

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

April 27, 2017

Jennifer Howard Schroeder called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm in the Highland Room, Needham Town Hall.

Committee members in attendance: Abdul Cader Asmal, Barry Ehrlich, Cynthia Ganung, Jennifer Howard Schroeder (chair), Amelia Klein, Lt. John Kraemer, Bud Schram, Matt Schroeder, Kerry Hurwitch, Jo-Anne Coffey-McCormick, and Marlene Schultz (vice-chair)

1. **MINUTES** of the March 16, 2017 & March 30, 2017 meetings were unanimously approved.
2. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.** None
3. **OLD BUSINESS**

Committee Members Update

One position remains open on the Human Rights Committee. Committee members agreed to reach out to groups not currently represented on the NHRC, but which are specifically identified in the CHARGE to the Human Rights Committee (approved by Board of selectmen, August 12, 2008)

The Committee shall consist of 12 members. When practicable, the Committee should include representatives or designees of the Needham Police Department and the Needham School Department (ex-officio and non-voting), the Needham Commission on disabilities and the Needham Housing authority. Membership should also include a representative of the local clergy. A senior citizen, a tenant of the Needham Housing authority, a realtor, and a Needham High School student.

Our group has reached out to Penny at the Housing Authority to advertise this opening. The position will be advertised in the newsletter. We discussed asking Superintendent Gutekanst about the possibility of submitting names from the school, although this would be a non-voting member.

Rep. Garlick's Coalition - Update Jen reported that there has been no follow-up. She noted that she, like some others, hope this new "Meeting of the Minds" committee will fill the role of what we had hoped would come from Rep. Garlick's Coalition. See below for more information on "Meeting of the Minds" group.

Follow-up Forum on Islam - Update The May 9 event sponsored by the NHRC and the Needham Public Library - UNDERSTANDING ISIS – is in the final stages of planning, thanks to the hard work of library staff, Marlene, Abdul and Ashok. Amelia reported on the media blitz she has followed-up with; Town Hall website, Calendar posting, Needham Clergy, Needham Diversity and Senior Center committed to posting. Info will be posted in the News from the Hill next week and electronic sign stationed at the Recycle Center; NHRC Facebook site and Town Hall webpage, Needham Grass Roots website. Boston Globe (*Former* column) The Committee agreed to light refreshments, such as water and coffee. Format – Marlene will introduce presenter, Craig Considine and will acknowledge Library's contribution. Craig will present 50 minutes and then there will be time for attendees to generate questions on note cards and have them addressed by presenter.

Follow-up regarding the Needham Parent Group- Update A concerted effort to address Racial Equity in the Needham Public Schools is being made. Jen sent a link about this to our group on April 27, 2017. Between our March and April meetings some NHRC members met with Pollard parents to better understand their concerns. Additionally, NHRC members attended a follow up meeting with Superintendent Gutekanst and the Pollard parents during the second week in April.

As a result of that meeting, Superintendent Gutekanst generated a list of thoughtful issues to be explored by the district. He is hiring a consultant for the term of one year to examine and address the issues related to racial equality in Needham Public Schools and stated his intentions to continue to engage with concerned parents and community members, including NHRC. This plan was approved at the April's school committee meeting. The parents reported their feelings were validated and concerns are being heard.

We discussed that the challenge may be in changing the minds of teachers and the community in acknowledging there may be race related issues in our schools. There is still no district wide process for collecting reports of racially motivated bias in the individual schools. Again, as a group, we discussed the potential role of the NHRC. We noted this could be an opportunity for NHRC to become involved in educating the public about why we as a community should be aware of racial inequalities within the NPS.

Support IINE Refugee Storytelling Event – Update Amelia updated us on the Suitcase Stories event on June 22, 2017, hosted by IINE – the International Institute of New England - and TripAdvisor. At this time, the organizers are still looking for “storytellers” at the June 22 event. “Storytellers” will include (1) an immigrant or refugee living in the area, and (2) persons who have had a personal

experience with refugees that they would like to share. Volunteers from our committee are needed to advertise/publicize the event and welcome guests at the TripAdvisor headquarters. We are seeking ways to involve World of Wellesley in this event. Admission will be \$25 and up. We will have more information next month.

Book Club Discussion Groups – World of Wellesley Event - Update Jennifer and Kerry participated in a *Community Read Event* at the Wellesley Community Center on April 11 to discuss the book: Born on Third Base by author Chuck Collins. The event was in conjunction with World of Wellesley. Approximately forty people attended, with many seniors.

