

DURHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2022
3:00 PM
Council Chambers – Durham Town Hall

Members Present: Council Chair Katherine (Kitty) Marple, Administrator Todd Selig, Business Manager Gail Jablonski, Dr. Janet Perkins-Howland, The Rev. Richard Belshaw

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Nadine Petty, UNH Chief Diversity Officer; Rachel Gasowski, Parks & Recreation Director

I. Call to Order

Chair Marple called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM and introductions of those present were made.

II. Land Acknowledgment Statement

The Rev. Richard Belshaw read the Durham, New Hampshire Land, Water, and Life Acknowledgment Statement:

The town of Durham, New Hampshire wishes to acknowledge the spiritual and physical connection maintained by the Pennacook, Abenaki and Wabanaki peoples to N'dakinna (homeland), aki (land), nibi (water), lolakwikak (flora) and awaasak (fauna). New Hampshire has been home to these Indigenous people for thousands of years. The residents of Durham acknowledge the ongoing hardships endured by our Indigenous neighbors after the loss of their unceded homelands which we now steward and we will work to foster relationships to support the well-being of Indigenous people who carry forward the traditions of their ancestors.

III. Approval of Minutes

January 13, 2022

Chair Marple noted that she had sent a non-substantive change along to Jennie Berry.

Chair Marple MOVED to approve the meeting minutes of January 13, 2022, as amended. The motion was SECONDED by Dr. Janet Perkins-Howland and PASSED unanimously, 5-0.

IV. Discussion with Nadine Petty, UNH Chief Diversity Officer, regarding what issues UNH has been working with regarding human rights matters on campus

Dr. Petty said she would be talking about some of the overall concerns expressed by UNH community members. She said that one of the major initiatives her office has been and will continue to work on is diversity for faculty, students, and staff. She said that although diversity has not been high, it has been improving and a diversity hiring framework has been put in place. In addition, her office and other UNH offices have been working with admissions on various recruiting initiatives to address concerns, including:

- Bringing students to campus with unrepresented identities. Data shows that students apply at higher rates to UNH than they actually choose as their final institution.
- Retention of faculty and staff in general, and those of color in particular. An informal faculty and staff of color network has been created intended to build community whereby interested individuals can sign up to participate.
- Retention of lower income and first-generation students relating to affordability of the institution and financial aid packages.
- Challenges nationwide with rising mental health, anxiety, and depression in students, which all speaks to the need of student support in general and also support in the institution's clinical and counseling areas. The campus does not have any staff of color in its psychological counseling services which is troubling, particularly when it is tied to identity. Dr. Petty said UNH is becoming more competitive with other institutions in order to attract councilors.

Dr. Petty said there are many other types of initiatives on campus meant to build community and inclusivity, including:

- Athletics has a commission on mutual respect for both students and faculty that is ethnic specific. For example, they read a value statement at home games that talks about their belief and equality, love is love, no person is illegal, etc.
- An initiative to put in place a barber shop for athletes who are unable to find one in the local community.
- The UNH Bearegard Center for Equity, Justice, and Freedom has a Student Support Center that does a lot of community outreach and has biweekly talks with specific themes and topics of interest to students. There is a Bearegard Center passport initiative. The Center is also increasing outreach to graduate students because they need support as well.

In closing, Dr. Petty said there is a lot of interest in forward movement at UNH and there has been a lot of successes over the past year and one-half that she has been with the institution. UNH has increased its faculty diversity numbers and continues to

increase its student diversity numbers. She said it is not just effort on the part of her office, but also university effort to keep the trend rising for employment of diversity faculty and enrollment of diversity student numbers.

Dr. Perkins-Howland said that the Durham HRC was looking for ways to share information and work together with the UNH community. She asked Dr. Petty how the commission and UNH could help one another. She asked if there were other educational institutions that were networking together.

Dr. Petty replied that there is a network of Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) throughout New Hampshire, which is a collective that has been organized by Campus Compact and others, that meets every few months to leverage each other's expertise, to get support, and to put initiatives in place. She said what she has learned since participating in this group is that the same concerns expressed at the UNH are universal across the State of New Hampshire and in higher education in general.

Responding to Dr. Perkins-Howland's question of how institutions leverage each other, Dr. Petty said she did not have the answer to that question, but she was absolutely open to any kind of collaboration or partnership.

Dr. Perkins-Howland asked if Dr. Petty's office has worked together with the Oyster River Equity and Justice group. Dr. Petty said her office has collaborated with that group, as well as the NH Juvenile Justice System. Her office is doing some bias awareness workshops with that group.

