

NHRC Minutes
September 21, 2023
Hybrid Meeting
Needham Free Public Library: Community Room

In attendance: (in person) Cynthia Ganung, Jen Howard, Amelia Klein, Tina Burgos, Chair, Finn McKeon, Emme Ward, Marlene Schultz, Kerry Hurwitz, (on Zoom) Bud Schram
Liaisons: Katie King, Lt. Belinda Carroll

Chair Tina Burgos called the meeting to order at 7:01pm.

1. Needham Public Schools conversation on Policy, presented by Superintendent Dan Gutekanst. Also present Mary Lammi (Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services). From the School Committee: Andrea Longo (chair), Liz Lee
See attached presentation outlining equitable policies at the federal, state and school committee levels.
Dennis asked how long it takes for policy changes. It depends upon what it is. It could take multiple school years, especially if there is a financial impact. They are very careful when making a policy. Handbooks change annually. There was a lot of discussion about the wording that Newton uses around bias. NPS plans to adopt the same language to make it more clear to parents.
School committee makes the policy. There is a protocol and implementation at the individual school level but schools strive to be consistent. Dan feels they need to be more clear about the implementation of policy.
Lisa spoke at length about the “silent sufferers” – those Asian families who are out of their comfort zone when it comes to speak up. It is not part of their culture and the schools must be aware of this and sensitive to it.
There is a form that can be submitted electronically regarding bullying. Mary suggests that it be expanded for incidents of bias. Once there is a report there is an investigation and families are notified. Bullying and allegation of bullying are reported. Many of the claims are due to conflict between students but are not bullying. Discrimination is seen differently. Tina asked about community outreach to those who need it most. How do we do this? Liz pointed out that this is not just a school issue – the whole community is part of this. Children only spend part of their day in school. They have many influences outside of school: family, house of worship, outside activities, etc. NHRC thanked the Superintendent for his thoughtful and informative presentation.

2. Follow up on working groups:

Community Conversations on Race: Amelia and Cynthia will facilitate this group. There will be 8 or 9 members in the group

NPS Policy: Someone from the school committee will work on this with us, probably Liz Lee who is our new liaison.

Each committee will discuss their purpose goals and target audience at their first meeting.

Discrimination Complaint Process: Marlene & Tina will meet

3. Needham Harvest Fair: Ameiia reported that there will be a Voices in Unity table for many town-wide organizations to be present to explain their missions. The fair will be on Sunday October 1 at Green's Field, 11-3pm. Jen will represent NHRC 11-1 and Finn will be our representative 1-3pm. Marlene will pick up the brochures from town hall and drop them off at Jen's house.
4. Branding and Town Seal Committee: A committee is being formed to look at the quality and representation of the seal. There are 9 seats on the committee representing a range of groups and people in town. Cynthia has volunteered to be the NHRC representative.
5. Public comment: A resident shared that the 9/11 commemoration event should be non-sectarian. This year there was a clergy person who did offer a non-sectarian prayer. The resident reached out to the Town Manager, he got an unsatisfactory response from that office. Katie King will follow up with him.
6. Indigenous Peoples Legislation: In order to educate ourselves before making a recommendation to the Select Board, Amelia has researched and found a website with excellent information that she will share with the committee in order for us to be more informed advocates. We will discuss at a future meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9pm

Respectfully submitted,
Marlene Schultz