

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
January 18, 2018

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

Committee members in attendance: Nadaa Ali, Abdul Cader Asmal, Cynthia Ganung, Jennifer Howard Schroeder (chair), Kerry Hurwitch, Marlene Schultz (vice-chair)

Committee members absent: Nancy Fitton, Amelia Klein, Ashok Mehta, Dan Rubin, Bud Schram, and Matt Schroeder.

Police liaison present: Lt. John Kraemer

Guests: Dr. Dan Gutekanst, Needham Public Schools, Gretchen Cook-Anderson

1.MINUTES

2.PUBLIC PARTICIPATION None

3.OLD BUSINESS

February 5 NHRC program: Diane Levin, Children and the Media - Needham Town Hall, Powers Room, 7:30-9pm

Kerry, Marlene and Jen have been working on publicity for the program, including use of social media, email lists, distribution to PTCs, area preschools, public library and community groups.

Marlene will ask about using other town resources including the digital billboard. Kerry will post the flyer on the NRHC website and ask for questions from parents and other adults prior to the event - as requested by the speaker.

NHRC members should be at the Town Hall at 7pm. Kerry will make NHRC name tags for the 3 new members.

January 31 Needham High “One Day” workshop

Matt will lead the workshop. The focus of the workshop will be on understanding and dealing with "Implicit Bias". Nadaa presented ideas for the design of the workshop: activities for students, taking a test on ‘Implicit Bias’ and viewing part of a TED talk by Verna

Myers. Kerry and Nadaa will meet with Matt to plan the workshop. Kerry will assist Matt with the presentations. Nadaa is unable to attend that day.

Race, Sports & Protest; a community conversation with author Jim Hirsch & others: - April 9, 7-9pm, Eliot Performance Center

Sponsored by the Needham Diversity Initiative. More information about the content of the program was distributed by email to the NHRC members. Members approved having the NHRC be a co-sponsor of the event. We will ask NDI how the NHRC can help.

Jan. 28 – Community interfaith potluck and dialogue about race at First Parish Church, 5-7pm. There will be discussions and short videos. Over 90 have signed up. It was not clear in the publicity that the event is planned for adults and older youth. There was concern expressed that there is no program for younger children. NHRC is one of the sponsors.

4. NEW BUSINESS

Racial Justice Book Group with the Needham Public Library

Jen has arranged a meeting on Saturday with representatives of the Library to discuss the idea of a book club. Marlene may join her.

Collaborative discussion group focused on Boston Globe

Spotlight on Race series: Dates: Jan. 30, 7pm at First Parish UU, Feb. 27, 7pm at First Baptist, March 27, 7pm at Congregational Church. NHRC will help publicize this program.

Needham Board of Selectmen.

Potential campaign to use gender-neutral language for the name of Needham Board of Selectmen.. Marianne Cooley would like the NHRC to make a public statement at the hearing regarding this proposal. It needs to be presented to the board before April, when her term as chair is over.

Jennifer asked Dan Mathews, vice-chair of the Board of Selectmen about the town's open meeting law and how quickly the NHRC could take an action. Selectperson Marianne Cooley will attend NHRC meeting in February to discuss.

5. REPORTS

Town Issues Lt. Kraemer reported there were no more incidents of graffiti at Pollard, Needham High School, or anywhere else in town.

Needham High School Jen reported for Matt that the Principal, Mr. Sicotte is having monthly “speak out” open forums with students as a follow up to the December walk out in response to the graffiti incidents at the high school.

Possible future program

Jennifer and Marlene will reach out to the selectmen and to state representative Denise Garlick to discuss the possibility of a community forum on graffiti and the town’s reaction.

6. Special Guest Discussion: Dr. Gutekanst on the Race Equity Audit report for Needham Public Schools

Dr. Gutekanst reported the main points of Ms. Christine Robinson’s report “Equity Audit: Initial Findings” as submitted to the Needham School Committee on December 19, 2017. The final report will likely be presented to the School Committee on February 27, 2018. The consultant noted the “assets” Needham public currently has: the social emotional learning curriculum, many of the staff have completed training in the area of equity and achievement and several of our teachers/staff are sought after trainers in this area, the Castles program, Needham High School and the Launching Scholars program., Pollard. The consultant noted we could be more strategic and consistent with staff training. The District plans to fortify the “REAL” team, focused on racial equity, to include students and parents. The school system has been working to intentionally increase the diversity of the staff. Dr. Gutekanst talked about NPS connections with Boston parents. He recently met with the group to hear their reactions to the equity report. The Needham School committee has one meeting a year in Boston at the Burke School.

Dr. Gutekanst recommended several budget requests aimed at producing more equity in town: an additional bus to get kids off the wait list for transportation; late buses to allow more kids to access after school activities; enhancements to the Launching Scholars program (which is largely a math boot camp and weekly tutoring during the summer); increase in funds for professional training so more staff can participate in equity training like the IDEAS program; an additional full time English Language Learner teacher and a unified sports program. Dr. Gutekanst appreciated NHRC chair Jen Howard advocating for these proposals at the School Committee Budget Hearing on 1/16. The District will be sending out a school climate survey soon to see how parents, students, and staff feel at the school. Dr. Gutekanst acknowledged the many challenges ahead, but reported the District is

working hard to address the concerns raised in the equity audit.

The Committee members and Dr. Gutekanst had some discussion about how the Committee might support the work being done at the schools. It was recommended that the school system look at what other towns are doing, such as the “Courageous Conversations on Race” program in Newton schools. One idea that came up was asking community volunteers to serve as “diversity coaches” for students looking for adults to emulate. The Committee thanked Dr. Gutekanst for taking the time to share the report and his thoughts about moving forward.

Meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

*Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia Ganung, Recorder*

**NEXT MEETING: Thursday, February 15, 2018 at
7:30 pm, Highland Room, Town Hall**

Recorder: Kerry Hurwitch