The Reverend Belshaw asked what collaboration Dr. Petty's office may have with the State of New Hampshire, and if her office also works with other schools that are not of higher learning (i.e., high schools or secondary schools). Dr. Petty responded that her office works with education in general (k-12, colleges, and universities) in different capacities. Regarding the state, Dr. Petty said there are some collaborations with the state that she does not have all the information for, but there is indeed work at the state level. For example, members of her office take part in commissions and councils that are diversity and social justice related. She said that there were no initiatives involving state partnership, but that did not mean they don't exist, just that her office has not been involved in any state initiatives.

Administrator Selig asked Dr. Petty, in her travels, to be thinking of ways Durham could be more attractive to everybody, and to let the town know if there are things it could do as a municipality to be more inclusive. For example, he noted that Portsmouth has an annual Pride Festival. He suggested that Durham might hold some type of festival jointly with UNH that could be a nice event for the community and the seacoast.

Administrator Selig asked Dr. Petty if there was any training or orientation that UNH offers to make people more aware and more accepting of differences, and if so, is there a way for Durham to link into such training. Dr. Petty said her office does do training for community members, and if the town was interested, to just reach out to her office and they will make it happen.

Mr. Selig noted that the Durham Police Department would like to hire more officers of color, but because of the demographics of New Hampshire, it was difficult. He said if there was a way for a UNH criminal justice student to intern with the Durham Police Department, and then work at the PD after graduating, that would present a real opportunity. Dr. Petty agreed and added that such a model has been established at UNH involving internships and employment of law students at law offices in Concord, NH. She said UNH does not know if that will be successful because it is only in its first year, so it will be a few years before they really know.

The Reverend Belshaw asked Dr. Petty if UNH is concerned about the enrollment of both international and domestic students, noting that a number of years ago there were a lot of Chinese students that have since seemed to decline. Dr. Petty said that UNH tends to recruit more heavily for domestic students for many different reasons. She said the needs of international students are very different than the needs of domestic students. She said UNH still has a lower number of international students than it has traditionally had in the past. However, there was a slight increase during the past round of admissions.

Durham resident Joshua Meyrowitz asked Chair Marple if he could speak to the decline of Chinese students. He said there had once been a Navitas program at UNH which brought in international students. However, UNH's ranking in China went down and the Navitas program eventually ended, along with UNH's Searchlight Program. He said at one point there were 1,000 Navitas students paying full tuition (at approximately \$35,000 each). As of the last institutional research, some of the Chinese students remained at UNH after the program ended, but there are none now.

V. Discussion to consider whether the Town of Durham should adopt a policy similar to Portsmouth, NH to discourage any public meetings on commonly accepted religious holidays such as Passover, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur – Request from Loren Selig

Loren Selig said it was her hope that the Durham HRC would move forward with adopting the same sort of proclamation and Acknowledgment as the City of Portsmouth, NH, which recognizes that people who observe other religious experiences are often excluded from critical town, city, and school board meetings and presentations. She asked the HRC to work with the Durham Town Council, and ideally the ORCSD, to take on a similar policy. Ms. Selig then explained how the

policy in Portsmouth, NH came about, and read a portion of the adopted policy for the commission members:

WHEREAS, the City of Portsmouth takes pride being the “City of the Open Door” welcoming people of all genders, races, and religions; and

WHEREAS, the City of Portsmouth currently does not hold any meetings on the federal holidays of New Year’s Day, Martin Luther King Jr Day, President’s Day, Memorial Day, Juneteenth, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day (also observed as Indigenous Peoples’ Day), Veterans’ Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day;

NOW THEREFORE, the City Council adopts this Religious Holiday Policy to discourage the City of Portsmouth from holding any meetings on commonly accepted religious holidays, such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, where the tenets of a resident’s religion prohibits attending meetings on such days and require their attendance at religious services.

Ms. Selig said that the Portsmouth policy added only Jewish holidays, but she would recommend that Durham also include Eid al-Fitr and Ramadan. She said there are other religions besides Judaism where the major part of the celebrations is in the evenings and carries on to the next day. She requested that Durham move forward with adopting a policy similar to Portsmouth, then perhaps encourage other communities nearby to do the same, and maybe eventually the ORCSD will respect that as well.

Ms. Selig noted that for the first time, the OR School Board attached to its calendar a list of recognized holidays. She shared the list with commission members.

