

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
May 18, 2017

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

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

Absent Members: Bud Schram,

1. **MINUTES** of the April 27, 2017 meeting were unanimously approved.
2. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.** None
3. **OLD BUSINESS**

Meeting with Chief Schlittler and Selectwoman Marianne Cooley on Ken Farbstein's effort to advocate for the Town's adoption of the ACLU immigration enforcement policy (May 16, 2017) - Meeting was formally called by Representative Garlick to discuss immigration issues in Needham. The event was held at Center at the Heights. Thirty people were present. Four NHRC members attended. Main message/ major take away was, Needham will not be honoring Civil Detainers. This means that Needham Police will not be holding individuals based *solely* on civil detainer requests from federal immigration enforcement departments. Civil detainers are not the same as arrest warrants issued by a neutral judge. The conversation focused on building trust. The police reported they haven't changed things in twenty years – which was meant to be a positive statement about how things have been and continue to work well in Needham. Two members of the Board of Selectmen present, reiterated town not likely to push for sanctuary city status. Mr. Farbstein advocated for codifying some of the elements of community policing. Representative Garlick suggested looking to fortify “principles” vs. “rules”.

Our group wonders, “How do we let Needham “citizens/workers know about their rights? How do we let everyone know Needham is a welcoming community?”

- We may advise selectmen to visually post our welcoming statement.
- We might recommend the police/selectmen that we generate a statement regarding the fact that Needham is a welcoming, safe, secure place?

- Do we want to consider organizing an event to educate the community on the NHRC to better understand the model policies and the Safe Communities legislation?

Board of Selectmen wish the NHRC to look into developing a resource list of attorneys from Needham who would be willing to be on a list of on call attorneys to be used by Needhamites concerned about their status.

From this conversation and the Community Policing report came the question about our diligence in terms of the need to recognize the necessity to acknowledge the proper treatment of individuals with mental health diagnoses. We all agree this is a human rights issue – simply not sure if it is within our scope. This is an endemic problem: Is it something our committee should address as a human rights issue? This begs the question of how we as a group identify our scope of action – how we create criteria for our future involvement (especially as we end the year and consider our charge for the upcoming year.) Maybe our naming mental health issues as a basic human right could help bring needed attention/awareness/education to the issue. We also understand this requires great infrastructure. We agreed to reach out to Denise Garlick to see if she will place this on her radar. This begs the question of how we as a group (HRC) identify our scope of action/create criteria for our future involvement (coming September 2017).

Comments on Medford’s Immigration forum (May 18, 2017) (as described in Medford’s report to the Massachusetts Association of HRCs).

- Sending a direct message: “Medford police are not going to stop you to ask you if you are a citizen.”
- ACLU was there
- Discussed whether we as a group should take on the task of identifying immigration lawyers for people needing such services. Wonder if we may be at a disadvantage if we a) don’t really know lawyers and b) if the list changes and we don’t frequently update.
 - Need to circle back to Denise Garlick regarding this matter.
 - Maybe we could/should loop in with Immigration JusticeTask Force.

Human Rights Committee Membership – open positions and upcoming elections - Positions 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.

Asked Penny at the Housing Authority to have one of our monthly meetings at the housing facility, to increase awareness. Barry reported he has reached out to real estate attorney William (Billy) DeBear regarding his interest in serving on the committee. He expressed an interest and will attend next month's meeting.

Dan Gutekanst does not have a school representative in mind, but is interested in coming to our meeting next month to get a better idea of what is involved.

Discussed fact we are holding NHRC elections next month. Noted there are no term limits, but we must elect each year. Jen is happy to continue in her position, but is also willing to open the seat up to any interested individual.

Additionally discussed whether our next meeting will be our last. Wonder if we should have at least one additional meeting to set goals for the upcoming year.

Rep. Garlick's Coalition - Update - No update at this time.

Understanding the ISIS Threat and how fighting the threat impacts human rights? (Marlene, Abdul & Ashok) – The May 9th event sponsored by the NHRC and the Needham Public Library was a great success – 115 attended, despite the lack of publicity in Needham Times. Craig was pleased to receive an honorarium and is eager to return again. After the event, Matt spoke with Craig (as he is a NHS grad). We wondered if Craig might be an appropriate candidate for an upcoming NHS Distinguished Graduates Presentation.

