

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

August 6, 2020

Jennifer Howard Schroeder called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM virtually on Zoom.

Committee members in attendance: Jennifer Howard Schroeder, Cynthia Ganung, Amelia Klein, Ashok Mehta, Marlene Schultz, Julie Venables, Tina Burgos

High School liaisons: Jared Pizzuto, Sophia Dedek

Town of Needham liaison: Katie King, Assistant Town Manager

Committee members absent: Bud Schram, Kerry Hurwitch *Police liaison:* Lt. Belinda Carroll

1. **OPENING & ROLL CALL** Jennifer Howard Schroeder called the meeting to order, reviewing the suspended open meeting laws and public participation rules via Zoom meeting.
2. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** Three members of the community were present: Jackie Shepherd, Vicky Makrides, and Si Si Goneconto. No members of the public chose to speak.
3. **APPROVAL OF JUNE MINUTES** The June meeting minutes were not available prior to the meeting, so will be approved at the next meeting of the NHRC in September.
4. **OLD BUSINESS**

Leadership and Structure of NHRC for 2020-2021 No current Committee members have volunteered for the role of Committee Chair at this time. Given this unique situation, the Committee is working to delegate Chair assignments as well as looking to re-evaluate the Committee's mission and purpose within the town.

Committee Member Roles Committee members have currently volunteered for the following roles:

- Manage requests for co-sponsorship – Amelia Klein
- Handle logistics for NHRC – Marlene Schultz (scheduling meetings only)
- Manage NHRC Facebook page and website - *no volunteers yet*
- Publicity of NHRC events - Cynthia Ganung (publicity to other community groups only), Tina Burgos (publicity with local newspapers)
- Author End of the Year Report – *no volunteers yet*
- Manage "Announcements" portion of the monthly meeting agenda – Cynthia Ganung, Julie Venables

- Lead effort to write statements on behalf of NHRC – Jennifer Howard Schroeder
- Represent NHRC in the Community Response Network - Jennifer Howard Schroeder, Cynthia Ganung, Amelia Klein, Ashok Metha, Marlene Schultz
- Liaison with Needham Public Schools - Jennifer Howard Schroeder, Julie Venables, Cynthia Ganung
- Liaison to “At My Neighbor’s Table” – Marlene Schultz
- Liaison to Diversity and Discussion Book Club – Jennifer Howard Schroeder

The Committee discussed that perhaps the student members of the group may be interested in taking on some of the open, technology-based roles.

5. NEW BUSINESS

Identification of NHRC priorities for the 2020-2021 year

The Committee discussed what the group is seeking to do, that it does not feel currently equipped to do. The Committee prepared the following specific asks to the Needham Select Board regarding the NHRC’s responsibilities:

1. Empower the NHRC to make a statement about and/or co-sponsor any event related to the [UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) without prior permission from the Select Board.
2. Bolster two-way communication by allotting a few minutes of time for the NHRC on the agenda of every Select Board meeting, including allowing a member of the NHRC to attend these meetings and provide updates to the Select Board. Additionally, the NHRC requests that a Select Board member sit in on its meetings every month, to help facilitate and streamline communication.
3. Empower members of the NHRC to help implement specific requests that come out of incidents or events such as the Needham Unites Against Racism initiative.

Julie Venables made a motion to send these three items to the Select Board. Amelia Klein seconded the motion. There was no further discussion requested. Jennifer Howard Schroeder conducted a roll call vote and the motion passed unanimously.

NHRC recommendations to the Select Board regarding the Needham United Against Racism Initiative

The Committee agreed that after the Select Board’s Listening Session, the next step is to examine issues of systemic racism within the Needham community rather than soliciting further examples of racism from members of the community. The Committee feels that action is important at this time, and

prepared the following suggestions to the Needham Select Board for actions to take in support of the Needham Unites Against Racism initiative:

1. Fast track the creation of the Community Response Network, including getting the Over Zero event back on the calendar.
2. Attack systemic racism in our community by identifying areas that need work. This could be achieved via a town equity audit by an independent third party. Another way may be assessing how groups such as the Housing Authority are operating with regard to systemic racism.
3. Empower the NHRC to develop a protocol that the committee uses to hear and respond to complaints of racism and bias.

Cynthia Ganung made a motion to send these suggestions to the Select Board. Julie Venables seconded the motion. There was no further discussion requested. Jennifer Howard Schroeder conducted a roll call vote and the motion passed unanimously.

With regards to leadership, the Committee discussed the need for a point person with whom the Select Board can communicate about the specific asks the NHRC has laid out. Tina Burgos will be this point person.

The Committee also decided that in the interim, without having one designated Chair, the group will rotate those who take on the Chair role for a shorter time (3 months). Amelia Klein will be the first temporary Chair. Marlene Schultz will set up the 2020-2021 calendar of meetings.

6. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00PM. *Respectfully submitted, Julie Venables (Recorder)*

NEXT MEETING: TBD September, 2020