Dr. Perkins-Howland asked what the town currently observes as holidays. Administrator Selig said there were 11 officially observed town holidays, mostly federal-related, and town offices are closed. He said that the Portsmouth policy could be used and changed to reflect what Durham would like to do in terms of adding other holidays where town meetings would not be scheduled.

Both Dr. Perkins-Howland and The Rev. Belshaw agreed that adding other religious holidays would be appropriate.

Deborah Hirsch-Mayer, 19 Garden Lane, said she fully endorsed the proposal. She said the commission should consult with religious leaders of various faiths to determine which holidays should be included on the proclamation. She also noted there are resources online that can be accessed. She offered her services to help each year with developing a calendar so that town boards, commissions, and committees will know which dates to avoid scheduling public meetings.

Joshua Meyrowitz, 7 Chesley Drive, said he was very much in support of the proposal. He said he did not believe there was really anyway to change the sense of minority

identity because it is overwhelming, but he felt adopting this proposal would be a step in the right direction.

Administrator Selig said he believed that institutionalizing this policy will be very helpful, but even then, it will still be a bit of an inherited process and staff will try its best to identify key dates to avoid public meetings. However, invariably at some point in the future someone may step forward and say there is another holiday of significance to them and the town will then need to evaluate whether that is something it can accommodate or not.

Administrator Selig said he would have Jennie Berry craft an initial version of holidays to be included which will be distributed to members of the commission, so they have a template to work from. It was agreed that Pastor David Grishaw-Jones from the Community Church of Durham would be a good person to contact to help identify key dates as he is a member of a local interfaith group.

VI. Bias training proposal – Dr. Janet Perkins-Howland

Dr. Perkins-Howland said that it would be her recommendation to provide bias training to the various town boards, commissions, and committees, as well as municipal employees. She said she had researched and found some individuals that could do this type of training. She recommended that it be required for an individual to have bias training before joining a town board, commission, or committee.

Administrator Selig said it might be possible to have a video that prospective applicants for town boards would be required to view prior to being appointed. Dr. Perkins-Howland agreed with Mr. Selig and said it could be a module for the town to follow.

Administrator Selig asked if it would be possible to work with the trainers to include an inclusive bias training to provide a framework for people to work within. Dr. Perkins-Howland said the person that she would recommend doing the training would be amenable to designing a program to meet the town's needs.

VII. Durham Day (June 4, 2022) table for HRC with examination of HRC Bylaws in advance

Chair Marple asked Parks & Recreation Director Rachel Gasowski if in past years Durham Day participants visited the numerous tables that different town organizations had with displays and information. Ms. Gasowski replied that there was a fair amount of people that did stop at the different tables. This year, Durham Day will be held on June 4, 2022 in downtown Durham instead of at Wagon Hill Farm.

The Rev. Belshaw felt that it would be good for the Human Rights Commission to be more visible at events such as Durham Day. He said he would be glad to man a table at the event. Chair Marple agreed that HRC should participate at Durham Day.

Commission members reviewed the Durham HRC Bylaws. Dr. Perkins-Howland said the Bylaws should remain as is, but perhaps the commission could develop some goals for the coming year. She said she would be willing to bring some proposed goals to the commission's next meeting for consideration and discussion.

VIII. Eligibility requirements for town committees: are they inclusive?

Chair Marple said that her sense, in answering the above question, is "yes", town committees are inclusive. She said that although there maybe people that live or work in Durham that don't really feel it really is welcoming, that was fine. She felt the idea of dismissing people because of who or what they are has never really been an issue in Durham.

Dr. Perkins-Howland asked if someone has to be a resident in order to serve on a town board or committee, specifically UNH students. Chair Marple replied that UNH students are considered residents because of their voting status. Administrator Selig replied that if a UNH student is living in Durham, they can apply for board and committee vacancies.

Dr. Perkins-Howland said she asked the above question because she felt sometimes one has to expand its recruitment efforts for board applicants to a younger demographic, particularly UNH.

IX. Other Business

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, May 12, 2022 at 3:00 PM (**later changed to Tuesday, May 10, 2022 at 3PM**). Administrator Selig will invite Vivian Jablonski and Zoe Selig to the HRC's May meeting to discuss their efforts with the Justice-Equity-Diversity-Inclusion (JEDI) collaborative at the Oyster River School District.

VIII. Adjournment

The Rev. Belshaw MOVED to ADJOURN the meeting. The motion was SECONDED by Dr. Perkins-Howland and PASSED unanimously, 5-0.

The meeting adjourned at 4:36 PM.

Prepared by Jennie Berry, Administrative Assistant