

NHRC February 16, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Present: Cynthia Ganung, Lt. Belinda Carroll, Bud Schram, Amelia Klein, Tina Burgos (Chair), Finn McKeon, Emme Ward, Kerry Hurwitch, Rinaz Mala Mohamed, and Katie King.

Excused: Marlene Schultz, Lisa Mesicek, Nate Hyman

January 19, 2023 meeting minutes:

Unanimously approved.

No public participation sought tonight.

Antisemitism at Needham Public High School

Antisemitism happened in Dover, **not** Needham High as listed on the agenda. Bud said he believed there was also an incident recently at Wellesley High.

Guest to come to April 27 NHRC meeting:

The incidents in Dover and Wellesley tie into our conversation in earlier meetings about the rise in antisemitism in the US. Marlene has arranged for Calum Farley, an Investigative Researcher with the ADL Center on Extremism to come to the April 27, 2023 meeting. Mr. Farley focuses his work on monitoring neo-Nazi extremism with a particular focus on the accelerationist movement. NDI will be invited to attend the meeting which is expected to be part presentation and part Q&A. The title of his program is "The Landscape of Extremism in New England."

The plan is to start the April 27 meeting would start at 7pm so we can handle NHRC business before the presentation.

Cynthia will be inviting 5 or 6 members of the Interfaith Clergy Association because they have also been talking about internally.

Tina is following up with Marlene on the planning.

Multicultural Festival March 19:

Rinaz reported 20 countries will be represented. May have opportunity to raise money for Turkey and Syria due to earthquake.

Pollard chorus will be singing at the event. One of the singers from MLK Celebration and Race Amity Day will also be performing. All of the trifold, flyers, and yard signs are being distributed. Bud has contacted CBS and ABC locally to share press release. Needham channel will be there for sure. Rinaz wants all members there and will let us know if there is more to do.

Discrimination Complaint Process:

Marlene and Tina went before the Select Board in January to present the plan. They did not vote on it yet because they said they needed more time to process the info. From information gathered after the meeting, it is clear that the process will not be accepted as is due to concerns about confidentiality. Tina and Marlene have been doing more research about the possibilities of using "executive session". Tina met with Town Counsel today. One issue to think about is that "excutive session" could only be used for complaints against an individual, not an organization.

Other consdierations, the subject of the complaint (who it is being filed against) would have to be given 48 hour notice of the executive session meeting and given the opportunity to attend the meeting and be heard. What does this mean we would do for the person who brought the complaint? Would we offer them the same opportunity? What would be the advantages or disadvantages of both parties being there?

The person accused of discrimination could come, decline or say they don't want it to be in executive session, would rather have it in a public meeting.

Questions to consider: How would we list it on the agenda? How would that impact confidentiality?

Would the notes from the meeting be made public?

Katie says there are 10 reasons that allow for executive session so this would have to meet one of those reasons. For our purposes this would fit best in the option for discussing reputation, etc. Town counsel confirmed during the meeting that if we went into executive session we would not have to reveal names of parties.

Kerry asked if the option of leaving the names confidential off the table? We do not know this answer yet. Once the complainant fills out the form, their name would be matter of public record. We could still as a committee refrain from using names or identifying information however, we would not have control over whether a member of the public revealed someone's identity.

Cynthia said some towns are allowing the complaints to come anonymously, at that first intake call and identify them as "person A" and "person B" for example.

Tina asked: how do you feel about executive session??

Cynthia raised again questions about "what we would be able to do?"

Tina and Marlene will be going back before the Select Board in March 14.

Process generally:

Complainant makes call to member. Member brings the matter to the NHRC to decide "should we take this on". If it is an individual v. individual, then we schedule it for executive session. If it

is against an organization, discussion would be in a public meeting. If we don't think it is NHRC matter, member would call the complainant to tell them we can't go forward. Consensus on the committee was to keep moving forward with the idea to see if executive session can work.

Massachusetts Association of Human Rights Committee:

Cynthia attended meeting of the MAHRC: almost everyone working on a complaint process is struggling with the confidentiality piece. Some towns have created private entities that can take complaints because they can stay confidential. Some towns try to keep the identities confidential. Some say you only trigger public meeting laws if you have a quorum. Some think every email triggers public meeting laws. MAHRC does have a listserve that is active when people pose a question. It is a good opportunity for NHRC members to participate.

Memorial Committee:

Cynthia reported no update about Memorial Committee at this moment.

Needham Connects book discussions coming up:

The next book discussion is scheduled for March 2, hosted by NDI. Book is *Under the Skin: The Hidden Toll of Racism on American Lives and on the Health of our Nation* by Lind Villarosa.

The May 11 book discussion on *Rough Sleepers* by Tracy Kidder. NHRC is hosting. Bud will consider co-hosting.

New business/announcements:

Cynthia announced there is planning happening with Rev. John Cage and Catie Scudera on **International Day of Trans Day of Visibility on March 31**. Never been done in Needham. If members are interested, let Cynthia know.

Bud announced **Greater Boston Interfaith Organization Housing Justice**, a multi-pronged state-wide housing justice campaign for housing justice has been having teach ins. They stand for the ability of all people to have safe, sanitary place to live. Temple Beth Shalom in Needham had a teach in this week to discuss efforts undertaken.

We talked last time about asking Dr. Gutenkanst to come to a future meeting. He said he would come and Tina is working on a date.

Time to start thinking about **Juneteenth and Pride events**. Bud suggested repeating the postings we did last year. Cynthia mentioned the town was making a committee, but Tina said right now she may be the only member. There was a process where people could apply to serve on the committee but we are not sure of the status of the committee. (Katie is going to check.).

Members needed to help plan events/efforts.

Ameila mentioned that NDI is interested in joining NHRC with planning for Juneteenth.

Rev. John Cage trying to plan something for Pride Day, perhaps we can coordinate efforts.

The Library may be a place we can do some kind of display.

Emme and Finn will do some thinking about how to connect with the community around Pride.
Tina will talk with them about it.

Bud made motion to adjourn that Cynthia seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:35.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Howard Schroeder