

THESE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AT THE DECEMBER 4, 2024 MEETING.

DURHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2024
3:30 P.M.
Council Chambers – Durham Town Hall

Members Present: Chair Sally Needell, Administrator Todd Selig, Dr. Janet Perkins-Howland, Deborah Hirsch Mayer (arrived late), The Rev. Richard Belshaw, Kathy Collins

Members Absent: Business Manager, Gail Jablonski

I. Call to Order

Chair Needell called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

II. Land Acknowledgement 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.

III. Approval of Agenda

Chair Needell suggested that the agenda item for Twenty-one Senses be moved to the first item.

Chair Needell MOVED to APPROVE the agenda as amended. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Collins and it PASSED 6-0.

VII. Discussion on whether the Town should budget monies to support 21 Senses

Administrator Selig stated that there was a portion of the town's budget that supported many different community services. Twenty-one Senses could be added to this grouping. Or it could be a budget item in the Parks & Recreation budget, and they could be paid per event. He stated that he was leaning towards budgeting for it in the Parks & Rec budget.

Commissioner Belshaw stated that he feels that it should not be in the Parks & Rec budget because it is broader than Parks & Rec. Commissioner Collins stated that she feels that it would be better to be among the other organizations that Durham supports.

Administrator Selig mentioned that he had come upon a sensory room in the Pittsburgh airport on his trip home last week, and he showed some photos of the room.

Administrator Selig stated that he could include a note in the budget that the Human Rights Commission supports the funding of 21 Senses.

IV. Discussion on Restructuring the HRC and changes to the By-Laws

Chair Needell mentioned that they are looking to change the membership because it is awkward for Todd and herself when the HRC is discussing something that will be before the Council for approval. She mentioned that the idea is that the HRC could be composed of 4 or 5 residents with one Council representative who would not vote. Todd and Gail would not attend unless needed in an advisory role. They would need to re-write the By-Laws and then it would need to be approved by the Town Council.

Commissioner Belshaw was wondering if Administrator Selig could come at the beginning of the meeting. Administrator Selig stated that he would be ok with attending the meetings as long as he was not a voting member.

There was consensus that this change in membership was acceptable.

Chair Needell mentioned that Karen Edwards would like to stop taking the minutes. Commissioner Collins volunteered to do the minutes starting with the next meeting.

V. Discussion on whether to write a letter of support for funding for the rehabilitation of the Bickford-Chesley House.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland had emailed the HRC a letter of support. Chair Needell had emailed a revised letter as another possibility. Commissioner Perkins-Howland liked Chair Needell's letter but would like to add a line that the Bickford Chesley house is an example. Chair Needell stated that yes, that could be done. Chair Needell will make sure that the letter gets to the Council for the October 21st meeting.

VI. Discussion of the passage of HB 1014 and how that effects Durham's observance of Indigenous Peoples Day vs. Columbus Day

Administrator Selig gave Durham's history with celebrating Indigenous Peoples Day. The Human Rights Commission was involved originally to designate the day to be celebrated on the same day as Columbus Day. The last State legislative session inserted an amendment to a bill requiring the Town to list the day as Columbus Day.

Administrator Selig mentioned that Representative Reed from Newmarket was interested in introducing an amendment to the bill to be able to designate the day as Indigenous Peoples' Day.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland asked if the Town could change the written designation as "Indigenous Peoples Day (previously known as Columbus Day)"?

Commissioner Belshaw felt that the HRC should write a letter to the legislature. He volunteered to write a draft copy to be looked over at the next meeting.

VIII. Follow-up Discussion of Council-Approved Resolution on Free Speech

Chair Needell mentioned that the resolution was well received by the Council and it was approved by the Council.

Chair Needell stated that Administrator Selig had mentioned that President Chilton has already met with the UNH and Durham Police and is supportive of de-escalation.

IX. Discussion of the New Hampshire use of IHRA Antisemitism definition

Chair Needell stated that the State has adopted the IHRA Antisemitism definition. Commissioner Belshaw stated that he had done some research on other definitions of antisemitism. He stated that the IHRA is a bit flawed as a document. There have been other documents published.

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer stated that people do not make the distinction between antisemitism and anti-Zionism which is where a lot of the problems have been.

Commission Belshaw stated that if the HRC wanted to adopt the IHRA antisemitism document, they should also adopt the Nexus and Jerusalem documents as those documents offer clarity and expand on the understanding.

Chair Needell asked if they should focus on those documents at their next meeting. Commission Belshaw thinks that they should urge the Town Council to publicly acknowledge all three of the documents. Commissioner Hirsch Mayer stated that she liked Administrator Selig's idea of not adopting a specific definition but referring to the definitions if a specific incident came up. She would like the Town Council to make a statement.

Administrator Selig mentioned that last December the HRC had asked him to write a statement about the conflict. He read an Op-Ed that he wrote for the newspaper.

There was additional discussion about this and how the HRC should respond to concerns from people who would like them to adopt an antisemitism definition.

There was discussion about when the next meeting should be scheduled. It was decided that the next meeting will be on December 4 at 4:15 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer left the meeting.

X. Approval of Minutes – July 25 and July 30, 2024

Chair Needell MOVED to accept the minutes of July 25 and July 30, 2024. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Belshaw. The motion PASSED 5-0.

XI. Other Business

Commissioner Belshaw spoke about the email they had received from John Carroll about the many for-rent signs Mr. Carroll has seen downtown. Commissioner Belshaw asked if this should be put on the agenda for the next meeting. He was wondering if the HRC needs to respond. Administrator Selig suggested that it just be taken as food for thought.

XII. Adjourn

Chair Needell MOVED to adjourn the meeting. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Collins. The motion PASSED 5-0.

The meeting **ADJOURNED** at 5:20 p.m.

Prepared by Karen Edwards, Administrative Assistant