

**Annual Town Report
FY 2021 (July 2020-June 2021)**

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

Tina Burgos (Chair)

Belinda Carroll (liaison – NPD)

Sophia Dedek (NHS)

Cynthia Ganung

Kerry Hurwitch

Katie King (liaison-SB)

Amelia Klein

Ashok Mehta

Jared Pizzuto (NHS)

Jennifer Howard Schroeder

Marlene Schultz

Bud Shram

Julie Venables

Marcus Nelson



CHARGE
Human Rights Committee
Approved August 12, 2008

Created in 1995 by the Select Board, the mission of the Human Rights Committee is to address matters pertaining to human and civil rights and problems related to thereto that may arise in the Town.

The charge of the Committee is to:

1. Advocate appreciation and respect for human and civil rights in our Town (EDUCATION);
2. Organize and/or recommend community events to constructively promote respect for human and civil rights in our Town (COMMUNITY OUTREACH);
3. Provide advice and assistance to the Town Manager, Chief of Police, and/or other Town offices in response to issues that challenge the human and/or civil rights of any individual or group in our Town (COMMUNITY RESPONSE)

NHRC LOGO



The NHRC logo design, which is universally recognized, combines the shape of a hand with that of a bird (dove). It was created by an international committee for the promotion and protection of human rights.

MEMBERSHIP

Official members of the Needham Human Rights Committee are Needham residents who volunteer to serve on the Committee. They are appointed by the Select Board.

The Committee shall consist of 12 members. When practicable, the Committee should include representatives or designees of the Needham Police Department and the Needham Public School Department (ex officio and non-voting), the Needham Commission on Disabilities, and the Needham Housing Authority. Membership should also include a representative of the local clergy, a senior citizen, a tenant of the Needham Housing Authority, a realtor, and a Needham High School student.

MEETINGS

Human Rights Committee meetings are usually held the *third Thursday* of each month at Needham Town Hall, Highland Room, 7:30-9:00 pm. During the pandemic, virtual meetings have been conducted via Zoom. These meetings were recorded and are available for viewing on the YouTube channel. Meetings are open to the public and all meeting dates and agendas are posted on the Town website 48 hours prior to the meeting. On occasion, guest speakers are invited by the Committee to share their expertise in the area of human rights. Guest speakers play an important role as resources for planning future NHRC events. The Committee welcomes all Needham residents who are interested in human rights to attend a meeting and to learn about the work of the Committee.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Organizing and sponsoring community events and educational forums related to human rights plays a major role in the work of the NHRC. Following are highlights for the Fiscal Year 2021:

*Needham Diversity Summit
November 15, 2020
ZOOM Conference*

REGISTER NOW!

Needham Diversity Initiative's 9th Annual Diversity Summit is going VIRTUAL!

November 15th / 12pm-5pm / Zoom

This year's theme is "Hate Has No Home Here - Beyond the Yard Signs"



2020 Presenter Highlights



Grab T with Nikki Turpin: Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall. Nikki joins us to discuss how to support racial justice, diversity and activism beyond the yard signs/ includes a 20 min audience Q&A.

PLUS+

HEAR Needham leaders, residents & students share their diverse journeys, **ATTEND** 8+ interactive, breakout sessions on topical issues and what's next in activism, **BE INSPIRED** by multimedia video & musical presentations and MORE..

The Needham Diversity Summit is a wonderful event that brings together community leaders, friends, neighbors, and students to explore, foster, strengthen, and celebrate Needham's diversity – of socioeconomic status, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion, ethnic identity, age and ability.

Registration to this virtual Summit is FREE at
[Needham Diversity Summit 9.0 -HATE HAS NO HOME HERE - Beyond the Yard Signs](#)

For questions email info@needhamdiversity.org

“Hate Has No Home Here - Beyond the Yard Signs” Although the event was virtual, many people thought it was the best Summit yet and found the experience engaging. The keynote speaker, panels and presenters were highly rated. The interactive break-out rooms were also highlighted by participants. Attendees felt engaged and many expressed the need to become involved in actions. The NHRC was a co-sponsor of the event. NHRC members served on the Diversity Summit Planning Committee and promoted the Diversity Summit through media sources and outreach. NHRC members also participated in workshop sessions, an integral part of the Diversity Summit program.

