

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

September 17, 2020

Amelia Klein called the meeting to order at 7:47PM virtually on Zoom.

Committee members in attendance: Jennifer Howard Schroeder, Cynthia Ganung, Amelia Klein, Ashok Mehta, Marlene Schultz, Julie Venables, Tina Burgos, Bud Schram, Kerry Hurwitch, Marcus Nelson

High School liaisons: Jared Pizzuto, Sophia Dedek

Town of Needham liaison: Katie King, Assistant Town Manager

Police liaison: Lt. Belinda Carroll

1. **OPENING & ROLL CALL** Amelia Klein called the meeting to order, reviewing the suspended open meeting laws and public participation rules via Zoom meeting. The NHRC welcomed its newest member, Marcus Nelson.
2. **APPROVAL OF JUNE AND AUGUST MINUTES** The June meeting minutes were not available at the previous meeting, so were moved for approval at the September meeting, Marlene Schultz moved to approve the June minutes, Jen Howard Schroeder seconded the motion. The approval passed unanimously with Marcus Nelson abstaining. The August meeting minutes were moved for approval. Marlene Schultz moved to approve the June minutes, Tina Burgos seconded the motion. Kerry Hurwitch, Bud Schram, and Marcus Nelson abstained from the vote. The motion passed.
3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** Three members of the community were present: Ferd Wilder, Rinaz Mala, and Noah Mertz. Ferd Wilder stated that he was interested in the NHRC, and present to listen and learn. Rinaz Mala stated that she is a Syrian Muslim refugee with two children who go to school in Needham, and it is very important to her to have a diverse committee doing this work.

4. OLD BUSINESS

Needham Response Network There is a planning committee currently working with Select Board member Dan Matthews. Marlene Schultz shared that the Over Zero training is going to be moving forward in October or November. The training will occur in a new format of three shorter sessions versus one intensive day. The local focus for Needham will be race equity. The goal of the Over Zero training as it applies to the Needham Response Network initiative is to come up with a rapid response through town government when a racist or otherwise hate crime incident occurs.

The NHRC needs to come up with case studies to review and use as simulations during the workshop.. Ashok Metha suggested using real, serious hate crimes

that have occurred within Needham such as the arson at a Needham synagogue. Jen Howard Schroeder suggested the NHRC dig into the connection with Needham schools. Cynthia Ganung suggested that the training include issues that have been raised with discrimination towards people of color in local businesses.

At My Neighbor's Table The "At My Neighbor's Table" series of events has been approved by the Select Board, so there was no need to discuss individual event approval. The next event will be held virtually on October 18, 2020, and there is widespread interest.

5. NEW BUSINESS

Select Board Working Group Two members of the NHRC were invited to be a part of the Select Board Working Group, Jen Howard Schroeder and Marcus Nelson. Katie King shared that from the recent listening session and launch of the NUARI, the Select Board felt a theme was to change overarching processes and handling of systemic racism in Needham. They also felt these changes need to be informed by the opinions of people of color. The Working Group is charged with articulating a vision statement around race equity in Needham.

Townwide Committee to Study Housing Equity There is interest in creating a committee to study housing equity in Needham. The goal would be to make fair housing more accessible in our community. There is no solid idea or ask at this time, and it may be a topic to further discuss with the Select Board.

Equal Justice Needham Noah Mertz of Equal Justice Needham (EJN) presented to the NHRC. Noah shared that Equal Justice Needham was formed in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, and has initiated a successful program called the "placard program" in Needham. The placard program creates placard for local businesses stating that all are welcome in their establishments, and they have had an overwhelmingly positive response. Equal Justice Needham is asking for the NHRC to support the initiative by raising awareness of the placard program and helping to boost the conversation around town. Jen Howard Schroeder suggested that there may be a way we could plan a community education program with ties to EJN.

Petition for Indigenous People's Day There is a petition in Needham to officially change the name of Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day. The NHRC discussed that this decision may sit with the Select Board.

6. REPORTS

None.

7. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15PM. *Respectfully submitted, Julie Venables (Recorder)*

NEXT MEETING: October 15, 2020