

Needham Human Rights Committee
October 18, 2018

In attendance: Jennifer Howard Schroeder, Christina Mathews, Amelia Klein, Ashok Mehta, Julie Venables, Jared Pizzuto, Marlene Schultz, Lt. John Kraemer, Abdul Cader Asmal, Cynthia Ganung, Bud Schram, and Kerry Hurwitch

Absent: Nadaa Ali

Guest: Paula Spies

The meeting was called to order by Co-chair, Christina Mathews.

1. Minutes from the last meeting were approved unanimously as presented.
2. Public Participation: None, though Needham resident Paula Spies came to observe the meeting.
3. Old Business

Portrait of a Needham Graduate: Committee Ashok and Christina have been the NHRC representation on this Needham Public Schools' committee. The goal is to identify core characteristics the district would like to see in Needham graduates in the future. About 53 members of the community comprise this committee, representing many areas, qualities, skills. The Committee will eventually publish a report and present it to the community at large. Ashok will see if the NHRC can see the powerpoint presentation which describes the plan for rolling out the report. NHRC may then provide some greater feedback. It is expected the report will be finalized in April/May timeframe.

Needham Freedom Team: No update tonight. Will look to report out in November.

4. New Business:

Next Potluck Conversation: At My Neighbor's Table: A Vegetarian Potluck on Cultural Appropriation and Appreciation will be held on October 21, 5:30-7:30 (doors open at 5) at Temple Beth Shalom. Marlene is chairing the program, Christina and Amelia are on the planning committee. All members of the committee are encouraged to attend and to invite their friends and neighbors. At this moment, about 80 people are registered. NHRC has been approached about whether it would host the next dinner.

Community Conversation about Preserving the Rights of Transgender Individuals in MA: Yes on 3 event 10/22. The transgender coalition is looking for people to canvas. There are many trans awareness events going on in surrounding towns. Needham Diversity Initiative and ParentTalk sponsored an event last week at the elementary school about understanding transgender kids.

Along with this discussion, the NHRC discussed next steps in getting the word out about its support for transgender and gender non-conforming people. The NHRC agreed we should reach out to the Selectboard again to reinforce our commitment to making a statement and to offer some possible resources for education. The point of reaching out is to open dialogue and emphasize the Committee's position. Jennifer will follow up with the Selectboard. Julie will send Jennifer a couple of resources from the NDI/ParentTalk event from last week. The intent is to try and find a middle ground that they may be able to support in light of their position that they cannot take a definitive position on what they see as a political ballot question.

The Committee also decided it would add the NHRC statement in support of transgender rights on the NHRC facebook page, the library and send it again to the newspaper.

Collaborative effort with NPS to bring "courageous conversations" trainers to the district. Tom Denton, Director of Guidance for NPS, approached Ashok about whether the NHRC would be willing to collaborate on a project to bring trainers to the district to instruct students to have difficult conversations around race. This is an idea directly related to the race equity report from last year. The district is seeking funding from the MetroWest Health Foundation and is looking for NHRC to provide a letter of support. The event would likely take place in the fall of 2019 and NHRC would help run this event. METCO is also involved in this proposal. Ashok drafted a letter for the Committee. The Committee voted unanimously to support this project and sign the letter of support. Christina, Julie and Ashok will lead the NHRC connection with this project.

Diversity and Discussion Book Club: met 10/11 to discuss Tomorrow Will Be Different, but unfortunately no NHRC members could attend. The next discussion will be in January, led by Gretchen Cook-Anderson for the NDI, Blood at the Root. NHRC will be leading the book discussion in March. Refugee was initially the book selected, but the Committee can change it if it wants. The parent/student book discussion of Refugee at Pollard Middle School in September was fairly well attended, with about 40 people in attendance. NDI member Cinza Solari led that discussion.

Needham Diversity Summit: will be held Saturday, 11/17/18 from 8am-2pm. New this year, the summit will remain in the cafeteria after lunch, with the hope it will keep more folks in the room. Ron Jones, a well known performer will be presenting. NHRC will have a table at the event.

Needham Diversity Initiative fundraiser next Thursday at Bertuccis, 25% of your bill will go to NDI.

MLK Day planning has begun. NHRC needs to decide if it will contribute food again?

5. Reports:

Town: no issues to report.

Schools: no report made.

Needham High School: Jared reported there was nothing specific going on.

Abdul is leading an important conference happening on 10/27 (Saturday) at the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center, called Voices of Marginalized Americans and Their Mainstream Allies. The event is co-sponsored by CMM and will focus on the treatment of marginalized people in the US. The goal is to have dialogue, not necessarily reach solutions.

Adjournment: 9:30pm

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Howard