*At My Neighbor's Table Series
Zoom Conferences*



Oct. 18, 2020 - What Kind Of Communities Do We Want To Live In?
December 13, 2020 - What Would Our Communities Look Like If We Valued Essential Workers?
Mar. 21, 2021 – Fault Lines: Grappling with segregation in our schools

The At My Neighbor's Table events adhere to the principal that all people - regardless of social, economic or health status; gender, religion, national, racial or ethnic identity; sexual orientation, political affiliation, age, or physical ability - are deserving of respect and equity within communities. Through the process of dialogue, they create conversations that bring people together in collective learning and inquiry. The conversations foster respectful sharing, listening, and discussion about equity in our communities. Two members of the NHRC serve on the AMNT planning committee, one member chairing the Committee. Three virtual events were presented during the 2021 Fiscal Year.

Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration
Jan. 18, 2021
ZOOM Conference

"In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends."

Join us for
Needham's Celebration and Observance of
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Monday, January 18, 2021
On Zoom
10:00 AM - 11:30 AM
Zoom Link will open at 9:45 AM

Free Registration At:
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/needham-2021-dr-martin-luther-king-jr-day-celebration-tickets-133610940621>

For more information visit:
www.NeedhamDiversity.org



Sponsored by the following Needham organizations:

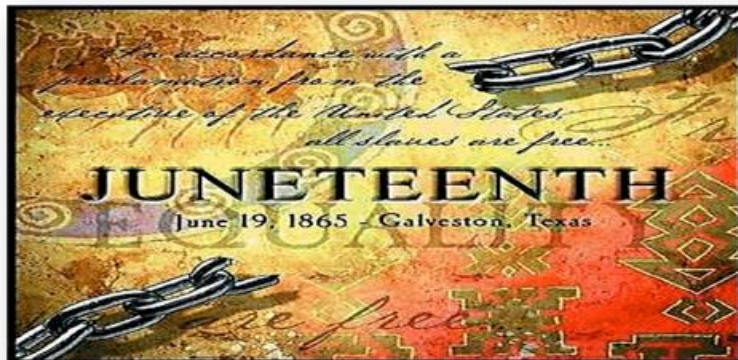
- Diversity Initiative
- Interfaith Clergy Association
- Human Rights Committee
- Public Schools and its METCO Program

This annual family friendly event celebrates the legacy and the life and achievement of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. NHRC is an on-going sponsor of the community celebration of the life and legacy of MLK Jr. The event is hosted by the Needham Diversity Initiative. Other sponsors were the Needham Interfaith Clergy Association, and the Needham Public Schools and their METCO program. This program (virtual) was rated highly by the 350+ attendees. Performer Guy Peartree portrayed the life of MLK, Jr. in the context of the civil

rights movement. The program honored the contributions of Black people in our community and

heard how residents are responding to racial injustice. Two members of NHRC serve on the board of NDI. NHRC participated in the event and promoted the MLK Day celebration through media sources.

Juneteenth
June 1-19, 2021



2021 was the first year the Needham Human Rights Committee planned and executed a formal event for Juneteenth. Due to COVID-19, we were limited to celebrating virtually. Beginning on June 1, we launched a series of Facebook posts to educate, inform, and connect with the Needham community and beyond. The celebration culminated on June 19th with a video of Marcus Nelson speaking on the significance of the Juneteenth holiday (below).

Juneteenth is a remembrance of the date in 1865 — 2½ years after Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation — when a Union general arrived in Galveston and informed Texas residents that enslaved Black people had been freed, prompting the release of tens of thousands still in bondage.

Commemorating Juneteenth is an important acknowledgment of the sacrifice of formerly enslaved Black people in this country, and a reminder of the ongoing racial justice work needed for the promise of freedom to be a reality for all of us. It's a day we commemorate the end of slavery and we honor the Black community's role fighting for their rights and making us a better nation.

Across the country, hundreds of people, of all races, nationalities and religions join hands to acknowledge the painful history and lasting systemic impact of slavery and racial injustice in the United States. Juneteenth is an opportunity to recommit ourselves to the goal of creating a more equal and just society.

In 2020, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker proclaimed June 19th to be an official state holiday. The Needham Human Rights Committee recognizes this important holiday of

independence in its continued resolve to bring about equality for all citizens of our community. We ask that you join us in observance of this pivotal moment in American history.

(NHRC statement read by select Board member Marcus Nelson in commemoration of Juneteenth.)

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In pursuing its mission, the NHRC seeks opportunities to collaborate - and develop on-going relationships - with groups in the Needham Community. Following are examples of ways the NHRC has made efforts to reach out to both official and non-official Town Committees and organizations.

