

DRAFT
NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
December 8, 2016

Chair Jennifer Howard called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm in the Highland Room of the Needham Town Hall.

Committee members in attendance: Abdul Cader Asmal, Barry Ehrlich, Cynthia Ganung, Jennifer Howard Schroeder (chair), Kerry Hurwitch, Lt. John Kraemer, Jo-Anne Coffey-McCormick, Matt Schroeder, Amelia Klein, Ashok Mehta, Bud Schram and Marlene Schultz (vice-chair)

This was an emergency meeting and did not follow the typical meeting format. No attendance was recorded, but attendees are identified above. There was no public participation. The focus of the discussion was on creating a solidarity statement, the role of the Human Rights Committee, and ways we can distribute our message.

Jennifer spoke by phone with Rep. Denise Garlick on December 5, 2016 to discuss ways we can work together to build a common ground regarding a campaign around human rights. She noted she would like to use a model similar to the suicide prevention plan currently in place; a plan that would send one message, involve many voices, and coordinate efforts. It would be an opportunity to frame various rights through a human rights lens. Representative Garlick reported she would like Needham citizens to be upstanders rather than bystanders. She also discussed the possibility of the Human Rights committee creating a float for the upcoming Fourth of July Parade.

There has been no luck in connecting with Selectmen Marianne Cooley. Selectmen John Bulian did note that he did not see the letter sent to their most recent meeting. We discussed the need to identify better ways to communicate with the selectmen. It was deemed that the selectmen do not seem to be planning to make a statement. As a result, we, The Human Rights Committee should make a statement. There was a discussion about our mandate, given that we are to be an advisory committee to the selectmen. We determined that if we are to make a statement it should be a non-judgmental, objective observation that identifies what human rights are, why we should care about human rights, and ways we can stand together in solidarity. The selectmen meet the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month. As a committee we would like them to make a statement about Needham being a "safe place." At the same time, we realize we need to ask them to take this under advisement, and hope they will endorse it as their own.

It was determined that between now and next week we would draft a statement that we will ask the selectmen to adjust and use as they see fit, or simply allow us to put it on the Human Rights website.

Abdul suggested we create a non reactionary statement that could be done in collaboration with other local towns, possibly all Norfolk county towns. It was recommended we start with a Needham statement and then aim to include other communities.

Various local solidarity events centered on symbolic gestures to bring communities together were discussed. Belmont had a non-political, non-partisan stand up for safety and civility "hands around the pond" event to stand up against discrimination. World of Wellesley did a similar even last Sunday. Brookline held a town wide vigil November 15, 2016. During our regular meeting, on Dec. 15, 2016, we will discuss the possibility of an interfaith vigil on January 20, 2017, Inauguration Day. Cynthia has more information.

Barry introduced the idea of generating a “house dialogue” event to prompt discussion around ways to generate trust; to break down walls and create relationships. It was noted it may be possible to tap into housing and high school groups also interested in such an event. The Human Rights Committee and local clergy did this years ago. Marlene was involved with the event and can provide additional information.

It was recommended we break into subgroups: 1. A statement committee 2. A visual symbolic idea committee. 3. A small group discussions committee.

Matt Schroeder reported on the state of the high school since the election. There was much turmoil the day after the election. Much calmer now. The principal sent a statement of solidarity to the school community. Individuals looking for a statement felt heard and supported. There was no significant parent response.

We identified various ways to get our message out to the greater community. There is some concern that even individuals that know a great deal about Needham committees and happenings have little or no idea about the work our committee is doing. It was suggested we could: 1. Create a Face book page 2. Create a twitter account and or 3. Update our brochure. The committee is relying on Kerry to start the work on the technology portions of this work. There was great discussion about social media policies. Marlene made a motion to notify the selectmen about our social media intensions and ways we will promote our statement once it is generated. Bud seconded the motion and all were in favor.

We identified Marlene, Barry and Jen as volunteers to write up a statement about Needham being a welcoming safe place. Amelia agreed to take charge of the Human Rights Committee update to be published in the upcoming town report.

Chair Jennifer Howard reviewed existing and upcoming work. We currently have the follow up program on Islam, we are collaborating on human trafficking and we have Immigration taskforce work. We are now adding Denise Garlick's campaign idea, work with the library on Islam and town reads, efforts to engage the school in human rights work, and the generation of a statement.

Meeting adjourned at 9:20pm.

NEXT MEETING: THURSDAY, December 15, 2016 7:30 PM. Recorder: Barry

Respectfully submitted,

JoAnne McCormick (Recorder)