

Needham Human Rights Committee
February 28, 2019
Highland Room, Town Hall

Committee members in attendance: Nadaa Ali, Cynthia Ganung, Amelia Klein, Christina Mathews (co-chair), Jennifer Howard Schroeder (co-chair), Marlene Schultz, Julie Venables, Lt. John Kraemer, Police Liaison, Dr. Dan Gutekanst, Needham Public Schools,

Committee members absent: Ashok Mehta, Kerry Hurwitch, Jared Pizzuto, Bud Schram

Guests: Abdul Cader Asmal, Tracy McKay, Kalpena Shah

Christina Mathews, co-chair, called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm. The guests, Tracy McKay and Kalpena Shah introduced themselves. Tracy will be joining the NHRC.

1. Minutes

The minutes from the January 17, 2019 NHRC meeting were approved.

2. Public participation – none

3. Old Business

Community Conversation Pot Luck Dinner – March 24 report by Amelia Klein, member of the planning committee. 5:30-7:30pm, Temple Beth Shalom, “It happened here: Slavery in Needham.” There will be a video and Guest speakers: Rev. Darrell Hamilton, First Baptist Church, Jamaica Plain, and Gloria Griess, Director, Needham History Museum. Discussion topics include slaves and slave holders in Needham and restorative justice. There will be an opportunity to converse in small groups. Participants bring a vegetarian appetizers. NHRC is a co-sponsor and Marlene Schultz has been this dinner’s lead organizer. The program is free, but registration is required. The flyer has a link to rsvp.

One speaker, David Hamilton, will talk about how to consider reparations for the slaves that lived in Needham. The NHRC will need to consider how it wants to be involved in this effort. In other towns, the town has issued a

statement of apology, children have lit candles. More research needs to be done.

March 14, 7pm in the Library –Diversity & Discussion Book Club (a collaboration between NHRC, Needham Free Public Library, and Needham Diversity Initiative) This month: Refugee, by Alan Gratz
Facilitator – Jen Howard, and several Pollard Middle School students have been invited to give their reflections about the book. Jen is meeting with the students next Thursday to help them prepare. Please attend!

4. New Business

End of Year NHRC Report 2018– Amelia Klein

The 2018 report covers from July, 2017 to June 31, 2018. It will be published for the town around the time of town meeting. Amelia will send a copy of the report to the NHRC members. During the year, Amelia writes about events as they happen, collects photos and uses the meeting minutes for the report. Everyone was very grateful to Amelia for writing these excellent and comprehensive annual reports. She asked members to take photos of NHRC activities and to give her feedback now for writing the next report. The Co-Chairs expressed immense gratitude to Amelia for once again writing the NHRC End of the Year report for the Town. This is a tremendous undertaking and Amelia does an outstanding job documenting the NHRC's efforts.

Celebrating Abdul Cader Asmal's Service to the NHRC

The co-chair Christina Mathews presented Abdul with a certificate of appreciation from the Needham Select Board for his 6 years of service on the NHRC, signed by all the members of the Select Board. Abdul was also presented with a framed quote by Martin Luther King, Jr. that was felt to exemplify his commitment to human rights and social justice. "Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You'll make a better person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in."

NPS Equity Community Forum:

Christina and Jen are continuing to work with Mary Lammi and Diane Simmons in putting together a community event to share the REAL Coalition's efforts on recommendations made in the 2017 NPS Equity Report. Dr. Gutekanst reported that NPS has decided since the focus will be on the schools for this forum, they will take the lead in planning the event and will hold it at one of the schools. There will likely be a role for NHRC, the Needham Diversity Initiative, and the Needham Clergy Association to address what can be done (and is being done) in the community to support the equity work in the schools. The tentative date for the event will be April 24, 2019.

Formation of Hate Crimes Taskforce:

Thank you to Marlene, Amelia, and Cynthia for convening to research various existing models of community organizing around responses to incidents of hate and bias in communities. They identified 3 distinct models for us to consider: a hate crimes task force, a rapid response team, and a freedom team. They looked at Natick and Arlington for examples. Natick has a hotline through the police department which takes calls from residents about incidents. The police decide whether it is a crime or not---which dictates whether a community response is appropriate. Arlington uses more of a rapid response team that provides for a systematic way of letting people know something has happened. The Natick freedom team seems to be a little bit of both, but also does preventative programming. Lt. Kraemer suggested narrowing down the intended ask and the questions to bring to Chief Schlittler, recognizing there will be specific protocols the police must follow in response to any call to them. The subcommittee working on this will reconvene to think more about specifics and report back.

The NHRC as a whole decided the body should release a statement for the community in the wake of any bias incidents in the future. The chairs have the committee's permission to do this if time is of the essence.

Race Amity Day, June 9th—dinner event—to be co-sponsored with the Needham Diversity Initiative. There will be a video about the history of METCO program and the group will reach out to the Metco parents in Needham and Wellesley to attend.

The NHRC voted unanimously to co-sponsor this event.

Repeating programs and co-sponsorship: The NHRC decided unanimously that programs that run repeatedly (MLK Day, Diversity Summit, Book Club, Potluck Conversations, etc.) do not need to be voted on each additional time the event approaches.

Growing Up Other in Suburbia. Sunday, April 7, 2019, 4-6pm at First Parish: First Parish is organizing a panel discussion lead by young adults, all of whom graduated from Needham High, who will talk about their experiences as a student identifying as something other than white. First Parish has asked if NHRC would co-sponsor the event and is only asking that we commit to bringing 5 individuals to the event.

The NHRC voted unanimously to co-sponsor this event.

Inviting the Selectboard to upcoming events: The NHRC expressed an intent to invite the Selectboard members to the spring events coming up soon.

5. Reports

Town Issues (Lt. Kraemer)

Another instance of graffiti at the high school. The school has been working on it.

Needham High School (Jared)

No report.

Adjournment: 9:15pm

Cynthia Ganung and Jennifer Howard Schroeder, Recorders