



NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

February 13, 2025

Needham Town Hall: Great Plain Room & via Zoom
7:30pm-9:00pm

Minutes

Attendance

Members Present:

Tina Burgos, Cynthia Ganung,
Jennifer Howard, Kerry Hurwitch,
Keith LaFace, Gemma Nauyokas,
Marlene Schultz
Albert Schram (Zoom),
Marie Shapiro (Zoom)

Members Absent:

Greg Dunn, Lulu Wang,
Belinda Carrol, NPD Liaison

Staff Present

Taylor Donaldson Jhurani, Assistant Director of Human Resources

Guest: John Schlittler, chief, Needham Police Dept.(Zoom)

Call to Order

Kerry Hurwitch opened the Human Rights Committee meeting at 7:35pm

Public Comment: None

The order of the agenda was changed to have the report from the Needham Police Chief John Schlittler come first.

Police Update:

Chief Schlittler said he came to the meeting to respond to a question that was raised about undocumented immigrants and what the local police are allowed to do. He said that the Needham Police cannot enforce federal laws. This is based on a 2017 ruling by the MA Supreme Court. The local police can assist federal agents with some criminal cases. They cannot enforce or hold people on the basis of a civil detainer of an undocumented person, if asked by a federal agent. Chief Schlittler said they want people to feel comfortable coming to the police dept if they are a victim of a crime or want to report one, without fear of being held. There is a big difference in a criminal case when there is a judicial warrant. They can go anywhere and the NPD assists. The NPD has no obligation to report a person's status if it comes out in a situation like driving without a license. It is only relevant when there is a serious crime like a violent crime or human trafficking. Federal agents check with the local police.



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Marlene raised a question about ICE entering Houses of Worship. The Chief said they can enter if they have a judicial warrant. If an ICE agent shows up at some place in the community, people can check with the NPD. Chief Schlittler will send us information about this policy. The NPD has a liaison to Needham's Housing and is in contact with Supt. Gutekanst about the Needham Public Schools policies.

Meeting Minutes for Approval

Marlene made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from January 16, 2025. Keith seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously.

Report on the MLK Day Program - Cynthia

The MLK Day program was held on Monday, 1/20/25 at the Needham High School Auditorium, 10:00-11:30 am. Refreshments were served at 9:30am. Thanks to all the HRC members who helped with picking up the food and beverages and serving it. We were grateful to the School Dept. and the Town for timely snow removal which made it possible to have the event that day. There was a large turnout of a diverse group with many families and children in attendance. HRC members commented that all the performances were beautiful. They thought it was good not to have a keynote talk which made it easier for all the kids and families who were there. One improvement would be to have more publicity. People appreciated being able to work with the Needham Diversity Initiative. Copies of the MLK Day program were shown to the members.

Immigration Forum - Jennifer

Event was on 1/27/25 at 7:30pm at the Center at the Heights, Around 120 attended in person and 36 on Zoom. The speaker, Immigration Lawyer Heather Yountz gave an engaging talk which included a great amount of information and also her personal experiences. The presentation by the Needham High School students - Students Teaching Instruments to Create Community Harmony (STITCCH) was inspiring and humanized the topic. Heather answered questions from the audience and talked with people after the presentation.

Town Update -Taylor

Taylor said the town will have "Know Your Rights" (KYR) cards available at town places like the Library, Hospital, Council on Aging, Park & Recreation and Health Dept. They will be in Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Russian, Mandarin.

School Update - Gemma

Gemma reported that the Social Policy Action Club and the Queer Student Union are working on a way to observe the March 31 "Trans Day of Remembrance". Gemma was asked to tell the sponsors that the NHRC would be available for support, if asked. Some members mentioned a Jan. 30, 2025 letter from Supt. Gutekanst to the Needham Public Schools Community that expressed concern about students and families who might be affected by government statements about deporting immigrants. The schools have a policy and are training staff about how to respond to ICE and how to protect students.



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Responding to attacks on DEI - discussion and action

Taylor said the town is monitoring what is happening and its impact on the town and the schools. Members thought it was important to state our support. We are concerned about the impact of the executive orders on many groups and all that is being lost. We discussed writing a public statement to show our support of everyone's rights, reiterating the protected groups. We would ask the Select Board to sign on to the statement and possibly others. Kerry and Keith will write the statement.

Vote: Marlene made a motion that we approve having Kerry and Keith write a statement for NHRC, seconded by Bud and approved unanimously.

NRN-CRC meeting on Feb. 19

Cynthia reported that the Community Response Committee (CRC) of the Needham Resilience Network (NRN) will be discussing the impact of the executive orders on groups in the town, including immigrant, trans and BIPOC communities and to consider responses.

Potential Future Program on Housing

We need a speaker, possibly someone from GBIO or CHAPA. Maybe it could be held before Town Meeting and look for a way to include different points of view about affordable housing. Keith said there is a new group "Abundant Housing".

Disability Film Series

Sponsored by the Needham Community Education (NCE) and the Needham Community Education Foundation (NEF). Feb. 11 film on Autism. Next films are March 12 (Right to Read) and April 3 The Disrupters). Tina said the film on Autism was well attended. She wondered if there is a way to create more town wide support for the CPAC group. One concern expressed was whether the businesses in town could be more inclusive, such as having accommodations for people who are neurodiverse. Keith said there is a proposal to have a new building at the Charles River Center that would house people with disabilities, with possible funding from the Community Preservation Committee.

Other Business

Inquiry about Needham's work on housing from a Newton rabbi. Marlene will talk with him. Community Conversations about Race. Planning another program. Main issue is marketing. Commission on Disabilities - Taylor said they would like to connect with the HRC. League of Women Voters. Tina was invited to a LWV meeting to tell them about the HRC programs. The LWV is trying to include a more diverse group. There is a LWV group at



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Needham High School. It is difficult to spread our networks. There might be some ways that the HRC can work with the LWV.

Announcement.

The Needham Diversity Initiative will have a stand out on Saturday, Feb. at the Needham Heights Common with the theme of being an inclusive community. Participants will hold lawn signs with this theme.

Adjournment

Marlene made a motion to adjourn the Human Rights Committee meeting. Keith seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9pm.

Submitted by Cynthia Ganung, Recorder

Upcoming meetings are scheduled for:

- April 17, 2025
- May 15, 2025
- June 12, 2025* (3rd Thursday falls on Juneteenth)

No regularly scheduled meetings in July and August.