

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
November 19, 2020

Amelia Klein, acting chair, called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM virtually on Zoom

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

High School liaisons: Jared Pizzuto, Sophia Dedek

Town of Needham liaison: Katie King, Assistant Town Manager

Police liaison: Lt. Belinda Carroll

Not in attendance: Julie Venables, Marcus Nelson

Meeting recorder: Tina Burgos

OPENING & ROLL CALL Amelia Klein called the meeting to order, reviewing the suspended open meeting laws and public participation rules via Zoom meeting.

1. APPROVAL OF OCTOBER MINUTES

The minutes were approved as presented.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Dan Matthews of the Select Board spoke to the Committee about 40B guidelines to provide clarification and context. Chapter 40B provides zoning exemptions under certain circumstances for certain kinds of affordable housing. The 40B town document from Dan is a first draft. It has not gone to the Board of Selectmen for public discussion. Exemptions are different for towns that are above/below 10% SHI (subsidized housing inventory). In 2012, Needham was below 10% SHI and received less favorable treatment under the statute. In 2012, the Town committed to working with the statute to achieve the 10% statutory mark. Since then, Needham has achieved this 10%. Now we are at that level, where are we going in terms of 40B projects? 40B is not a complete affordable housing policy. The Select Board really wants to develop 40B projects. Dan believes going forward this should be a consultative process town wide. The document went to a number of stakeholders in town. The key responding agents are the Select Board and the ZBA. But there are many other stakeholders involved (Planning Board, School Board, HRC, NUARI, Design Review Committee). It makes sense to get everyone's input and sign off from the principal stakeholders. So the process will have some public participation and will take some time.

Jen thought this may be a good time to educate the public about what 40B is and what other housing initiatives are taking place. Dan agreed but questioned how this would be executed because the jurisdictions are a little complicated.

3. OLD BUSINESS

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S DAY

A sub-committee of Cynthia, Marcus and Amelia met with Julie Reich and Fernanda Pinto and gave them suggestions on renaming Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day. The sub-committee, along with the Diversity Initiative, took a consultative role to determine what Julie and Fernanda wanted to accomplish, keeping in mind that changing Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day is part of a larger desire to educate the community about indigenous people and their place in our world. The Select Board wants more research before they make a decision and would like a formal presentation from Julie and Fernanda. We should think about what other communities have done. Additionally, the Needham Superintendent of Schools was very receptive to possibly making the change on the school calendar.

NEEDHAM DIVERSITY SUMMIT

Marlene felt it was the best one yet. It was engaging, the presenters were incredible and it felt more intimate. The keynote was great, as were the break-out rooms. It was well orchestrated. Ashok agreed. He was impressed with the keynote speaker and the panels. He also felt it was a more interactive experience. Cynthia felt there was an intensity to the summit, which helped to increase the impact on attendees. She felt this was a good learning experience of how to get people to become involved and take next steps of action.

NUARI

For those who cannot attend, meetings are accessible via You Tube. Jen spoke about the working group, which has been charged with putting together an equity vision statement for the Town. The Town brought in a facilitator who was fantastic in helping to get discussion going. The working group went through the mechanics of putting together a vision statement and what kinds of things should be included. In addition to being forward thinking, the statement should also come up with achievable goals. The next meeting will be used to finalize vision statement. Jen is concerned that the process is taking a lot of time and that NUARI is not necessarily getting done what the community was hoping for. The feedback she has received is that community members are looking for something more tangible.

NUARI falls under the Select Board. The investigation regarding Mr. Henry is supposed to be happening at the end of the year. The person in charge of the investigation will also be going through Needham policing policy generally to make some observations. Article 17 (which Equal Justice Needham organized around) passed. How will NUARI be tackling this issue right now? Jen was also contacted by some people at EJA about 40B housing guidelines. NUARI was also hoping to tackle this issue. Housing, policing, and schools were the top three initiatives the working group wanted to address. Other items included diversity in elected positions, working with businesses in town, diversifying town staff, and neighborhood interaction.