NEEDHAM UNITES AGAINST RACISM INITIATIVE During the summer of 2020, the Needham Select Board launched the Needham Unites Against Racism Initiative (NUARI) in an effort to establish a framework for the community to discuss difficult issues related to racism and create strategies for dismantling systemic racism and making Needham a more inclusive and welcoming community for all. The Select Board appointed two members of the Needham Human Rights Committee to sit on this working group: Marcus Nelson and Jennifer Howard Schroeder, along with invited members of the community. NUARI met 16 times over zoom in fiscal year 2021, held community listening sessions and produced a Vision Statement, Guiding Principles and Intentional Practices which were then promulgated to all Town Committees, Departments, and community organizations for their consideration and endorsement.

<https://www.needhamma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/23259/NUARI-Vision-Guiding-Principles-and-Intentional-Practices-Adopted?bidId=>

NEEDHAM FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY The Needham Human Rights Committee continued its partnership with the Needham Diversity Initiative and the Trustees of the Needham Free Public Library in offering the community opportunities to build connections through books. The Diversity and Discussion Book Club continued to meet, hosting two exciting zoom meetings featuring the authors of the selected books.

An American Marriage by Tayari Jones - January 27, 2021. Facilitated by NDI member Gretchen Cook-Anderson, Ms. Jones shared her inspiration and insights about this important book about a marriage disrupted by the wrongful conviction of a young, Black man.

Don't Ask Me Where I'm From by Jennifer De Leon - April 22, 2021. Facilitated by NDI member Jenn Scheck-Kahn, Ms. De Leon joined the discussion to explore the life of a young high school student of color who lives in Boston but attends school in a nearby, very white suburb through the METCO program.

NEEDHAM HOUSING AUTHORITY Members of the NHRC have had on-going conversations with the Executive Director and the Resident Services Coordinator to discuss common interests and means of support. The Committee's goal is to learn about the needs of residents living in NHA units, and how well residents of Needham public housing are integrated into the Community. The Committee continues to seek candidates who are residents of the Needham Housing Authority to serve on the NHRC, and has collaborated with NHA officials in promoting resident representation on the Committee. Select Board member Dan Matthews asked

for the Committee's feedback on the 40B Housing Guidelines document that was distributed. After discussion it was decided that a subcommittee of three members would review it and write a statement to be sent to the Select Board, viewing it from a human rights perspective.

MEDIA SOURCES The NHRC has developed close links with the local media. Direct contact with editors and journalists in the past has helped the Committee promote its events and generate interest in human rights. The Hometown Weekly has consistently responded to press releases and published lead articles about Committee events in a timely fashion. Additionally, the NHRC launched its own Facebook page to publicize events and promote understanding of human rights issues in the community.

NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS Members of the Committee continued to meet with the Superintendent and Needham Public School officials and staff to discuss ways to collaborate and to share resources. The NHRC is committed to developing on-going relationships with school personnel and students. Their input is critical in the planning of educational forums which address the challenges faced by youth in our community. Dr. Gutekanst has attended many NHRC meetings and has kept the Committee informed about major initiatives and activities in the NPS, particularly updates related to the Needham Equity Report. The NHRC provides opportunities for NHS students to take on leadership roles as members of the Committee, and to take initiative in providing student participation and input in the planning of events. The Needham High School representative who serves on the Committee provides an important link to faculty and student groups.

REAL Coalition A member of NHRC serves on the School District-wide team: Race, Equity, Access & Leadership (REAL), whose purpose is to lead the work and conversations around equity in the Needham Public Schools and classrooms. The NHRC is a partner of the Coalition.

Indigenous Peoples Day Two Needham Public School students requested guidance from NHRC to create a petition to change the name of Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day in the official NPS calendar. Two NHRC members served on a planning committee along with Needham Diversity Initiative members. The students presented their idea to the Select Board and were advised to develop a proposal based on research. The planning committee worked with the students to develop their petition. The students' petition was presented at a School Committee meeting on April 27, 2021.

Voices in Unity Organized by Joanne Allen-Willoughby, director of the Needham METCO program, VIU brings together anti-racist and anti-bias groups in Needham to find ways they can support one another, and to develop a common language and understanding. The group meets monthly. Meetings are facilitated by Dr. Willoughby along with Dr. Gary Bailey, director at Simmons College. NHRC members participate in the meetings and share its mission to collectively work with the Town of Needham to combat systemic racism.

