

These minutes were approved at the March 7, 2024 meeting.

DURHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2024
9:00 A.M.
Council Chambers – Durham Town Hall

Members Present: Chair Sally Needell, Administrator Todd Selig, Dr. Janet Perkins-Howland, Deborah Hirsch Mayer, The Rev. Richard Belshaw, Business Manager Gail Jablonski

Members Absent: Kathy Collins

I. Call to Order

Chair Sally Needell called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The members introduced themselves.

III. Approval of Minutes – August 15, 2023 & December 13, 2023

Chair Needell MOVED to approve the minutes of August 15 and December 13, 2023. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Perkins-Howland and it PASSED 5-0 with Commissioner Belshaw abstaining.

IV. Public Comments

Tolu Afolayan, 9 Willey Road presented a proposal for a publicly transparent productivity software tool that he created. He would like to work with the Human Rights Commission directly to customize the software. There was discussion on how this might work. Commissioner Belshaw suggested that Tolu come back to the next meeting with a demonstration of how the software would work.

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.

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

Chair Needell thought that they had decided to eliminate the last sentence of the purpose statement regarding the United Nations General Assembly. She suggested that this sentence be removed. There was discussion on this.

Administrator Selig MOVED to adopt the revised By-Laws with the removal of the sentence referencing the United Nations document. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Hirsch Mayer and it PASSED unanimously.

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

Chair Needell stated that the purpose statement that was just approved should be added to the letter. She was also wondering how this letter would be shared with other Committees. Commissioner Perkins-Howland stated that it was her idea to send the letter out to the Committee Chairs and see if anyone responded. If no one responds, they could try a different tactic.

There was discussion around the wording of the letter. Chair Needell suggested leaving out the link to the HRC on the Town website. There was discussion on using a different wording other than collaborate in the first paragraph.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland would like to add a way for someone to contact the HRC. Chair Needell stated that she would be ok with including her Town Council email address.

There was discussion around the order of the names of the Commission in the letter. It was decided to list the names in alphabetical order.

There was discussion about the possibility of someone attending the Housing Task Force meeting first as the Task Force has just received their Housing Needs Assessment.

Administrator Selig suggested that he could have Administrative Assistant Karen Edwards create a draft letter from the suggestions stated. Commissioner Hirsch Mayer would like to see the draft after it is completed before it goes out. It was decided that Chair Needell would send out the final letter once it is completed.

VII. Update on January 18 Roundtable Discussion on the Oyster River Massacre marker

Chair Needell stated that it was good to hear that people need to be treated with respect and humility. Commissioner Perkins-Howland appreciated the opportunity to come together. Commissioner Belshaw stated that the discussion expanded certain questions for him. He realized that this is part of a bigger picture than just Durham. He wondered if people ever think about the massacre when they think of Durham. He also was wondering if there really needed to be a sign as there is so much access to information with today's technology. The sign could be very general. There was additional discussion on what type of sign could be installed.

Administrator Selig mentioned that as a society we are much more aware of the importance of the history of the indigenous peoples, more so than in 1965 when the

sign was created. It's not about erasing history but doing a better job of understanding the history that occurred and why it occurred. He was hopeful at the end of the meeting. He doesn't think that we should be constrained to the same size of sign. It could be bigger or double-sided.

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer would like to see something embedded in an everyday object rather than a sign. She stated that she is not sure how that would work in this case. Administrator Selig stated that the challenge is that in this day and age, people want to see facts. However, there is not much written from the indigenous peoples. It is more of an oral tradition.

VIII. Other Business

Chair Needell stated that she went to a recent talk at Riverwoods on indigenous peoples, and the speaker was a UNH professor and the Strawberry Bank archeologist. Chair Needell felt that this woman would be a good speaker for Indigenous People's Day.

Chair Needell mentioned that Oyster River Community Read is going to be focusing on poverty and climate injustice, and they have an upcoming event in April.

Administrator Selig stated that the Town's Personnel plan is structured around rewarding staff that have been with the Town for a long time. He has sent Business Manager Jablonski some ideas to change the plan to encourage today's younger population to work for the Town. One thing he was considering was adopting Juneteenth as a day off for staff. He is wondering if the HRC believes that this would be a good idea. Commissioner Hirsch Mayer suggested that there may be holidays where the Town could be open but employees would have the flexibility to take the day or not. Commissioner Belshaw mentioned that he is in favor of the Town being closed on Juneteenth. He also liked the suggestion Commissioner Hirsch Mayer made.

There was discussion around setting the next meeting date. It was determined that the next meeting would either be March 6 at 11:00 a.m. or March 7 at 10:30 a.m. depending upon when Kathy Collins would be available.

IX. Adjournment

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

The meeting **ADJOURNED** at 10:30 a.m.

Prepared by Karen Edwards, Administrative Assistant