. Maybe they fill out a form first – or maybe they come and present and then they fill out the form.

Bud: folks may not have realized it was public in the past.

Kerry: meeting is a public meeting.

Jen: different, though – feels different in person vs. on Zoom.

Marlene: usually someone would contact the Chair, and then they would come.

Tina; so maybe we give people the option. Anna knew – she wanted to appear in a public forum.

Marlene: Helps to have people think it through to put it down on paper.

Tina: so process: we can have an initial phone conversation, keep things confidential. Top line: if you want a call, send us your phone number. Fill out form but know it's a public record.

Kerry: can also make it a google form. Can use it to gather information. Different than a google doc.

Tina: ok with adding something to the top?

Marlene: agree we should work on that. This is form is a public record.

Cynthia: and phone call?

Tina: Meeting on Tuesday.

Katie: Hybrid – in-person is select board chambers, and Zoom is going to go up tomorrow.

Marlene: would be great if people could come in person.

Bud: Moves to adjourn.

[All vote in favor].