We, as a group, wonder – how do we increase coverage and attendance? How do we get newspaper reporters/cable to events? After the event Abdul wrote a letter to the paper that did not get acknowledged. Part of the issue is the significant turnover at the newspaper. Also discussed the demographic issue; the fact that there were not many young people in attendance. How do we attract younger community members? Discussed possible need of providing child care for future events.

Follow-up regarding the Needham Parent Group- No updates.

International Institute of New England to co-sponsor Refugee Storytelling event –Update Amelia updated us on the Suitcase Stories event (and handed out a flyer) - officially titled "Suitcase Stories: Supporting Refugees in New England." On June 22, 2017 (estimated to last from 7-10PM), hosted by IINE – the International Institute of New England - and Trip Advisor. There will be six story tellers. As a group we can help with volunteering for the event (eight

members needed). Amelia will be travelling and will be unable to attend, so she will put the event committee in touch with Jen. Interested attendees can register at “NeedhamOne.”

4. NEW BUSINESS:

One Book One community Program: Summer Book Read Update - The Needham Library has planned 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 books will be available from the library mid June. The Needham Library is hoping we will be a sponsor of the event. The Immigration Justice Task Force and the Library Community have already committed and they are waiting for other supporters before sending out a press release. Marlene moved to co-sponsor. All agreed.

Race Amity Day of Celebration Upcoming Event. A program scheduled for June 11, 2017 from 2-3:30 (rain or shine) at the Congregational Church in Needham. 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. This is the first time the event will occur in Needham and it will be celebrated state-wide. The governor has declared the second Sunday in June as Amity Day. Our committee is co-sponsoring the Race Amity Day with the Diversity Committee. Our committee can help by: being there, providing store bought (?) food, publicizing event on our website(Ashok has a lot of great ideas on website development and will be in touch with Kerry), reaching out to young people, targeting houses of worship and taking photos of the event.

Jose Antonio Vargas speaking event: Progressive Needham is sponsoring a talk by Jose Antonio Vargas on June 10, 2017. Mr. Vargas is a nationally known activist on the immigration front to advocate support for undocumented individuals in the US. The official name of the event has been changed from Immigration and Identity in Trump to Immigration and Identity in America. Marlene moved that we become a community partner – all approved. The event will be free, donations will be accepted. Registration is required (visit http://www.progressivemass.com/2017_06vargas#rsvp) The room will be set up for 400-600 people, and it is expected to fill. The “to do list” for this event is being developed.

5. REPORTS

Efforts to address cultural proficiency in Needham schools - No report, however, Dr. Gutekanst decided he will serve as the NPS liaison to the NHRC for the remainder of this year and will attend the June meeting (our last meeting of the year).

Upcoming PATH Community Event - will occur on September 28th. We are not co-sponsoring. Friends of the Needham Library are co-sponsoring and they believe they can provide all required support.

Witness for Social Justice Group (formally referred to as Bridging the Political Divide)-Barry reported the focus is on protecting vulnerable neighbors and ways to concur the political divide. The group will meet again on June 6, 2017 at 7:30 at the Baptist Church to decide upon future plans. Barry will send out an invitation.

Town Issues - Lt. Kraemer not present to update on town issues.

6. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Temporary Protected Status for Haitians and others who faced National Disasters in their country of origin – An article in today's local paper noted there will be an upcoming vote on TPS of those previously brought to the USA due to disasters in their countries. For example, many (approximately 50,000) Haitians came after the 2010 hurricane. They have registered to stay. Now the decision regarding their fate rests with John Kelly and the Department of Homeland security.

**NEXT MEETING: Thursday, June 15, 2017, 7:30-9:00pm,
Highland Room Town Hall (Recorder: Bud Schram)**

2017-2018 NHRC meeting dates:

September 14

October 19

November 16

December 21

January 18

February 15

March 15

April 26

May 17

June 21

We have reserved this room for all future meetings.

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