

Needham Human Rights Committee
December 19, 2019 Meeting minutes

Meeting called to order at 7:40.

Members in attendance: Christina Mathews, Jen Howard, Marlene Schultz, Jared Pizzutto, Kerry Hurwitch, Ashok Mehta, Amelia Klein, Cynthia Ganung, and Belinda Carroll (Needham Police liaison)

Special guests: Select Board Vice Chair, Moe Handel, Needham residents Christine & Sophia Dedek (Needham high student & mother), Tom Denton (Director of Guidance, Needham Public Schools)

Welcome to Moe Handel.

Handel stated he is here to facilitate more communication and clarify the Select Board's expectations of the NHRC. In response to questions from NHRC members, Handel states the NHRC needs approval from the Town Manager and Select Board before acting, the Select Board wants to be involved early when it is something that needs a decision. The Select Board recognizes a sensitivity to things that it considers may be "political." Several members of the NHRC expressed the belief that the Committee fights for recognition of "human rights" which are not political. Handel reiterated the Town has a broad range of people living here and that the Select Board seeks consensus, particularly when the Committee is seen as speaking for the Town. Handel thanked the NHRC for all the work we do and assured us the Town appreciates the efforts. All agree more effort at keeping communication lines open between the NHRC and the Select Board is necessary.

Tom Denton (Director of Guidance) – attended to update the NHRC on the MetroWest Foundation Grant, for which the NHRC wrote a letter of support last year. Denton reported on the "Courageous Conversations on Race" project, the goal to be proactive not "reactive". Working with METCO Director and the effort is now a course for the first time at the high school with plans to move to the middle and elementary. Conversations are happening regarding all sorts of race related conversations. Denton said they are looking to move our schools ahead. The district takes the equity report seriously. There is training coming and Denton wants to develop a partnership with the NHRC. The district made an effort to publicize when things happen (graffiti at school, etc.) this was a conscious decision. Denton is here to create a partnership with us looking to Spring working on educating parents going forward. Tonight specifically he is here to talk about moving forward with a relationship with us for educating the Needham school parents going forward. Denton is hoping the NHRC will help come up with a program for the spring and help organize and run it.

A discussion followed about how to engage parents. Mention was made of the NHRC co-sponsored pot luck community conversations as a model that has been successful. Also

considered working with the PTC to put on workshops, possibly using the spring parents' conference as a platform to program.

Needham High students discussed their experiences at the high school and expressed gratitude that the new conversations are starting with the freshmen. Both shared experiences around the language curriculum with an "identity" activity that pulled from some "regular" things but then also religion, race, etc. This did not feel like a good tool to discuss race and left many students feeling uncomfortable.

Old Business

- Needham PATH event: Marlene reported they do not need our help with set up. Event taking place January 9.
- Community Conversation Potluck: Marlene also noted that the next At My Neighbor's Table potluck on restorative justice will be on February 9th, 5-7:30 at Temple Beth Shalom. Unrelated, but Judge Broderick (who presented on mental health at the Diversity Summit in November 2019) will be at Temple Beth Shalom at 9:30am on February 9.
- Program with Needham SEPAC: tabled for discussion at a later meeting.

New Business

- Community Resilience spring event: Vice Chair Handel told the NHRC to work with Town Manager to plan. The NHRC confirmed they are comfortable moving forward. Marlene, Cynthia, Christina, Amelia, and Jen will continue to work on this. Will set up a meeting with Town Manager.
- Request for co-sponsorship from Temple Beth Shalom on immigration event on January 9. Committee decided it did not make sense to sign on since we were already co-sponsoring the PATH event the same night.
- MLK Celebration Jan. 20. Committee members needed to help with food. Cynthia will coordinate.
- STA Day May 20---Confirmed the NHRC will present. Cynthia and Julie will coordinate.
- Next Diversity & Discussion Book Club: We are Here to Stay, Susan Kuklin, January 30th at the Library.

Reports

- Town: Incident at Mitchell School—student uttering anti-semitic statement to another student. Being investigated and handled by the school.

- Needham High: Reports that some students feel it is very polarized but efforts are underway to address.
- Schools: Next REAL Coalition meeting to be Friday, December 20, Jen will attend.

Meeting adjourned 9:04PM

Recorder: Kerry Hurwitch