

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
MINUTES

October 21, 2021

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89930144310>

7:30pm - 9:00pm

In attendance: Tina Burgos, Cynthia Ganung, Amelia Klein, Marlene Schultz, Kerry Hurwitch, Bud Schram, Julie Venebles, Lt. Belinda Carroll, and Katie King.

- No minutes of June 2021 were approved as they were not ready to be distributed
- Public participation

Rinaz Mala was in attendance. Rinaz has applied for one of the HRC vacant seats.

- Diversity Book Club (Jen)

No updates on next book or meeting. The organizers were to restructure the club as it's predominantly made up of NDI members. An invitation was extended to NHRC members to attend. Expectation is that members will attend most meetings and lead at least one discussion. Tina and/or Jen will reach out to Anna for updates.

- Discrimination Complaint Process (Tina, Marlene, Julie)

The Sub-committee met to formulate a workable solution to open meeting law. Any time a sub-committee is created and assigned to do work, that sub-committee is subject to open meeting law. This has created a tension point in the development of the complaint process.

As we look for a resolution to the problem of only one member of NHRC being allowed to handle a case and avoid open meeting law, Tina met with Nichole Argo and Beth Pinals of the Resilience Network. The proposal is for NHRC to join efforts with the Resilience Network so NHRC has additional support when investigating cases.

Resilience Network will not own the process; it will be under the jurisdiction of NHRC. Resilience Network will play and advisory role only.

While not ideally what NHRC initially envisioned, is a good compromise and NHRC will be working with complementary groups of people.

Assigned case investigator does not have to work with Resilience Network only if there is a need.

Marlene: concerned that because Resilience Network is not yet in place, Select Board will not approve Discrimination Complaint Process. Katie responded that because network is a resource and does not affect the Discrimination Process, this should not be an issue. Needs to be clarification that working with the Resilience Network is not mandatory (Tina to update presentation)

Cynthia: If the case investigator communicates with less than a quorum of NHRC members, will open

meeting law not be triggered? Katie: Because a sub-committee is considered a public body, it is subject to open meeting law. One NHRC member can chat with another NHRC member in an informal conversation. Policy should stipulate that one person is in charge of a case. If one member assigned to a case can consult with, among other resources, another member of the NHRC (not a formal working group) this satisfies Cynthia's concern regarding only one person handling a case.

To confirm, the case point person will have the ability to consult with outside resources. Kerry: Does not feel like NHRC is responding to anything. Marlene: Clarified that NHRC does not move forward with a case unless it is initially discussed amongst the entire committee. Is the case appropriate for NHRC to take on? Additionally, one member of NHRC reports back to committee and NHRC may need to follow up further.

Jen: Fear of sharing sensitive information outside the NHRC circle; privacy concerns. Bud: Training needed to protect privacy. Marlene: May be an instance where NHRC has access to personal information. Could be helpful in navigating a case.

What are we trying to accomplish? Giving people a place to go with their concerns. What are the outcomes? Expectations need to be set at initial point of contact. During initial call, make it clear that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed because of public records policy. Need to get a sense of what the complainant wants as an end result.

Jen: Why would it be worth it for someone to go through this process? Julie: Point people in the right direction. Offer up next step. Marlene: Take a deep dive into what happened. Tease out issues. Was this a misunderstanding? Implement restorative justice? Hard to say until cases come through. Amelia: Put the process through a real-life case study (High Rock - complaint that 6th grade middle school divided classes into clusters; used race to create cluster groups). How would this process work? Determined this would have been appropriate for NHRC because it was a policy/process issue. Effectiveness of action due to the fact that several members of NHRC were involved.

How will we evaluate everyone with same criteria? Let complainant know that as a committee we'll decide if it falls under the NHRC jurisdiction.

Amelia: NHRC can play an important role in these issues.

Cynthia: Power of the group in working together. How can we rely on that? We want to be able to consult with people with whom we've been working. Important to find a way for us to be a resource for each other.

Needham's interpretation of open meeting law is different from that of Arlington.

This path would be helping people; place for people to be listened to; a resource available for support.

Bud: Important for committee to take this on and try; see if it works and make changes as necessary.

Cynthia: Will approve going forward with structure of one person handling complaint; get support from town and external resources; wish for a way for more complete working with other members of NHRC.

Training? Tina: Once overall process is approved by NHRC and Select Board, work out logistical details.

Vote to bring Discrimination Complaint Process to Select Board: approved by all but one dissenting.

Kerry: Shares Jen's concerns; sees this as a place to start; willing to try and tweak if necessary

Belinda: Great place to go; allow people to know their options; compare to domestic violence victims who don't know where to go/feel overwhelmed; tremendous starting point

- Indigenous People's Day (Cynthia)

Fernanda Pinto and Nick Toucan spoke at opening faculty meeting. Encouraged teachers to incorporate understanding of Indigenous Peoples into curriculum

Indigenous People's Day committee did not have enough time to plan a Needham event; instead encouraged attendance of event in Newton (Cynthia and Amelia attended)

- NDI Summit: Voices in Unity (Amelia)

Finetuning; Gary Bailey keynote speaker; Denise Garlick; Panel to share personal stories; Fireside chat with individuals connected to Needham share ideas about diversity, equity, and inclusion

Breakout sessions:

Reimagining Public Safety in Needham

Elementary Racial Literacy in Needham Public Schools

Getting Involved in Civic Engagement - League of Women Voters

Housing in Needham

LISTEN: Two-Spirit, Indigenous justice organizer, Candi Brings Plenty in conversation with

Standing Rock Water Protector Waste Win Young

What are Restorative Practices? Can they benefit Needham?

- CCOR (Jen)

Trying to figure out how to proceed. First conversation will be about policing and public safety. Early 2022 event. Housing and schools also priorities

- Citizens Police Academy (Tina)

Important for NHRC to understand what's happening with department because NHRC needs to be closely aligned with Needham Police Department to accomplish its work

- Harvest Fair (Kerry)

A lot of people from various organizations at one table. Well attended. Nice to see people in person. Handed out flyers and lawn signs. Email lists combined. NHRC should attend future events because many people don't know our committee exists. Add email addresses to NHRC list serve.

- Announcements

Co- sponsor Trans Gender Day of Remembrance on 11/20

Reschedule April meeting to 4/28/22

Vacancies - interview candidates in November; apply through Town Government website

Need to schedule meeting minute takers

It was decided that we will continue with meeting format on Zoom for now