

**Needham Human Rights Committee
Minutes
September 14, 2017 7:30pm
Highland Room, Needham Town Hall
Recorder: Matt Schroeder**

The Town of Needham's Human Rights Committee strives to reaffirm the worth and dignity of every human being. The diversity of our community is embraced and celebrated through the promotion of good will and respect for all.

Welcome to new NHRC member Daniel Rubin!!

Jennifer Howard Schroeder called the meeting to order at 7:30pm in the Highland Room, Needham Town Hall.

Committee members present: Abdul Cader Asmal, Jennifer Howard Schroeder (chair), Amelia Klein, Bud Schram, Matt Schroeder, Ashok Mehta, Dan Rubin

Police Liaison: Lt. John Kraemer

Committee members absent: Marlene Schultz, Cynthia Ganung, Kerry Hurwitch

Guests: Dr. Daniel Gutekanst, Needham Superintendent of Schools

1. The Committee unanimously approved the minutes of the May 18 and June 15, 2017 meetings.
2. Public participation: None.
3. Report from Dr. Gutekanst: Dr. Gutekanst took a moment to recognize two significant losses to the Needham community over the summer, one student and one teacher. Dr. Gutekanst reported a positive opening of schools with teachers eager to start the new year. There was an incident at Mitchell Elementary where racist graffiti was found in the boys' bathroom. Police were notified and the Mitchell Principal met with staff, parents and children about the incident. An assembly was held for 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders, the kindergarteners, 1st and 2nd graders had discussions in their classrooms with their teachers. Dr. Gutekanst also updated the Committee on Equity Consultant, Christine Robinson's work in the district. She is still reviewing practices and expects to have a report ready for the December School Committee meeting. Dr. Gutekanst will share this report once complete. The committee expressed interest in getting ideas from the consultant for programming that could be done in town talking about how to talk to children about race, similar to one done by the Needham Diversity Initiative a couple of years ago. There was discussion about getting teachers and administrators the information they need to be prepared to talk with students about these incidents as they happen. Dr. Gutekanst and Matt plan to meet soon to talk about engaging the high school students around human rights issues. Dr. Gutekanst offered to assist Matt in connecting with Mr. A at the high school.
3. Old Business
 - NHRC 2017 committee elections: The Committee voted to re-elect Jennifer Howard Schroeder as Chair and Marlene Schultz as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

- Update about community potluck dinners: Jennifer and Marlene attended a meeting at the end of August about planning another community dinner around discussion of race topics. The dinner will be postponed until after January, to accommodate a busy programming schedule this fall, including a similar potluck event being held in September at the Presbyterian church, co-sponsored by Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries (much like the event held last spring).
- Summer book read in collaboration with the Needham Library: *In the Country We Love*, Diane Guerrero: Program has been a success, all of the copies of the book purchased by the library were taken out. Amelia reported she attended one of the discussions and enjoyed it. There will be a guest speaker to close out the series of discussions. Jennifer will co-lead a discussion on September 24. Ashok is still looking for an additional committee member to co-lead the last discussion on September 26 as he will be out of town.
- Committee membership : The Committee enthusiastically welcomed new member Dan Rubin to the membership. There are still two open positions. All members encouraged to seek members. Dan suggested maybe getting the library to host a “human rights” display that might help raise interest—maybe in December, which is human rights awareness month. Committee also considering trying to get information into the Times again. There is a meeting coming up of the Needham Social Action Network, which grew from some of the activism last fall. Jennifer will ask at that meeting if anyone is interested.

5. New Business

- Diversity Summit: November 18. Amelia reported there will be a guest speaker and a panel discussion, representing diverse backgrounds in Needham. Kemp Harris, a musician will be performing. True Story Theater group will also be performing and facilitating discussion in the afternoon.

The Committee voted to co-sponsor this event as it has in the past.

- New England Innocence Project: case study Sean Ellis: Jennifer reported that she was approached over the summer by Joined In Action, which is bringing the New England Innocence Project to Needham this October to talk about their work, in particular about a case involving a man named Sean Ellis who had been a student in Needham Public Schools in the 1980s. Mr. Ellis has recently been released from prison and granted a new trial after serving over 20 years for a crime proclaims he did not commit. Mr. Ellis is currently waiting to hear if he is going to be re-tried. The purpose of the event is both to draw attention to the equity challenges in the criminal justice system and also Mr. Ellis’ case in particular. Joined in Action was seeking co-sponsorship from NHRC. After much discussion, the Committee voted to decline to co-sponsor the event despite its general support for the work of the New England Innocence Project, because members were concerned about appearing to support the specific case to be presented.
- NHRC 2017 subcommittees: tabled to next meeting.
- Program ideas for 2017-2018: tabled until next meeting.

6. Reports

- Town Issues: Lt. Kraemer reported there were no new town issues, aside from the incident at Mitchell School, which is still under investigation.
- Needham High School: Matt reported he is meeting with the leaders of human rights based student clubs at the high school. This is in an effort to promote higher attendance by students at Committee sponsored events as well as to gain a better sense of how students are perceiving human rights at NHS.
- Massachusetts Association of Human Rights Committees: Jennifer reported she attended the September meeting of this group. The MAHRC is working on a master list of all “human rights” groups in Massachusetts. Meetings are in Winchester, monthly on Friday mornings. Any NHRC members interested are welcome to attend.
- Framingham based immigration legal team. No report at this time.
- Jennifer reported she has a meeting scheduled for October 2nd with Representative Denise Garlick to follow up on earlier efforts to engage the community around “civil discourse”.

7. Announcements

Next meeting: Thursday, October 19, 2017, 7:30-9:00pm

Highland Room Town Hall

Recorder: Amelia

2017-2018 NHRC meeting dates

October 19

November 16

December 21

January 18

February 15

March 15

April 26

May 17

June 21