

**Needham Human Rights Committee
Minutes
February 27, 2020 - 7:30pm
Great Plain Room - Town Hall**

Committee members in attendance: Cynthia Ganung, Kerry Hurwitch, Amelia Klein, Christina Mathews, Jared Pizzuto, Julie Venables

Committee members absent: Jennifer Howard, Ashok Mehta, Marlene Schulz, Bud Schram, Police liaison – Lt. Belinda Carroll

Guest: Sophia Dedek, Needham High School Student

The meeting was called to order by co-chair Christina Mathews at 7:30 pm.

Minutes:

Minutes from Dec 19, 2019 NHRC meeting were approved (with addition of recorder's name); Minutes from January 16, 2020 NHRC meeting were approved.

Public participation - none

Old Business:

- **Program with Needham SEPAC** – The Needham Special Education Parent Advisory Council is hosting a film entitled “Intelligent Lives” about the empowerment of individuals with intellectual disabilities. SEPAC asked the NHRC to be a cosponsor of the event. The Committee voted unanimously to be a co-sponsor. The event will be held on March 25 at the Needham Public Library.
- **Meeting with Tom Denton** at NHS. Ashok is currently abroad and will contact Tom when he returns to schedule a meeting.
- **Diversity and Discussion Book Club**. NHRC will lead a discussion of the book “Educate” on June 10. Named one of the 10 best books of the year by the New York Times Book Review: “An unforgettable memoir about a young girl who, kept out of school, leaves her survivalist family and goes on to earn a PhD from Cambridge University.” Kerry Hurwitch and possibly Julie Venables will lead the book discussion to be held at the Library.
- **Pollard STA Day - May 20** Students Taking Action to make a difference for 8th grade. Cynthia and a second volunteer (needed) will facilitate a workshop for the students. A suggested format is to present a 10 minute *documentary* “*The Story of Human Rights*” produced by Youth for Human Rights. Jared will check his schedule to see if he could co-lead the workshop session.

- **Community Resilience Building One Day Training - Friday, March 27, 8:30-4, Town Hall** The idea of a “community response program” was first introduced to the Town of Needham at a community forum organized by the NHRC on May 17, 2018. The forum explored types of efforts or programs that would enhance Needham’s ability to respond to incidents of hate and bias that happen in the Town. The well attended event included members from the League of Women Voters, Needham Diversity Initiative, Temple Beth Shalom Social Justice Committee, Superintendent Dan Gutekanst, Rep. Denise Garlick, and 12 community members. Participants of the forum expressed support for further discussion about a collaborative model that would be most effective in the Town of Needham.

Since that meeting, the NHRC has worked diligently to gather information about community response programs. A sub-committee reviewed models of “Rapid Response” initiatives in near-by communities, with information compiled from news and social media sources, and from first hand communication with officials affiliated with Rapid Response programs in those communities. A key finding was that effective programs were developed through collaboration with official task forces and community-based groups.

The NHRC partnered with the Needham Diversity Initiative to further explore ways to bridge communication between groups, and amongst members of the broader community. They met with a representative from Over Zero, an organization that works within communities to build “relational infrastructure.” NHRC shared their findings with Town leadership and proposed a “community response network” for communication, including key Needham stakeholders. A series of intensive meetings were held during the past two months with Kate Fitzpatrick, the Town Manager.

The NHRC is grateful for the steps taken by Kate Fitzpatrick and an organizing committee to host a day-long workshop for Needham residents, Town officials, members of the business community and others *to help formalize our community’s response to hate speech and other acts of discrimination*. The workshop will be held on Friday, March 27, 8:30-4:30 pm at the Needham Free Library. The workshop is co-hosted by the Select Board, the Needham Diversity Initiative, and the Needham Human Rights Committee. The workshop will be facilitated by Over Zero. “Attendees of the workshop will receive an overview of the dynamics of hate; briefly examine recent events in the community; participate in contextually informed simulations that will illumine how and when to respond to hate incidents; and prepare and plan for future events. The workshop is intended to be the start of a conversation with additional work occurring post-event.”

