

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

AGENDA

June 18, 2020 – 7:00pm

ZOOM Meeting

In attendance: Christina Mathews, Marlene Schultz, Amelia Klein, Cynthia Ganung, Jen Howard Schroeder, Julie Venables, Sophia Dedek, Ashok Mehta, Kerry Hurwitch, Jared Pizzuto

Katie King, Town of Needham liaison

Tina Burgos, prospective member

Sandy Cincotta, Town of Needham

Guests: Monique Harrington, Needham resident

Anna Giraldo-Kerr, Needham Free Public Library Trustee, SEPAC,
Citizens for Needham Schools & Needham Diversity Initiative

Rinaz Mala Mohamed, Needham resident

Christina Mathews called the meeting to order at 5pm via zoom and did a roll call for attendance.

1. Approval of minutes from June 2, 2020 meeting.
2. There was no public participation beyond introductions.
3. Old Business
 - Marlene and Amelia updated the committee on the next “At My Neighbor’s Table” event 6/24 at 6:30pm via zoom. (This is the 8th). The topic is “unpacking structural racism”. There has been a very robust registration despite virtual nature of the event—90 participants signed up in 2 days! High school students from Courageous Conversations will be involved. Several NHRC members are serving as “table leaders” in break out rooms for the event. Two presenters who are experts, both from Families Organizing for Racial Justice in Newton. Most of the time will be for conversation.
 - Rotation of NHRC Leadership, nominations needed for 2020-2021: Current NHRC co-chairs reiterated that they were unable to continue serving in the chair positions for the Committee. The Committee engaged in a long discussion about the need for other members to take on the Chair role. The Committee discussed at length how the duties of the Chair could be broken up into smaller tasks that Committee members could take on to relieve some of the responsibilities of the Chair. While several members expressed a willingness to take on some of the smaller tasks, no members agreed to take on the role of Chair. Within this discussion, many members expressed uncertainty about the role of NHRC going forward, whether our charge is still accurate and what

the relationship between the Committee and town Select Board actually is. There are community members who would be interested in serving but for the impression that the NHRC has no autonomy. Suggested that we focus on our real “advisory” role to the Select Board instead of co-sponsoring so many events. Maybe we should be re-writing our mission to focus on ideas like the rapid-response network. Whether we stay a committee or try and become a commission we will still need leadership. The committee decided to break up the duties/jobs that usually fall to the chairs and have individual members commit to particular tasks. Christina and Jen will create the list of tasks.

5. New Business

- Meeting with Town Manager and Select Board Chair: Jen and Christina reported that we had the meeting with Kate Fitzpatrick, Katie King, Moe Handel, and Matt Borelli. Gesture by Select Board to open channels of communication between Select Board and NHRC. Katie King will facilitate communication. Katie King reported the Select Board is interested in hearing from the NHRC about how to engage the community in discussions about race and discrimination in town. The Town is working on a way to move forward. Select Board said NHRC are “boots on the ground” where community members may feel safe to come and report problems. This is valued by the Select Board. There is still no plan or protocol for what to do with reports. Select Board open to exploring what we can do next. Select Board recognizing there are incidents happening in town and value NHRC. Moe Handel said he promised at Town Meeting to have a community conversation for July around race and policing in Needham. They are looking for recommendations from the NHRC. Chief is very interested in having these community conversations.
 - We will put together recommendations for the Select Board regarding the community forum for July 21.
 - Katie King reported Select Board looking for advice about structuring the community forum. Fielding questions largely about the police, but expecting it would be broader. Select Board wants to know what we are hearing about what people’s concerns are: more specific to police chief? An additional statement on general racism?
 - What was the need to spend more money for guns and additional police officers? If the gap is in mental health services, why is the need being met with more police officers as opposed to other professionals?
 - Chief Schlittler looking to explain “community policing”
 - Natick United did a community forum on policing, perhaps is a model that included community survey of some sort.

- Should we have another meeting to address these recommendations? Or could we do them by email? Public meeting laws prohibit “deliberations”.
- Katie heard desire to learn why the extra money was spent, what partnerships the police have, and a community survey. She will bring to the Select Board. They will probably also like to hear what that survey would look like. Katie will let us know if we need to have more discussion/another meeting.

Marlene asked about scheduling next NHRC meetings. Sandy Cincotta informed the committee they should be scheduled one at a time because of the zoom permission issues.

6. Reports

- Town Issues (Belinda & Christina). Christina reported that we all need to be aware of the public health aspects of large gatherings and protests. If members hear of things happening, please alert the Board of Health.
- Needham High School (Jared). No report.
- Needham Schools— Dan Gutekanst was going to come to the meeting when it was scheduled for 5, but could not make it at the later time. However he is looking forward to working together in the coming months.

7. Meeting adjourned at 8:30pm.

. Announcements

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Howard Schroeder