

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

June 15, 2017

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

Committee members in attendance: Cynthia Ganung, Jennifer Howard Schroeder (chair), Ashok Mehta, Kerry Hurwitch, and Marlene Schultz (vice-chair), Lt. John Kraemer

Guests: SiSi Goneconto and Dr. Dan Gutekanst

Absent Members: Bud Schram, Matthew Schroeder, Amelia Klein, Abdul Cader Asmal, JoAnne Coffey-McCormick

1. **Minutes:** As we were not able to make a quorum, the Minutes of the May 18, 2017 meeting could not be approved at this time.
2. **Public Participation:** Needham Resident Si Si Goneconto presented during the public participation time of the meeting. Ms. Goneconto told the Committee about an Interracial Pot Luck being planned for Oct. 29 5:30-7:30. This potluck would be a follow up to the one from this spring, co-sponsored by Needham Clergy Association and Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries (CMM). This October dinner would be co-sponsored by several groups in town, including the Clergy Association, CMM and the Ba'Hai organization in Needham. The group is seeking support from the NHRC. A planning meeting will take place in late August. The goal is continued inter-racial dialogue and community building. Maybe have babysitters if people bring children. Possibly have a facilitator at each table. Maybe involve the high school's Social Justice group.

Jen asked how many people do you want on the planning committee? Maybe 1 or 2 people from each group.

Should you have it structured or not? Ashok and Marlene and others voiced that yes, structure is important.

3. Old Business

Report from Dr. Daniel Gutekanst: Dr. Dan Gutekanst came to talk to us about the school connection to the NHRC. Dr. Gutekanst reported that the District has hired a consultant to perform the district-wide equity audit, in response to concerns raised last year about the placement of students of color at the middle school level. Dr. Gutekanst explained how the District organizes clusters based on many factors, such as: language, band, academic needs, including race. The district has decided to stop using race as a determinative factor. The parents who initially brought the concerns to Dr. Gutekanst will have an opportunity to meet

with the new consultant first, probably in late June. As of yesterday, a consultant Christine Robinson was hired (she's out of Natick). Dr. Gutekanst hopes she'll have a report on the "picture" of the Needham Public Schools and the practices we have going on by late fall/early winter.

Ashok asked about the potential bias of a report like this. Dr. G assured us that they did a lot of vetting to select the consultant.

Jennifer pointed out to Dr. G - please use NHRC to support efforts of the District, particularly for community education.

Update on immigration enforcement in Needham: Jennifer reported that Selectwoman Marianne Cooley said she and the chief will be drafting an Op-ed about it this summer/early fall. There is discussion about putting up notices of Needham's position in places like Dunkin Donuts, train station, places immigrants may be working in Needham. Selectwoman Cooley clarified she would like any inquiries into Needham's position to be directed to her. Goal is to clarify in town Needham's role so people know.

Lt. Kramer has mentioned that we here in Needham have not seen immigration activity in our town. Heard that it's happening more around criminals.

Jennifer asked about the Chief's position on the "Safe Communities Act". Lt. Kramer did not know and would not speak to that position.

Summer Book read – In This Country We Love. In collaboration with the Needham Public Library. Hoping to have community sponsors. Not date yet. Ashok will clarify what the Library is actually asking NHRC to do.

Event with International Institute of New England: Jennifer reminded the Committee about the upcoming event with the International Institute of New England about the Refugee Storytelling program, June 22, 2017. NHRC members asked to attend if possible.

Human Rights Committee Membership – We will be looking to have three new members appointed. Everyone encouraged to talk to networks. Still looking for representation from someone living in Needham Housing Authority.

4. New Business

Elections: Discussed fact we were supposed to hold NHRC elections this month. Unfortunately, not enough members present to hold the election. Jennifer is happy to continue in her position, but is also willing to open the seat up to any interested individual. Marlene agreed to continue on as Vice Chair. Election will have to take place in September at our next meeting.

Framingham based immigration legal team: Cynthia reported that there is a group forming based out of Framingham seeking to support vulnerable individuals with immigration issues. The group will seek money for providing transportation for legal appearances, as well as court accompaniment and legal assistance. Perhaps once formed, the NHRC can publicize their services on the NHRC webpage or Facebook. Cynthia and Marlene are interested in being involved with this project. More info to come.

“Know Your Rights” immigration flyers: Cynthia reported that out of one of the Witness for Justice meetings came the idea to create “Know Your Rights” flyers to be put around Needham. They would like to include language that says “NHRC supports this work” and give the flyer out along with the Selectmen’s statement on human rights.

Preliminary plans for 2017-2018: tabled until the next meeting. Possible program on mental health and human rights. Possibly a play of some kind about human rights.

5. Reports

Town issues: Lt. Kraemer reported they are still investigating the homicide that occurred in Needham. There has been an uptick in mental health crisis events recently.

Needham High School: no report.

Race Amity Day 2017: Co-sponsored with Needham Diversity Initiative, World of Wellesley, NHRC. Nice event, not well attended.

Jose Antonio Vargas event: June 10, 2017, very large crowd. NHRC acknowledged as a community partner.

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**NEXT MEETING: Thursday, September 14, 2017, 7:30-9:00pm,
Highland Room Town Hall**

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:25pm. *Respectfully submitted, Kerry Hurwitch (Recorder)*