- **REAL Coalition (Needham Race Equity Access Leadership) Meeting – March 6**
Jen will try to attend the meeting if her schedule permits. Others present at the meeting were unable to attend the day meeting.

New Business

- **Event dispelling myths of colorblindness** The Committee would like to organize an event in May as a follow-up to Dan Gutekanst's post on the NPS website *No, I am not color blind*. A suggestion was made to partner with the REAL Coalition. The purpose of REAL is to implement the goals of the NPS work on racial equity, (based on the March, 2018 Equity report). Members are teachers, administrators, students, parents and community members. Other possible resources are the Superintendent's Office, Diane Simmons, and Mary Lammi. Further discussion about an event will take place at the March meeting.

Reports

- **MLK Day Celebration** (Cynthia) Thanks to NDI, NHRC and everyone who made this year's Needham MLK Day program an inspiring celebration of the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. Over 300 people came together at the Pollard Middle School for a spirited program with music, dance, poetry and reflections. It was a good to see such a diverse group of performers and attendees, including many families, children and youth. There were positive comments about the refreshments which the NHRC provided. Five NHRC members were at the program. Jared, Ashok and Cynthia (who took the lead once again) helped with the refreshments. Next year we will remember to bring the NHRC display and maybe the committee will write a statement to share during the program.
- **Interfaith Pot Luck Dinner and Conversation about Restorative Justice** (Cynthia & Amelia) The seventh of a series of potluck conversation dinners around the theme: "Conversations at My Neighbor's Table" took place on Sunday, February 9, 2020 from 5:30-7:30 pm at Temple Beth Shalom. Participants learned about [Restorative Justice: What it is and how it can work](#) - including ways it is being used in Needham. Special Guests were: Dr. Rachel King, Title IX Coordinator, Institutional Planning, Curry College; Dr. Jennifer Balboni, Professor of Criminal Justice, Curry College; Officer Adrienne Anderson, Needham Public Schools Resource Officer. Over 100 people participated, many first time attendees at the series including NHS, Olin and Babson College students, and visitors from surrounding communities. NHRC was a sponsor of the event. Marlene led the Potluck Planning Committee (for the third time!) and was instrumental in facilitating the evening activities.
- **Town Issues** – Nothing to report

- **Needham Schools** – Nothing to report.
- **Needham High School** (Jared) Courageous Conversations were held in all classes. A Feb. 10 workshop was offered during a half-day school schedule.
- **2019 NHRC Annual Report** (Amelia) Members received a copy of the FY 2019 NHRC annual report outlining the work and the efforts of the NHRC in meeting its mission. The report covers the period July 1, 2018-June 30, 2019 and will be published as part of the Annual Town Report.

Announcements

- **Two Open NHRC Positions** Sophia Dedek submitted a formal request to the Select Board to be a student representative (along with Jared Pizzuto) on the Committee. Renaz Mala, a Needham resident, has indicated an interest in - and will attend - the March 19 NHRC meeting to learn more about the work of the Committee.

- **Upcoming events in the Town**

Feb. 29 – Community Interfaith Discussion, **Islamic Center of Boston** – Dr. Celene Ibrahim, Guest speaker and author of One Nation, Indivisible 3:00-5:00 pm

March 12 – Diversity & Discussion Book Club, Guest speaker and author Grace Talusan – The Body Papers **Needham Library** 7:30 pm

April 1 - League of Women Voters event with Chief Justice Margaret Marshall, **Temple Beth Shalom** 7:30 pm

- **Needham Housing Authority Report - Jan. 2020** The Needham Times recently published an article about residents of the Needham Housing Authority. The article reported that access to the most basic necessities - food, transportation, and shelter - are the most pressing issues for residents living in Needham Housing Authority (NHA) apartments. Information was based on results from a recently completed survey conducted by the Needham Department of Public Health and Human Services, which also identified neighbor-to-neighbor conflicts, social isolation, and drug-use among common concerns. A request was made that the Committee review the original document. Christina will send the official report to members.

Upcoming meeting dates and recorders:

March 19 (Jared)	May 21 (Jen)
April 16 (Julie)	June 18 (Bud)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 pm.

Recorder – Amelia Klein