NEEDHAM COUNCIL ON AGING The co-chairs of the NHRC have corresponded with the Executive Director of the Council on Aging to plan events at the Center at the Heights to accommodate the needs of older adults. The Director has been supportive in helping the

Committee reserve dates and space at the Center to host key events. The Center staff members have generously given their time and energy in organizing and facilitating event activities.

NEEDHAM DIVERSITY INITIATIVE, Inc. The Needham Diversity Initiative (NDI) is a grass-roots, community organization of individuals who live, work, study - or whose children study - in Needham. Many are educators and have been involved with diversity training in the past (e.g., via their profession or membership in Needham's Human Rights Committee, Needham Clergy Association, or Immigration Justice Task Force). The NDI organizes on-going events, workshops, and community forums which provide opportunities for residents of Needham to learn about the diverse populations within their community, to examine diversity issues, and to build diverse coalitions. Two members of the NHRC serve on the Board of the Needham Diversity Initiative. The NHRC has been an annual co-sponsor of the Needham Diversity Summit and the Martin Luther King Day Celebration. The NHRC has co-sponsored many of the events organized by the NDI during the past year.

NEEDHAM CLERGY ASSOCIATION One member of the NHRC is an active member of the Needham Clergy Association. Both groups have shared information about their work with members of their respective organizations, and have supported and attended public events organized by each group. This past year, the NHRC was a co-sponsor of three community inter-faith virtual conferences: At My Neighbor's Table Series.

NEEDHAM IMMIGRATION JUSTICE TASK FORCE One member of the NHRC is a member of the Immigration Justice Task Force and has been an important link to the group. The NHRC has supported the activities of the IJTF and has attended and co-sponsored events they have organized. The work of the IJTF is relevant to the work of the Committee: both groups are advocates for human rights. The IJTF has been an important source of information about current issues and actions taken in relation to immigration policies, many that involve residents and employees in the Town of Needham.

HUMAN RIGHTS RESOURCE GROUPS

The NHRC has kept informed about human rights issues by connecting to regional organizations and groups who serve as resources to the Committee. These resources enhance the work of the Committee in planning educational forums, and in responding to issues that challenge the human rights of any individual or group in the Needham Community.

MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELATIONS COMMISSIONS (MAHRC) The Massachusetts Association of Human Rights and Relations Commissions is an organization of municipal and local agencies responsible for promoting human and civil rights and harmonious relationships among diverse groups at a local level. The mission of MAHRC is to provide local and statewide leadership in the areas of human rights and intergroup relationships. MAHRC accomplishes this charge by promoting networking initiatives, developing educational strategies and model programs; and serving as a resource for new and existing human rights and relations commissions.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

In meeting its charge to provide advice and assistance to the Town Manager, Chief of Police, and/or other Town offices, the Needham Human Rights Committee has supported community efforts that promote inclusivity, and has participated in community initiatives in response to acts of hate and bias.

Town Vigils



Needham Interfaith Trans Day of Remembrance Vigil - Nov. 11, 2021 This vigil was a time to remember Trans and gender non-conforming people who were killed in hate crimes over the past year. It was led by some members of the Needham Interfaith Clergy, and OUT MetroWest. NHRC was a cosponsor of the annual vigil – a powerful experience and an effective way to reach out to the community.

Stop the Hate - Vigil to support AAPI neighbors - March 20, 2021 NHRC was a co-sponsor of the vigil held on the Town Common. The vigil was planned by many community groups in response to killings in Georgia of people of Asian descent. The goal of the vigil was to both mourn those losses and acknowledge the significant rise in hate crimes committed against the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities.

Community Observance of George Floyd's Murder - May 31, 2021 Needham residents gathered while maintaining physical distance along Highland Avenue for a silent vigil in peaceful support of the protests. Mae Hardebeck, a Needham High School graduate and Needham Times reporter, stated: *Although thankfully we have not experienced any police brutality in our community, Needham is not a perfect "bubble:" anti-blackness and racism affect Needham residents on a daily basis in subtle ways, such as micro-aggressions and a lack of racial diversity that operates as de facto segregation. Racism doesn't simply exist on an individual level where we can cast members as either "racist" or "not racist" based on their actions or thoughts, but rather as a complex system in which all of us participate, whether we choose to or not.* NHRC was a co-sponsor of the vigil held on the Town Common.

