

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
Meeting Minutes
October 17, 2019

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

Members in attendance: Jennifer Howard-Schroeder, Christina Mathews, Marlene Schultz, Julie Venables, Jared Pizutto, Cynthia Ganung, Bud Schram, Ashok Mehta, Kerry Hurwitch

Ex officio: Dan Gutekanst, Superintendent, Belinda Carroll, Police liaison

Absent: Amelia Klein, Tracy McKay

Officer Carroll introduced herself to the group. She is in her 19th year on the unit and is now our police liaison. She was welcomed to the committee and we introduced ourselves to her.

1. **MINUTES** of the September 2019 meeting were approved.

2. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** – none

3. **Old Business**

Needham PATH: Marlene is working with Rick Vincent on logistics for the program that we are co-sponsoring and will be held in January.

Metrowest Foundation: Ashok will contact those in charge to find out more about the community event and the grant that was awarded to NHS.

Interfaith Potluck Conversations: Marlene reported that the planning committee is meeting on November 6 to discuss possible next steps.

4. **New Business**

Transgender Day of Remembrance will be held once again at First Parish. There will be a remembrance service.

Action: Jen will contact the Select Board to see if we can co-sponsor the program.

Guest: Stephanie Hartung, New England Innocence Project, asked for our co-sponsorship of a program that will be held on November 15. She explained that the Innocence Project works to correct things when someone is wrongly convicted, when there is factual innocence. Sean Ellis, a former METCO student in Needham, was wrongly convicted. He has been fully exonerated. He will be speaking at Needham High School on Nov.15 during the day and he

will be on a panel at the Diversity Summit on Nov. 16. While he is in the area, he will be telling his story in the evening to the community on Nov. 15 to raise awareness and educate people about wrongful conviction.

Action taken: The committee voted to co-sponsor the program. We will publicize it to our lists and post on social media. Kerry will attend, as the NHRC representative, the planning meeting on Monday for this event.

SEPAC: They have asked us to co-sponsor a program in March 2020 where they will be showing the movie *Intelligent Lives*.

Action: Jen will get more information about the program and report on it at the next meeting.

Project Over Zero: will be doing a session on Nov. 16 at the Diversity Summit. We hope that members of the Select Board will be in attendance in order to jump-start a community dialogue.

Education Program: There was discussion about a possible program on What are Hate Crimes?

Clarifying the role of NHRC: We had a lengthy discussion about our role in light of what we heard last month from Select Board Chair, John Bulian. Many members were disturbed by what may have been a lack of understanding and a limiting of our role. It was thought that we might look at this as an opening for developing a deeper working relationship with the Select Board. We had many questions:

- As advisory to the SB – should they be coming to us for advice?
- If we have to ask permission for everything we do, why do we exist?
- How we work with the SB needs to be explored through a conversation.
- If we are restricted in our ability to do what we signed up to do, which is support and advocate for human rights, why are we here?

Action: We will invite the 4 Select Board Members we have not yet met with to attend our next meeting. Perhaps we can meet with 2 at a time and give them different time slots for our discussion.

5. **Schools:** nothing to report

6. **Town:** nothing to report

7. **High School:** Jared reported that after the last anti-Semitic incident at the high school, the Jewish Student Union (a group that is 2 years old) organized a solidarity day. Students wore blue and it was felt that student peer-to-peer interactions were the most helpful for these types of incidents.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15pm

Next meeting will be November 21, 2019, 7:30pm.

Recorder – Tracy McKay