

*These minutes were approved at the July 25, 2024 meeting.*

**DURHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**  
**THURSDAY, MAY 30, 2024**  
**10:30 A.M.**  
**Council Chambers – Durham Town Hall**

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

Members Absent:

**I. Call to Order**

Chair Needell called the meeting to order at 10:35 a.m.

**II. Land Acknowledgment Statement**

Commissioner 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 Agenda**

*Chair Needell MOVED to ACCEPT the agenda. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Belshaw and it PASSED 7-0.*

**IV. Public Comments**

**Councilor, Wayne Burton** – He introduced himself and stated that he is a Vietnam combat veteran. He was in charge of organizing Veteran's For Peace. There were large demonstrations on the UNH campus at the time of the Vietnam War. He is currently sponsoring a resolution for the Council to adopt which is critical of how the University handled the demonstrations regarding Gaza and the ceasefire there.

Council Burton expressed that he was upset that the Human Rights Commission had been against the Council's resolution on the Gaza ceasefire, partially because the Human Rights Commission felt it would lead to antisemitism. Part of the Council Resolution was a condemnation of antisemitism, so he was confused when he got the letter from the Commission. The council created and voted on the Resolution in good faith.

Councilor Burton is concerned with the way the University Police handled the Gaza demonstrations on the UNH campus. There are three Councilors who are interested in writing up a Resolution condemning the actions of the University Police and State Police. He wants to keep it positive because there is a new University President beginning her tenure this summer.

Councilor Burton stated that he is here today to make sure that the Human Rights Commission is not overlooked with the writing of this new Resolution. He doesn't have a draft right now. The University is part of the town so he would like to see the town assert strongly that we believe in free speech.

**V. Report on the presentation of the letter prepared by the HRC regarding the Town Council Israel-Gaza ceasefire resolution**

Commissioner Belshaw summarized his presentation before the Town Council. He felt that the letter from the Commission was critical more about the process of adopting the resolution than it was about its content. He thanked Councilor Burton for being here this morning.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland mentioned to Councilor Burton that even though other Resolutions have been approved by the Council without other Committee suggestions, this particular Resolution mentioned the Human Rights Commission so they were caught unaware, and at their next meeting, there were members of the public questioning them about the Resolution.

Chair Needell mentioned that she did not vote for the Resolution because she feared it would create divisiveness in the town, and she didn't feel that was the role of the Town Council.

Council Burton was concerned with the statement from Commissioner Belshaw that some of the townspeople felt less safe because of the Resolution. That bothered him because the Resolution specifically condemned antisemitism. He asked the members here if they felt that the Council resolution contributed to antisemitism. Chair Needell stated that that was the take by some members of the community. Councilor Burton asked if the Commission members believed that. Commissioner Belshaw said no.

Chair Needell stated that she doesn't think that the Resolution contributed to the feeling of antisemitism intentionally. Commissioner Belshaw never felt that he was accusing the Council of antisemitism. He stated that he was wondering what was *causing* the feelings of those who brought up that notion. Commissioner Collins was wondering if it was due to the fact that no Resolution was passed after October 7 to address that particular event.

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer feels that for people who aren't Jewish, it is hard to understand the antisemitism that they feel. In the Town Council discussion the night the Resolution was discussed, there was no mention of October 7. There was a lot of triggering language. Antisemitism is complicated and complex.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland asked if Councilor Burton was looking to prepare a statement that could be reviewed by the Human Rights Commission at their next meeting, or did he want something to go out sooner than that?

Commissioner Belshaw suggested the Commission have a workshop meeting to discuss these issues and bring in some people to educate them. He would like to discuss what happened at UNH with the protests. Chair Needell mentioned that to discuss this you need verifiable, factual information. There is a lot of homework that needs to be done before making recommendations. Commissioner Hirsch Mayer agrees.

Councilor Burton suggested that there be a joint resolution between the Human Rights Commission and the Council on the value of free speech.

There was additional discussion about the specifics of what happened at the University of New Hampshire student protest.

Chair Needell mentioned that they are looking at a similar resolution later in today's agenda. She would like to see a resolution that doesn't paint the University in a negative way.

Councilor Burton stated that the Council will draft a resolution and then bring it to the Human Rights Commission for review.

## **VI. Continued Discussion of the Definition of Antisemitism**

Chair Needell asked if they need to look at defining other forms of discrimination or just stay with the definition of antisemitism. Commissioner Hirsch Mayer reviewed the reasoning behind adopting a definition of antisemitism.

Commissioner Belshaw would like to do some research on this. Commissioner Collins volunteered to write up some definitions of different types of discrimination as a resource tool for the Human Rights Commission.

## **VII. Continued Discussion on Housing as a Human Right**

Commissioner Perkins-Howland reviewed the Human Rights Commission's previous work on this topic. She suggested that they issue a proclamation stating that, "The Human Rights Commission supports the work of the Housing Task Force and Planning Board to further efforts of developing the diversity of equal and non-

discriminatory housing choices in Durham.” Chair Needell questioned what “equal” refers to. Commissioner Perkins-Howland stated that equal could be changed to equitable.

Chair Needell refined the statement to read “The Durham Human Rights Commission supports the work of the Housing Task Force and Planning Board to further efforts to develop diversity of equitable opportunity and non-discriminatory housing choices in Durham.”

There was further discussion to change the statement to “The Durham Human Rights Commission supports the work of the Housing Task Force and Planning Board to further efforts to increase diverse housing options in Durham that are equitable and non-discriminatory.”

*Chair Needell MOVED to ADOPT the statement as amended. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Collins and it PASSED 7-0.*

**VIII. Discussion of Town Council Resolution #2017-19 and whether it should be re-approved by the Town Council every year.**

This item was tabled to the next meeting.

There was discussion on whether to have a table at this year’s Durham Day.

**IX. Approval of Minutes – April 5, 2024**

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer would like to change the wording in the first paragraph of Page 3 to read, “Commissioner Hirsch Mayer felt that the confusion *may have* come from the Public Comments....”

Commissioner Belshaw and Collins both stated that there were places where they were referred to as “Commission” instead of “Commissioner.”

**X. Other Business**

It was decided that the next meeting would be Thursday, July 25, 10:30 a.m.

**XI. Adjourn**

*Chair Needell MOVED to adjourn the meeting. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Hirsch Mayer and it PASSED 7-0.*

The meeting **ADJOURNED** at 12:30 p.m.

Prepared by Karen Edwards, Administrative Assistant