Rapid Response and Resilience Training Workshops Needham Community Response Network

As part of its mission to protect the human rights of all Needham residents, the Needham Human Rights Committee has provided advice and assistance to the town and has participated in community initiatives in response to acts of hate and bias. The NHRC has been interested in developing a Community Response Network to respond to acts of bias and hate in Needham.

Needham residents, Town officials, members of the business community, and others attended a 3-session workshop intended to help formalize our community's response to hate speech and other acts of discrimination. The workshop was held online, via Zoom, on consecutive Tuesdays, November 17, November 24, and December 1, from 8:00 am – 10:30 am each day. All invitees were asked to participate only if they could commit to attending all 3 sessions.

The workshop brought together diverse interests and viewpoints to work to identify ways we can effectively prevent and respond to incidents of hate and discrimination against those who live, work and pass through Needham. The workshop was planned and co-hosted by the Select Board, the Needham Diversity Initiative, and the Needham Human Rights Committee.

The workshop was facilitated by Over Zero, a non-profit based in Washington, DC. Through trainings and workshops, Over Zero partners with community leaders, civil society, and researchers throughout the U.S. and internationally; its focus is on harnessing the power of communication to prevent, resist and rise above identity-based violence and other forms of group-targeted harm.

Attendees of the workshop received an overview of the dynamics of hate; examined recent events in the community; participated in simulations to help inform how and when to respond to hate incidents; and prepare and plan for future events. The workshop was intended to be the start of a conversation with additional work occurring after the event. Participants:

- learned about the growing frequency of identity-based violence and group-targeted harm;
- assessed the impact of past events and assessed the risks for future events in Needham;
- explored the continuum of possible responses and identified possible strategies for Needham; and
- identified potential meaningful steps forward.

Development of a NHRC Complaint Process

The Committee began work on drafting a discrimination complaint process for the Town. Drake Pussey, co-chair of the Arlington Human Rights Commission, was invited to the February meeting to present the AHRC complaint process to the NHRC, which was a robust and an interesting model for the Committee. Two members of the Select Board joined the meeting for the presentation. The Committee was very impressed with the depth and breadth of how Arlington is handling complaints and it gave the Committee the impetus to move forward. A sub-committee was appointed to begin drafting a process for NHRC.

Needham Human Rights Committee Statements



April, 2021 - Derek Chauvin Verdict

To members of our Needham Community: The members of the Needham Human Rights Committee extend their deepest sympathy to the family of Mr. Floyd and hope that his loved ones can begin to heal from this tragic and senseless loss.

The long-standing history of systemic racism in our country has created a society in which Blacks are devalued and marginalized. The guilty verdict of Derek Chauvin not only serves accountability for the killing of George Floyd, but it is a long overdue step toward justice for Black Americans.

The Needham Human Rights Committee will continue its work toward racial equity and will endeavor to “actively engage with those who feel the impact of racism most directly, seeking their input, guidance, and honoring the wisdom of experience.” -Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative

In accordance with our purpose, we strive to reaffirm the worth and dignity of every human being. Our hope is to facilitate healing and the creation of a world grounded in community building and transformative change.

Signed the Members of the Human Rights Committee

April, 2021 - April 13, 2021 Town Election

The Needham Human Rights Committee would like to congratulate Lakshmi Balachandra and Marcus Nelson on their historic election wins for Select Board members. As the first people of color to be elected to the Board, we are excited to collaborate with this diverse body to continue our mission of making Needham a more inclusive and welcoming place for all who reside, work and visit our community. The significant increase in civic engagement in this election demonstrates exciting opportunities for progress in executing NUARI's (Needham United Against Racism Initiative) recently adopted Mission statement:

Needham will be a community free of racism, racial bias, prejudice, and discrimination. Our residents, schools, businesses, organizations, and government will work together to identify barriers to racial equity and create solutions, opportunities, resources, and support for removing them.

For the first time in the history of Needham, we are experiencing what NUARI named as guiding principle 1(a): people of color will see others of color in leadership roles in government, business, the school system, and civic groups.

The business of advocating for human rights in Needham is deeply enhanced by having many different perspectives represented in analyzing any situation. Today we have more voices than ever at the table to do this work. The Needham Human Rights Committee is eager to continue to join forces with the Select Board to amplify community concerns and protect human rights.

We also want to extend our gratitude to Maurice Handel and John Bulian for their support and allyship during their tenures. Their commitment to furthering human rights initiatives has always been appreciated and will truly be missed.

Signed the Members of the Human Rights Committee