

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
February 16, 2017

Chair Jennifer Howard called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm in the Highland Room of Needham Town Hall.

Committee Members in Attendance: Abdul Cader Asmal, Cynthia Ganung, Jennifer Howard Schroeder (chair), Kerry Hurwitch, Matt Schroeder, Ashok Mehta, Marlene Schultz (vice-chair), Amelia Klein, and Bud Schram.

Committee Members Absent: Barry Ehrlich, Jo-Anne Coffey-McCormick, and Lt. John Kraemer (police liaison),

Minutes of the January 19, 2017 meeting were approved with Amelia abstaining.

No one requested to address the committee during Public Participation time.

Old Business:

Report on Meeting with Town Manager & Selectmen/discussion of goals for remainder of 2016-2017 NHRC session.

Per Jen and Marlene: Rep. Denise Garlick would like to move forward with the coalition. The coalition would bring together a diverse group of people in to help efforts to create a common language for public discourse in the community.

Jen and Marlene met with Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager, Selectmen Borelli and Cooley, Chief Schlittler, and Rep. Denise Garlick to discuss the role of the NHRC in town. There was a discussion about the increase in participation of town residents in government, and also an observation that the tone of some of the dialogue has been contentious and discourteous, particularly to town/government staff. Rep. Garlick advocated for bringing together a coalition, modeled after the town's suicide prevention coalition of a few years ago. The plan is to form a list of stakeholders and then seek people to fill those slots. The goal is to create an environment where people can have civil discourse, even in the face of disagreement. The Representative suggested bringing in a few different facilitators to address this small group with the goal of choosing one that would possibly guide the coalition's work.

The NHRC discussed where we as a Human Rights Committee play a role in civility of the town and communication within the community surrounding human rights/civil rights.

Ashok weighed in that he would like to see a proactive role rather than a re-active role. Barry agreed and urged the group to consider having a tangible goal for the coalition, beyond just creating civil discourse.

Cynthia brought up the immigration movement on undocumented immigrants.

Marlene and Jen will bring back our thoughts/ideas on Denise's coalition plan.

Where should NHRC focus the next few months? Consensus seems to be we have a full calendar with the March and May events looming.

Barry wants to know can we be a conduit for gathering information from the citizens of Needham to bring to the town?

Amelia thinks maybe getting Needham Times to feature us and other organizations in town. Marlene mentioned Denise Garlick said only 30% of Needham actually reads the paper.

Kerry mentioned maybe adding onto the email blasts that go from each school to the families. Amelia mentioned Town Meeting. Jen thinks we can task people in the committee to take this piece on.

Jen mentioned a way for members of the community to bring grievances to us. Email? Phone? Show up at monthly meeting. Also should grievances be in the public minutes?

How can we form sub-committees? Who is interested in what?

- Publicity & public awareness (flyers, contact with newspapers for announcements, Facebook, brochures)
- Education and awareness programming
- School outreach
- NHRC written statements
- Complaints
- NHRC meeting recorders

Marlene suggested those sub-committees meet ½ hour before the monthly meeting and report in.

Barry looking for clarification on sub-committees. 3 buckets – schools – coalition & programs that exist that need addressing. **NHRC members signed up for the following subcommittees:**

1. Educational programming: Marlene, Ashok, Abdul, Amelia, Cynthia
2. Schools: JoAnne, Barry, Matt, Jen
3. Outreach/Publicity/Data Gathering: Kerry, Amelia, Jen, Barry, Marlene

Human Trafficking event – (Marlene reporting). March 9th, Powers Hall
We need a room setup contact person. Abdul will be contact & arrive at 7pm. Please email around the flyer and get the word out! It's on our Facebook page, website, town has info. Can we get it on the NTS digital sign?

Understanding ISIS and combatting the threat. (Marlene and Ashok reporting) May 9, 2017, 7:30-9pm at the Center at the Heights. We have a speaker – Dr. Craig Considine. He will receive a \$500 honorarium, through a donation from the Needham Library Foundation. Save the date flyer needs to be designed and sent out. This is a follow-up to last year's forum, and Craig is a former Needham High student. Kerry will design the "Save the Date". Do we have refreshments? What are regulations from BOH regarding refreshments? Regulations related to food are many, refreshment question to be decided at a later meeting.

Follow up Elliot school family from last year. Racial discrimination - didn't get resolution here in town, they moved to Newton. Marlene spent time on the phone with the mother for follow up. Elliot never apologized, they didn't seem open to educating the teachers on dealing with racism. Mother reported they met with principal and superintendent and no one apologized or dealt with it in a way they felt was helpful.

New concerns raised about Needham Public Schools. Jen, Amelia, Cynthia and Barry met with Needham residents (concerned parents) regarding the fact that all the kids in the middle school of African American descent were placed into one cluster for grades 6-8. This started 8 years ago in an effort to prevent African American students from feeling isolated. The past couple of years there have been complaints from parents who felt their concerns were not heard. These parents hired a lawyer presented their complaints and demands to the School Committee in January. In a subsequent blog post, the superintendent, Dr. Gutekanst announced the policy will no longer be followed and that the district would meet with school administrators to continue ongoing discussions around culturally proficient practice and investigate the possibility of hiring an outside consultant to review policies.

NHRC School sub-committee will follow up with the positions of parents and schools and how we can help.

New Business

Cynthia wants to know if we can co-sponsor a refugee resettlement fundraiser called Suitcase Stories with the International Institute of New England. The program will be sponsored by and held at TripAdvisor. The Committee discussed whether the NHRC should as a general rule be involved in "fundraising" or whether that could lead to many more groups seeking out our sponsorship. Another issue raised was putting the NHRC name on a fundraiser where the NHRC has no control over how the money is eventually used. Moreover, as a town committee, is it proper for the "town" to be fundraising? Jen will clarify with the Board of Selectmen, then we will decide at the next meeting whether we want to be involved? Cynthia stressed all we are doing is lending our name to the event, getting the word out.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30pm.

NEXT MEETING: THURSDAY, March 16, 2017 7:30 PM. Recorder: Amelia

Respectfully submitted,

Kerry Hurwitch (Recorder)