The Needham Library has planned a similar event – a town wide read sometime during the upcoming summer. The book will be In the Country we Love: My Family Divided by Diane Guerrero. The book is about the story of her life. She is a US citizen whose parents were undocumented. When she was twelve they were deported and she stayed in the US and became a successful actress. The Needham Library has not publicized this event yet. Needham High School is reportedly not doing a school wide book next year.

4. NEW BUSINESS

“Meeting of the Minds” Committee Barry and Cynthia attended this committee meeting that met on April 26, 2017 for the first time. The group was generated from the thought that there was great activist movement in Needham and perhaps there was room to coordinate efforts. The goal of this group is to oversee great action and movements in Needham. The focus is on collaboration – a sharing of long/short term actions to adopt issues in a unified way. Some groups were underrepresented or absent; such as the schools and community council. The next step will be to develop a subgroup will meet to shape all ideas presented at the meeting.

5. REPORTS

Upcoming PATH Community Event There is a new event being planned for this fall, either September 26th or 28th. It is not clear yet whether they will seek our support, however, we discussed it and believe it is within our mission. We had a motion to cosponsor the fall PATH program if they ask us to do this. The Needham Library is co-sponsoring the event. The goal of the event is to increase awareness of human trafficking. Survivors will speak to the audience. Since the last PATH presentation in Needham, two people came forward with concerns and both matters are actively being addressed.

TZEDEK/ Justice Group. Marlene reported on her temple's new group for justice. The Jewish Community Relations Counsel will provide an up-stander training. This effort is dedicated to the Safe Communities Bill. This could be something we, NHRC, would like to do for our community and schools.

Race Amity Celebration Upcoming Event. Amelia spoke about the World of Wellesley and the Diversity Committee joining efforts to present a program on June 11, 2017 from 2-3:30 at the Congregational Church in Needham. This event has rotated venues and this year is Needham's turn to host. The founder of METCO will be honored this year. There will be music, entertainment, storytellers. The goal will be to bring various races together to celebrate for an afternoon. There is a link at Wheelock College Race Amity Collaboration we can check out. It was decided our committee is interested in sponsoring the Race Amity Celebration with the Diversity Initiative.

Jose Antonio Vargas speaking event. Progressive Needham is sponsoring a talk by Jose Antonio Vargas on June 10, 2017. Jen sent an email detailing the event. Mr. Vargas is a nationally known activist on the immigration front to advocate support for undocumented individuals in the US.

Bridging the Political Divide - Barry discussed a program he is involved with that focuses on engaging and facilitating conversations around the political divide. He noted the group has turned to skills building as a way to achieve this. The group is meeting Sunday April 30, 2017 for the first or a two-part training presented by Elizabeth Worts . We discussed that this training could be something the NHRC might be interested in pursuing.

Dinner Dialog: Four members of the NHRC attended a dinner dialog about race and race relations, sponsored by the Needham Clergy Association and Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries. Likely to be more programs like this in the future.

Town Issues Lt. Kraemer reported on the "Community Policing Meeting" with Ken Farbstein regarding the ACLU immigration model policies. During this meeting, they discussed how Needham Police are not required to enforce Federal immigration law. The results are that everyone arrested (documented or not) are processed in the same way. John noted that legislation at the state level will address some of these issues, taking the decision of how to respond away from the community level (The Safe Communities Act), It was noted that everyone on the Needham force is trained to use a taser, but it has only been used once in Needham. Lt. Kraemer said the Community Policing staffing report will be publicized and presented soon.

Lt. Kraemer noted there have been several overdoses in Needham this year. There was recently on Needham drug dealer identified. The matter became an immigration issue when it was learned the drug dealer is not a citizen of the US. His country of origin was contacted but before anything else could be done, an unidentified person came up and posted bail. The alleged drug dealer walked away and has not been seen again. Marlene attended the Board of Selectmen meeting on April 12, 2017, where the Chief discussed community policing.

Needham Schools Matt met with Mr. Sicotte to discuss the NHRC committee working with the school. Matt is currently working with Mr. Sicotte to develop a Google survey on human rights and how students are experiencing the new school policies. The high school is looking for a Human Rights Focus Group of fifteen students. Barry agreed to help Matt identify research based questions previously generated. Matt is drafting an email to all stakeholders to identify the issues around cultural climate at NHS.

Meeting adjourned at 9:25 pm. *Respectfully submitted, JoAnne McCormick (Recorder)*

**NEXT MEETING: Thursday, May 18 (4th Thurs.) 7:30 pm, Highland Room,
Town Hall (Recorder: JoAnne McCormick)**