

**DURHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**  
**TUESDAY, JULY 12, 2022**  
**3:00 PM**  
**Council Chambers – Durham Town Hall**

Members Present: Administrator Todd Selig, Business Manager Gail Jablonski, Dr. Janet Perkins-Howland (arrived at 3:25 PM), The Rev. Richard Belshaw

Members Absent: Council Chair Kitty Marple

Others Present: Shawna Coppola, Racial Unity Team (RUT) Leadership Team Member

**I. Call to Order**

Administrator Todd Selig chaired the meeting in Kitty Marple's absence.

Administrator Selig called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM and introductions of members present were made.

**II. Land Acknowledgment Statement**

The Rev. 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 –May 10, 2022**

*Gail Jablonski MOVED to approve the meeting minutes of May 10, 2022, as presented. The motion was SECONDED by the Rev. Richard Belshaw and PASSED unanimously, 3-0.*

**IV. Racial Unity Day Event - Shawna Coppola, Racial Unity Team (RUT) Leadership Team Member**

Administrator Selig introduced Shawna Coppola who began by providing a brief summary of what the Racial Unity Team (RUT) is about. The Racial Unity Team is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit charitable organization, governed by a Board of Directors who are

responsible for overall policy and direction of the organization. The board delegates responsibility to members of the Leadership Team, Special Project Teams, and volunteers. RUT originated in Exeter, NH. Ms. Coppola said she was a voting member and was also on the Education Committee. One of the team's goals is to identify and work to dismantle systemic and individual racism working in collaboration with governments, schools, businesses, and communities.

Ms. Coppola said the team is working to extend its outreach to other communities. She said that the unity team has been involved with events mainly in the Exeter area such as around July 4<sup>th</sup> a community read is held centered around Frederick Douglass' speech given on July 5, 1852, Indigenous Peoples' Day, and Juneteenth.

Ms. Coppola said an event the unity team has done since 2015 is its Racial Unity Day Celebration which occurs in September each year. It is a community event and last year's celebration had a display for an Art & Poetry Challenge, which is another project the unity team takes on working collaboratively with schools in the area. She said there is usually a theme and anyone in the community is welcome to create some kind of visual art or poetry around that theme. Overall, the celebration offers activities and educational programs that express support for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) and offers a variety of exhibits, walking tours, panel discussions, music, art, and children's stations.

Ms. Coppola also noted that a project, Oyster River Equity and Justice, was launched in May 2021, consisting of three members, including herself. Their guiding principles are:

- **Honoring and amplifying** the knowledge, histories, and lived experiences of those whose identities have traditionally been marginalized, dismissed, or erased.
- **De-centering Whiteness**, patriarchy, ableism, heteronormativity within curricula, policies, and practices.
- **Promoting and working toward** equity (e.g., everyone having access to what they need, when they need it) over equality (e.g., everyone having access to the same things at the same time).
- **Committing** to this work even when it becomes challenging or uncomfortable.
- **Standing in solidarity** with anyone committed to opening their hearts and minds in order to be and to do better.

In closing, Ms. Coppola said that the unity team is looking to bring to Durham the idea of potentially becoming involved in its own Racial Unity Day at some future time working in collaboration with the Racial Unity Team and Oyster River Equity Justice with the idea that events would occur in multiple communities. She asked HRC members for their thoughts/input on this idea.

The Rev. Belshaw said that UNH participation should be an integral part of such an event. He also noted that those persons that attended the Equity Summit a year or so ago may also be interested in becoming involved and he would encourage their participation.

Ms. Coppola said there are also a couple of social justice groups in the Oyster River High School that she felt would be great to involve. She also said there were a number of people she knows, including herself, that would be glad to lead a panel discussion.

Administrator Selig asked if the event would only focus on racial unity. Ms. Coppola replied that yes, it would focus on racial unity, at least to start, with the opportunity of looking into other matters of equity and social justice for future events.

Administrator Selig said that holding an event of this nature will take a lot of planning and resources regarding food, supplies, blocking and/or closing streets, etc. that will require bringing town DPW, Fire, and Police in on overtime. Therefore, the HRC needs to be able to justify why it supports holding the event; more than it just “makes everyone feel good”. He asked Ms. Coppola what are these events trying to achieve? What is the population they are trying to help, and to what extent are the injustices they are trying to correct? He said that although he feels a Racial Unity Day event would be nice, he also has to look at the financial aspects and impacts it will have.

