

These minutes were approved at the January 19, 2024 meeting.

DURHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2023
11:00 A.M.
Council Chambers – Durham Town Hall

Members Present: Chair Sally Needell, Administrator Todd Selig, Dr. Janet Perkins-Howland, Kathy Collins, Deborah Hirsch Mayer (arrived at 11:20 a.m.)

Members Absent: Business Manager, Gail Jablonski and The Rev. Richard Belshaw

I. Call to Order

Chair Sally Needell called the meeting to order at 11:05 a.m.

II. Land Acknowledgment Statement

Chair Needell 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.

The members introduced themselves.

IV. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Due to the fact that Commissioner Hirsch Mayer will be arriving late, the agenda items that she would like to discuss will be addressed later in the meeting.

IX. Other Business

Chair Needell brought up the fact that, at the August 15 meeting, Commissioner Perkins-Howland was concerned about the wording of one of the goals. The minutes of August 15 had not yet been changed to reflect that. Chair Needell suggested that the following be put in the August minutes: "This comment was followed with a discussion of suggested changes to the wording. It was recommended that the words 'by offering the following, but not limited to' be added to Town Council goal #5 so that it reads, '...by supporting the needs of residents, families, and other identified stakeholders by offering the following, but not limited to...' This change would be recommended to the 2024 Town Council when setting their goals. There was additional discussion of how the Town Council goals are created." Chair Needell

acknowledged that she needs to bring the re-wording of the goal to the Council in 2024.

VIII. Discussion of IPD (Indigenous Peoples Day) celebration

Commissioner Perkins-Howland stated that ideally Indigenous Peoples Day would be accompanied by some educational opportunities, specifically about the Durham indigenous peoples. She was wondering what could be planned for next year.

Administrator Selig stated that in the past there have been people that have come to speak to the Council regarding Indigenous Peoples Day. However, there wasn't any program this year. The first time Indigenous People's Day was held, Durham Community Church had some activities. This year the Durham United church had a presentation.

Chair Needell wondered if they should partner with the Durham Library about this next year.

Commissioner Collins stated that she could also bring this up to Oyster River Community Reads at their next meeting. Commissioner Collins and Commissioner Perkins-Howland are willing to follow up on possible events for next year.

VI. Continued discussion of Introductory Letter to other Boards, Committees and Commissions written by Janet Perkins-Howland

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer had made some suggestions to the introductory letter. Chair Needell is wondering if they are still waiting to add the HRC's mission and purpose from the By-Laws to the letter. There was agreement that those things should be in the letter.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland was wondering if they would ask each board/committee to put this on their agenda. Chair Needell felt that it would be fine to either ask to be put on the agenda or just speak during the meeting's public comments. Commissioner Perkins-Howland stated that they can finish this item today with the knowledge that the mission and goals will be added into the letter. She is fine with Commissioner Hirsch Mayer's suggestions to add names and email addresses. Chair Needell stated that she is fine with being the main contact listed.

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer arrived at 11:20 a.m.

III. Approval of October 17, 2023, Meeting Minutes

Chair Needell moved to accept the minutes of October 17. The minutes were approved 4-0.

V. Continued discussion and possible approval of Amended By-Laws

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer had brought some suggestions for amendments. She was trying to make the language in the Purpose as lean as possible and more readable. She wasn't sure what the sentence regarding "developments in human relations" meant. Administrator Selig felt that some of the language in the By-Laws came from

other towns. He believes the sentence means the relationships between humans in Durham and whether issues are coming up.

Commission Collins feels that the statement of “eliminating prejudice” would be difficult to do in practice. The wording could be changed as “strives to counter prejudice...” and “mitigate discrimination” There was discussion around this wording. There was belief that “eliminate discrimination” was better.

There was discussion around the list of types of discrimination. Administrator Selig asked if there needs to be a list of all types of discrimination. They could refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights rather than listing them out. After “eliminate discrimination” there was the suggestion of saying “without distinction of any kind and with the guidance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948.” There was additional discussion on whether the list Commissioner Hirsch Mayer suggested should be included.

Chair Needell wondered if “inhabitants” should change to “resident, employee and visitor.” The wording was suggested as “The purpose of the commission is to take steps to ensure the rights of every resident, employee and visitor of the Town of Durham. The Commission strives to counter prejudice and eliminate discrimination without distinction of any kind and with the guidance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. [or add in Commissioner Hirsch Mayer’s list] All Durham residents are ensured equal economic, educational and political opportunity, to equal accommodations in all business establishments in the Town and to equal service and protection by public agencies.” It was suggested that they take out the sentence regarding the developments in human relations. The sentence would read “The Commission provides advice and assistance to the officers, agencies.....”

There was further discussion on changes to this paragraph. There was the suggestion that the sentence referring to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights be eliminated.

Commission Perkins-Howland read the final version:

The purpose of the Commission is to take steps to ensure the rights of every resident, visitor and employee of the Town of Durham or Durham business to counter prejudice and eliminate discrimination without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, creed, religion, national or social origin, ancestry, gender or sexual orientation, marital/relationship status, disability, or other health status, political opinion or association with members of such classes. All Durham residents have equal rights to economic, political and educational opportunity; to equal accommodations in all business establishments in the Town; and to equal service and protection by public agencies. The commission aims to provide advice and assistance to the officers, agencies, boards, departments, and employees of the Town regarding human rights issues. The commission encourages private persons and groups to promote and provide equal opportunity and good will toward all people.

There was discussion about scheduling the next meeting in January to approve the By-Laws and the letter. There was agreement to schedule the next meeting for **January 19 at 9:00 a.m.** Chair Needell will inform the Town Council about the changes in the By-Laws at the first meeting in February.

VII. Discussion of the ORHS hate speech/vandalism incidents

Commissioner Collins mentioned that the presentation by the School District on the hate speech/vandalism incidents was not very well attended. They have stepped up monitoring of the bathrooms. The caregivers were concerned about the delay between the incidents and communication about them to themselves and others.

Commissioner Collins also mentioned that she is on the school DEIJ committee, and the students who are on the committee were talking about the many microaggressions they see. Chair Needell also mentioned that she was at the presentation, and the school principal stated that Oyster River is not the only school system experiencing these issues.

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer was wondering if the Human Rights Commission has any role to play in this. Chair Needell said that the HRC could take a stand with the school. Commissioner Collins asked if any hate speech had occurred within the Town. Administrator Selig said that not anything that would qualify as hate speech.

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer feels that the HRC should make a statement to help the Jewish citizens feel safe and noticed. She stated that there is an uneasiness amongst the Jewish citizens in Durham. Commissioner Perkins-Howland felt that would be a good idea in light of all that is going on. There was more discussion on what that statement should be. Administrator Selig stated that he could write up something for the Friday Updates. There was discussion around how the HRC could speak up more regarding the events that are going on in the world.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland would like to add something about safety within the Purpose of the By-Laws. The last sentence was changed to: *The commission encourages private persons and groups to promote and provide equal opportunity, safe environments and good will toward all people.*

X. Adjournment

Chair Needell MOVED to adjourn the meeting. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Collins and it PASSED unanimously.

The meeting **ADJOURNED** at 1:17 p.m.

Prepared by Karen Edwards, Administrative Assistant