

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

November 17, 2016

Chair Jennifer Howard called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm in the conference room of the Broadmeadow School.

Committee members in attendance: Abdul Cader Asmal, Barry Ehrlich, Cynthia Ganung, Jennifer Howard Schroeder (chair), Kerry Hurwitch, Lt. John Kraemer, Jo-Anne Coffey-McCormick, Matt Schroeder

Committee members absent: Helen Giragosian, Amelia Klein, Ashok Mehta, Bud Schram and Marlene Schultz (vice-chair)

Guests: Rebecca Tarantino, Linnea Wren

1. **MINUTES** of the October 20, 2016 NHRC meeting were unanimously approved.
2. **Membership on NHRC committee.** Helen Giragosian has resigned.
3. **Public Participation** - Rebecca Tarantino, Needham resident would like to see the Needham town leaders make a public statement about protecting the human rights of everyone in the town, that everyone has a right to be in our community and feel safe. She is asking that the NHRC take leadership in asking that the town officials (school superintendent and selectmen) take a stand. She referred to an example of this seen in a letter sent to the community by the Natick Schools Supt. Rebecca is also concerned about how to help teachers facilitate conversations with students that creates a safe space for them to talk about where they are from. She is not sure whether the NRC is the group to do that.

Response from committee members. Many agreed with this concern and thought that there should be a statement by town leaders that Needham is welcoming and inclusive. Members commented that they felt that the principals of Needham High School and Pollard Middle School were supportive of students' rights and creating a safe space for everyone. The principal of NHS sent a letter to parents and staff. Abdul said that in this current climate it is harder to have an open dialogue.

3. OLD BUSINESS.

Follow-up Forum on Islam - Abdul

Noah Feldman spoke this afternoon at Wellesley College about "the Fall and Rise of the Islamic State". We agreed to explore the possibility of NHRC asking Noah Feldman to speak at an event in Needham. Abdul will follow up about this possibility and the cost. NHRC can only afford \$100 for an honorarium. Other funding sources can be explored, including foundations in town and co-sponsoring with another town.

Report on STA Day at Pollard: (Students Taking Action: A Day of Sensitivity, Tolerance and Awareness) November 16, - Barry, Kerry, Cynthia, Marlene, JoAnne and Jen presented a workshop focused on “What are Human Rights.” The workshop was presented 4 times; 30 minutes each to classes of around 20 students. We used the UN youth video on Human Rights, asked students to list human rights, involved them in a hypothetical discussion about refugees seeking asylum in the US and asked them how they could make a difference. The students were engaged and given a handout with information about how to get involved with NHRC. Additionally, with the students’ participation, we created poster that identified individual human rights and what the students could do to promote them. The Pollard principal hung this poster in the front foyer of the middle school, allowing the whole school to see it and think about human rights. We should follow up with the Pollard principal to discuss the possibility of asking some students(12) to be part of a focus group to discuss the culture and climate in the schools. This half hour workshop could be used in other settings.

Human Trafficking Program Marlene, Abdul and Joanne have been attending the PATH meetings. A meeting to discuss trainings was held on October 25 @ 7:30pm at First Parish.

4. NEW BUSINESS

Needham Diversity Summit V: Will be held on November 19, 2016. The Needham Diversity Initiative group decided to not have the break out groups. Instead there will be a large and small group discussion about responses to the election results and where we go from here.

Massachusetts Association of Human Rights and Relations Committees (MAHRC) Jennifer encouraged members to attend the MAHRC, which meets on the 2nd Friday of the month, 9:30-11:30 in Medford. The next meeting is December 9. It is a great opportunity to learn about what other groups in the area are doing. Maybe several members could take turns attending the meetings.

Collaboration with the Needham Public Library

They would like a liaison with NHRC. Ashok or Marlene will attend their Jan. meeting.

5. REPORTS

Refugee Resettlement Consortium The next meeting of the group is on Nov. 30.

Immigration Task Force Welcoming Event – Dec. 4, 2016, 3-5pm “An afternoon of joy through Cultural Sharing” Chambers St. community room, 5 Chambers St. Rsvp to Carolyn Lynes, Carolynlynnes@gmail.com, 781-559-3667.

Needham Schools Matt reported on the Oct. 26 event at NHS based on The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates. Students, faculty and Community members offered 33 workshops for the NHS students. Matt led a workshop focused on the school to prison pipeline, discussing what is the problem and what to do. There were three 45 minute sessions. Matt reported that his sessions went well and the day was productive, went smoothly and brought the school community together.

Town Issues Lt. Kraemer reported that there was an incident in Needham on Nov. 9, following the election. There was a report of a suspicious vehicle at Channel 5, with lots of signs. The party then came to the police station, waved a wooden sword and shouted “hate, hate”. The person was taken into custody and charged with assault. No one was injured. There were medical issues involved. This was not a Needham resident and this action was not part of a political group. There was a lot of misinformation about this incident. It was reported on the police tweet. If anyone has a question, they can call the police station.

Members asked about reporting incidents of racial slurs or harassment. A guest from Dover asked about what to do when you witness someone harassing another person. Lt. Kraemer said it is important not to intervene, but to call the police who are trained about what to do to keep everyone safe. The attorney general’s office has a new hot line people can call to report threats, harassment or violence related to civil rights violations. Phone 800 994-3228.

6. **Announcements:**
Moving the monthly meeting to Town Hall.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm.

NEXT MEETING: THURSDAY, December 8, 2016 7:30 PM. Recorder: Barry

*Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia Ganung (Recorder)*