Ms. Coppola responded that she felt one of the issues the Oyster River community could use a lot of education on was the concept of Whiteness and how that ties into racial injustice everywhere. She said that although people may say that this community does not have racial injustice problems, they are really thinking of a very small aspect of race and racism and thinking of interpersonal instances. However, she said the community does have ingrained systemic and institutional aspects of racism that it needs to work on.

Dr. Howland-Perkins said she felt that there should be some kind of DEIJ inclusion initiative in Durham itself and would like to talk about what that might look like.

Administrator Selig said that when looking solely at the topic of racial injustice, he does not understand how it applies to Durham, NH, and therefore it would be difficult for him to go to the Town Council and request funding without specific justification for spending a large amount of money on this type of event.

The Rev. Belshaw suggested, and Ms. Coppola agreed, that maybe the next step would be for the Racial Unity Team to approach some of the individuals/groups noted earlier in this discussion to see what people might be interested in assisting with a Racial Unity Day in Durham and then report back to the Durham HRC once they have formulated some ideas of what might occur if such an event were to be held.

**V. Review draft proposed resolution (as amended by the Town Council on May 16, 2022) establishing a policy for scheduling public meetings on holidays for Town boards, commissions, and committees to consider when planning public meetings each year**

Administrator Selig gave a brief overview of changes that the Town Council made to the resolution that the Human Rights Commission is recommending for the Council's adoption, which are outlined in the revised resolution included today's HRC's packet.

Within the fourth "Whereas" clause, Dr. Perkins-Howland suggested removing the words "...of the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu faiths..." and adding at the end "and celebrations".

*The Rev. Belshaw MOVED to accept the resolution as edited with the Council's changes and those noted above in the 4<sup>th</sup> WHEREAS clause by the HRC members and to submit these additional changes to the Town Council for its consideration and adoption. Dr. Perkins-Howland SECONDED the motion and it PASSED unanimously, 4-0.*

**VI. Recap on Durham Day Human Rights Commission Table – Dr. Perkins-Howland**

Dr. Perkins-Howland said she was the sole representative at the HRC's table at Durham Day. She said she had some engagement from UNH students, which was great. She also had a host family from Afghanistan come over and a refugee from Africa living at the Durham Community Church.

She said in terms of the Durham HRC itself, if someone were to ask questions about the commission, she was not certain how to respond to what the make up of the commission is. She said she had some informational boards that could be reused at another Durham Day event that included what the commission's bylaws are, the current members, and some of items the commission has worked on.

Dr. Perkins-Howland asked if the membership should perhaps be expanded to include more citizen members.

Administrator Selig said that the original members on the Durham HRC were the Council chair, Administrator, and Business Manager. The commission was kept small and included these members in order to review town policies and procedures to determine what may need to be adjusted to be more equitable, in particular with respect to LGBTQ topics. Once these policies were reviewed and adjusted, the commission looked at expanding its membership to add two citizen members. He said that he always worries about expanding new efforts and whether the town has the resources to adequately support them. So, the idea was that between the Council Chair, Administrator, and Business Manager, they would have a good sense of what is

occurring within the town and could make institutional changes within the bureaucratic organization of the town quickly.

Mr. Selig said that there were many ways to structure a commission or committee, and if the time has come to revisit the HRC's makeup to drop the staff members and include additional community members, that is something the commission can discuss but the structure was really originally designed as he has described. Administrator Selig said he is always concerned about the town's resources and ability to successfully accomplish expanded activities.

The Rev. Belshaw said he is always open to encouraging participation and would be open to the idea of removing staff members and including more resident members. However, he wondered how essential it really was it to change the membership since the HRC is primarily an advisory group.

## **VII. New Hampshire Charitable Grant Proposal – Dr. Perkins-Howland**

Dr. Perkins-Howland said the town received a \$10,000 NH Charitable grant to use toward DEIJ training of town staff, the Town Council, and boards, commissions, and committees. She said a public hearing will need to be held in order to accept and expend the funds.

Dr. Perkins-Howland said that if a consultant is hired to conduct the training, they will want to know the town's goals and what it would expect for potential outcomes of the training sessions. She felt it might be beneficial to have a small working group that would include a couple of HRC members and possibly a Council member and someone from Oyster River Equity and Justice to talk about what that training is going to entail.

Administrator Selig said that seemed like a reasonable approach because he does not have a clear idea of what he would expect for the training and has not had time to really look into it.

