

Needham Human Rights Committee
January 17, 2019
Highland Room, Town Hall

Attendance: Jennifer Howard Schroeder (Co-Chair), Christina Mathews (Co-Chair), Cynthia Ganung, Ashok Mehta, Lt. John Kraemer, Jared Pizzuto, Nadaa Ali, Julie Venables, Marlene Schultz, Kerry Hurwitch, Bud Schram
Absent: Amelia Klein

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair Jennifer Howard Schroeder at 7:35PM.

1 . Public participation

Liz Lee, Citizens for Needham Schools – Liz came to inform the HRC about the Citizens for Needham Schools, and share the new mission of the group. The Citizens for Needham Schools is a community group that works to connect families, schools, and the community to achieve the best education for Needham kids.

The Citizens for Needham Schools is trying to facilitate the sharing of information between citizens and schools. They publish 2-5 newsletters/yr. and take salient points from events like school committee meetings to share.

They are trying to cast a wider net of parents and are following the biggest issues in the schools right now (Equity Audit, Williams School/school rebuilding projects, full day K). They would welcome the chance to work with the HRC.

Gerry Rovner, Chair of Needham Area Immigration Task Force – Gerry came to share the Immigration Task Force's mission with the HRC and welcome members to participate in their committees or receive their newsletter. The Immigration Task Force has committees that work in many different areas, including legislative, wage theft, the safe communities bill, and resettle together.

Gerry encouraged public action for immigration issues beyond outrage, and offered to support the HRC in similar initiatives.

2. Minutes from December 21, 2018 meeting were approved unanimously, as presented.

3. Old Business

Needham High Grant – Ashok Mehta reported that Tom Denton was able to secure the grant that he was seeking with the help of the letter from the HRC. Now, Tom Denton and others will plan how to use the grant to apply it to the Equity Audit and the HRC will learn how it can be of service in this plan.

Book Club – There were 14-15 attendees at the most recent book club, and it went well. The next book club will be held on March 14, 2019.

REAL Coalition – Jen Howard Schroeder and Christina Mathews to meet with Mary Lammi to get an update on where this stands.

School Committee/Budget – The HRC discussed working to put together a comment ahead of the school committee meeting to see that Equity Audit recommendations are being implemented.

Julie Venables made a motion for the following: The HRC will submit written comments to the school committee suggesting that some of the budget go towards the Equity Audit, specifically for the funding of implementation of the recommendations, and oversight of that implementation. Cynthia Ganung seconded the motion and the vote passed unanimously.

STA Day – The HRC determined that it cannot participate this year, but interested in continuing participation in future years.

4. New Business

Discussion of Spring Events the HRC would like to host:

- Programming in conjunction with school Equity efforts. The HRC may want to host something like an update, “The Equity Report: One Year Later?” type of program. This could look like a town hall meeting, open to parents and community at large. The goal would be to provide a forum to hear from the REAL Coalition about what is happening and for the district to hear from the community what ongoing concerns exist.

Timing would probably be April after the vacation week.

This event would give people an opportunity to voice their concerns and an idea of how best the schools can communicate Equity Audit updates. Perhaps the HRC would collect questions ahead of the meeting. Ideally, students would be involved in this programming as well

- Listening sessions. The HRC held an initial discussion on what “listening sessions” may look like in the community. The goal may be small for 2019, of just having two sessions, and telling community members that this is a pilot program. The sessions may be held in community spots with a specific population represented (like the senior center) or general spot like the Library.

Outstanding questions to answer on this programming include: What topics might the HRC cover in the listening sessions? What will the HRC do with this information?

5. Reports

Town Issues (Lt. Kraemer)

Another instance of graffiti at the high school. No updates since school has been back in session after December break. The school has been working on it.

Needham High School (Jared)

There was an announcement of the new graffiti incident.
The one day program is coming up on Wednesday, January 30.

Adjournment: 9:15pm

Julie Venables, Recorder