4. NEW BUSINESS OVER ZERO

A first rapid response meeting was held. Marlene, Jennifer, Amelia, Cynthia and Ashok were in attendance. Marlene, who was on the planning board, felt the meeting went really well. All of the information presented was excellent. The frames and context presented were useful. Jen thought the meeting was really engaging, even in the small break out rooms. There was a

great diversity in the meeting (ethnic and professional backgrounds). Cynthia concurred with Jen. She felt the content was fabulous and resonated on international, national and local levels. Amelia thought the presenters did a fabulous job explaining very basic concepts.

NHRC AS A REPOSITORY FOR DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS: RECOMMENDATIONS TO SELECT BOARD

Amelia: Is there something that we can bring to NUARI; where can people in the community come to share their voice and experiences? This leads to an ongoing discussion about the HRC as a depository for discrimination complaints and recommendations for the Select Board. Katie didn't have much of an update as there has been no conclusion since the HRC's last communication with the Select Board. The HRC needs to follow up with Moe.

LIVED EXPERIENCES PROJECT

What is the perspective of the HRC in supporting the next steps of the Lived Experiences Project?

After experiences were compiled the organization prepared a report and presented to the Select Board. They also presented at the Diversity Summit. The next steps are four-fold:

- 1) Share with other groups in the community about the organization's experiences.
- 2) Promote the report they have written. They are looking for assistance with social media posting and website.
- 3) Develop a funding plan.
- 4) Present to the community.

What can be done in the schools? Is this something of interest to Jared and Sophia, particularly the social media piece? Jared and Sophia expressed a willingness to assist. What about Stay Day at Pollard? Would Jared and Sophia also be willing to communicate with high school students about the Lived Experiences Project?

Jared is working on Courageous Conversations on Race. Jared talked with his student group about possibly filming a video about what racism means to them. There is also discussion about creating a banner for students to record what they want to see happen in school (CCOR students) so it becomes a more inviting place. Sophia agreed that speaking with middle schoolers is a good idea because it's important to get these messages out to younger people. These are messages students can also bring home to their parents. Kerry expressed interest in assisting with technology. Tina is willing to help the Lived Experiences Project with their website.

The next step is to develop a plan with Beth Pinels (sp?), Jared and Sophia to mobilize students around a video.

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS

At My Neighbor's Table series is December 13, not December 6.

6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ross Donald lives at the Housing Authority; he has been a resident for 10 years. He has been denied access to the Housing Authority meetings. According to his knowledge, 25% of lowest income population in Needham is housed at the Housing Authority. This is a diverse population. Ross believes the residents at the Housing Authority should be the focus of attention as there has been active discrimination in the authority. Is it a human rights issue when residents are being denied participation? He feels the model the Housing Authority had adopted is punitive when they try to speak out.

What can the HRC do to assist? Ross was welcome to keep in touch with the HRC.

7. SELECTION OF THE NEXT CHAIR; WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Jen suggested a shared a experience for December meeting. Marlene suggested Color of Law. Bud suggested the State of Race series.

This was Amelia's last meeting as acting Chair. Is anyone willing to take on that role with support of the committee? The role as acting Chair is to develop the agenda of the meeting and gather information to prepare the committee for discussion at future meetings. HRC needs an acting Chair to move forward. What about a team approach?

Kerry welcomed the idea of taking it on as a group effort. She would be willing to share some of the responsibility. Tina is willing to help Kerry through March. Julie would also be willing to assist. Working with Jennifer and Katie is helpful regarding town issues. Cynthia and Marlene are helpful as they are involved with many groups. Bud would be willing to run the meeting and moderate. Jared and Sophia could also help to facilitate.

Thoughts about the December meeting: Take a break? Engage in an educational program? Explore ways that the HRC can become a repository for discrimination complaint proces? But is it worth spending time on this if the Select Board does not want us to pursue this?

Ultimately, the committee decided to take a break until January. In the meantime we'll think about where we want to go from here.

Bud is willing to reach out to Collette Phillips for speaker ideas. Marlene is willing to find a speaker to talk about the complaint process.

The committee decided to carve out some time in January or February to discuss the complaint process and decide whether or not the HRC has the resources to implement.

8. REPORTS

Nothing to report from Lt. Belinda Carroll.

A motion to cancel the December meeting was approved. The NHRC will reconvene in January 2021.