

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
September 19, 2019

Jennifer Howard-Schroeder called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm.

Committee Members in attendance: Jennifer Howard-Schroeder, Christina Mathews, Amelia Klein, Marlene Schultz, Julie Venables, Tracy McKay, Jared Pizutto, Cynthia Ganung

Committee Members absent: Bud Schram, Ashok Mehta, Kerry Hurwitch

Select Board Member in attendance: John Bulian

1. **MINUTES** of the June 2019 meeting were approved.
2. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** – Ilene Scanlon and her son, Brendan, a student at Roxbury Latin attended the meeting. They came to observe a town committee as part of a school project.
3. Membership Update – Nadaa Ali Khan can no longer be on the committee. We have a vacant position.
4. **Clarification on NHRC role by Select Board Chair John Bulian**

John Bulian explained the dynamics of the Select Board being like a marriage in that they always try to reach consensus on issues. They don't engage in split votes. He reminded the committee that every issue has political overtones, and they would like for us to make it comfortable for everyone with various viewpoints to live and work in the town. He said that when things happen in town (hate crimes, acts of hate, etc), we want to respond, but also don't want to make others uncomfortable. The Select Board is very sensitive to this, and they are conscious of the political overtones in play. He suggested that if indeed the Human Rights Committee would like to respond to events in town, we should contact Kate Fitzpatrick and Sandy Cincotta who will then relay the message to the Select Board, and then we can discuss further.

Jennifer Howard Schroeder responded by saying that we could serve the community by putting a human rights lens on issues rather than a political one.

Marlene Schultz said that human rights are human rights. We are not talking about political issues. She clarified that the Human Rights Committee has always used the UN Declaration of Human Rights as our guide.

John further clarified that as a town committee we need to have communication with the Select Board before we plan a response. He said that there has been some feedback that the HRC has become more independent than they would like. We need to communicate with Kate and Sandy about any responses we are taking. Also, if we are partnering with other groups in town on various initiatives, we need to run it by Sandy and Kate also.

Tracy McKay noted that our committee's role is one of advising the Select Board on issues of human rights, so when these kinds of issues arise, we would hope that the Board would trust our advice. She stated that John mentioned that the Select Board does not take a position on political issues or ballot issues, so everyone in the town can feel comfortable, but not taking a position also makes some community members uncomfortable. She questioned what the role of our committee is if the Board does not take our advice.

Jennifer Howard Schroeder reiterated that she would like further clarification of our charge. We have residents that come to us to talk about issues happening in town, and we thought the charge included a responsiveness element. The Select Board is now asking us to discuss potential responses and all activities, with them first.

5. OLD BUSINESS

Needham PATH January Sex Trafficking Forum – There was a motion to co-sponsor the program, and it passed unanimously. We will seek approval on this event from the Select Board.

Diversity & Discussion Book Club – Last month's book was Things that Make White People Uncomfortable and 22 people attended. It was the largest group yet. Hosted by Needham Diversity Initiative. Next month's book is The 57 Bus.

Needham Transgender Coalition for Trans Equality - The Human Rights Committee will have to leave the coalition since there will be some potentially political events coming up (Medicare for All) that the Coalition will co-sponsor. The HRC will likely not be able to support all of these initiatives, and we want to ensure the Coalition can do what is best for those they serve.

Meeting adjourned at 9:32pm

**Next meeting will be October 17, 2019, 7:30pm.
Recorder – Marlene Schultz**