After some discussion, the commission decided to schedule a Durham Human Rights Commission meeting to discuss preparation for the DEIJ consultant Tara Flippo and representatives from the Durham fire, police, and DPW, as well as the chairs or their designees from the Durham Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and Historic District Commission/Heritage Commission.

## **VIII. Equity Collaboration Possibilities – Dr. Perkins-Howland**

Dr. Perkins-Howland said her question was whether there should be a separate DEIJ committee formed for Durham aside from the Durham HRC.

Administrator Selig said he didn't have an answer to her question but again, worried about not having enough resources to keep branching out. He said the HRC has and does a lot of things (updating the town's holiday policy, becoming more active in town activities and events, considering the possibility of including a new Durham Racial Unity Day), so if the commission wants to do more then he would say there needs to be more citizen involvement on or with the HRC. He said the group would need to be very self-motivated and come back with proposals. He said he felt taking on more events or causes was bumping up against the commission's capacity and what was originally established.

The Rev. Belshaw said he agreed with Administrator Selig and felt that holding off on creating another committee for a while might be the best approach to take at this time.

## **IX. Other Business**

Administrative Selig gave an overview of why the Oyster River Massacre marker, located on Route 108 at Oyster River on Newmarket Road, was removed. He said that the NH Division of Historic Resources (NHDHR) formed a State Historical Highway Marker Advisory Committee to review the state's existing historical markers for inappropriateness, lack of context, or offensive/dated language, and identifying markers in need of revision. Durham's marker was identified by the group, as well as by the NH Commission on Native American Affairs, as one of those markers. Based upon these concerns, the state removed the marker and is now providing an opportunity for new wording for the marker.

Amy Dixon from the NHDHR manages and oversees the marker program and will work with the town's sponsor, the Durham Historic Association, to craft new language. The town had asked that the Durham Historic Association (DHA), Durham Historic District/Heritage Commission (HD/HC) and Durham Human Rights Commission (HRC) be involved as well. He said the DHA prepared new language and sent it to the state because the members felt since the DHA is the sponsor, it should have the first opportunity to provide language to the NHDHR and then get feedback from the other two committees. Mr. Selig said that the town just received the language proposed by the DHA yesterday.

Administrator Selig said that at this point, the town is waiting to find out from Amy Dixon how she plans to proceed. Mr. Selig said he took the position on behalf of the town that since the DHA is the official sponsor of the marker, he would be comfortable allowing the DHA to proceed with suggesting the language, seeing what the NHDHR is comfortable with, and then presenting the language to the other local Durham groups for their input/recommendations.

Mr. Selig said he believed the language that was proposed by the DHA, which again just became available to the town yesterday, includes language that is very similar to

the one that was on the original marker and he is not certain that the proposed draft will address the concerns about providing a fuller description of the event that will be acceptable.

Dr. Perkins-Howland said she read the language proposed by the DHA and was very surprised as it seemed to her to be more offensive than the original language. She was also concerned because none of the people sitting on these committees include any of the people that were a part of that historic event (meaning the indigenous population). Dr. Perkins-Howland did not believe that having the power of being a town organization should give that organization the right to place something that is potentially offensive to a marginalized group on the marker. She asked what is meant by the DHA being the "sponsor".

Administrator Selig replied that he thought many years ago the DHA was the local group that felt there should be an historic marker commemorating the historic event. Therefore, that was the group to which the state went back for revised language. He said where this is the state's program, it is up to the state to pull in whom they believe to be the stakeholders.

The Rev. Belshaw said he was happy to have the DHA lead this effort as a historical priority but also felt it would be helpful for the HRC to have input in its' capacity as an advisory committee.

Dr. Perkins-Howland felt the updated language being proposed by the DHA is more damaging than anything else. She said it would not be right to perpetuate that type of one-sided history on the marker in any way and wanted the record to show that she was not in support of the updated language being proposed by the DHA.

Administrator Selig said he would relay the comments from today's HRC meeting to Amy Dixon and will ask her to let the town know how the process will proceed.

## **X. Adjourn**

*Dr. Perkins-Howland MOVED to adjourn the meeting. The motion was SECONDED by The Rev. Richard Belshaw and PASSED unanimously, 4-0.*

The meeting **ADJOURNED** at 4:45 PM.

**Next Meeting: Tuesday, September 13, 2022 at 3PM.**

Prepared by Jennie Berry, Administrative Assistant