

**Durham Human Rights Commission  
August 22, 2025**

**In attendance:**

Richard Belshaw (Chair)  
Kathy Collins  
Deborah Hirsch Mayer  
Janet Perkins-Howland  
Leslie Schwartz  
Robin Vogt (Town Council Representative, non-voting)  
Todd Selig (Town Manager, non-voting)

**Call to Order and Land Acknowledgement**

The meeting was called to order at 4:32 by Chair Belshaw.

Chair Belshaw noted that there were no members of the public present and that this meeting would not be recorded. He said that commission members don't need to worry about speaking into microphones but please speak up.

Chair Belshaw read the Land Acknowledgement.

**Approval of Agenda**

Commissioner Perkins Howland made a motion to approve the agenda and Commissioner Schwartz seconded it. The motion was approved unanimously.

**Continued Discussion of US Customs and Immigration (ICE) Resources for the Community**

Councilor Vogt said that he asked Town Manager Todd Selig for input about the Linktree. Councilor Vogt noted the Linktree was not live on the town website at that point. He then ran through various items on the Linktree, noting that two links for the NH Alliance for Immigrants and Refugees are no longer live because hackers were trying to get information from their websites. Additionally, the Immigration Court Information and Resources link no longer exists out of concern for hackers and users with nefarious intentions.

Chair Belshaw commended Commissioner Vogt for the good job on the Linktree. He especially appreciates the inclusion of other languages. He asked the HRC if there's anything else that should be included. Chair Belshaw acknowledged that things are changing all the time and noted that it will be a constantly changing resource.

Chair Belshaw asked who will maintain the Linktree, and Commissioner Vogt said he will continue to do so.

The HRC took a few minutes to continue exploring the links.

Chair Belshaw said it would be beneficial to make the linktree live on the town website as soon as possible.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland asked if it could be mentioned in the following week's Friday updates.

Town Manager Selig said that it would be mentioned.

Commissioner Collins shared the most recent iterations of the Know Your Rights postcard and infographic which will be distributed within the Town Hall, the Durham Public Library, and downtown businesses.

Chair Belshaw noted that the postcard looks great with clear concise, questions on the front. Both Commissioners Perkins-Howland and Schwartz asked for the language about lawyers/attorneys to be revised for clarity on the infographic. Commissioner Collins said she'd take care of that.

Town Manager Selig asked if we wanted to put the Durham town seal on the documents as well as the QR code for the linktree. The commissioners agreed it would be a good idea. Chair Belshaw asked about printing them, and

Town Manager Selig said the town can subsidize the printing. Commissioner Collins and Town Manager Selig said they will figure out the details.

Chair Belshaw thanked everyone for their work on the Know Your Rights Linktree, postcard, and infographic.

#### **Discussion of Housing Needs for Low/No income individuals in Durham**

Chair Belshaw expressed his concerns about the lack of housing on the whole seacoast for low/no income people and asked if that is a topic that the HRC should address at some point.

Commissioner Schwartz asked if someone shows up to the Town Hall who needs housing, is the town obligated to find something for them? She heard that this is true.

Town Manager Selig responded that this is a complicated issue and there is not a one-size-fits-all answer. There are more and more unhoused people, not just on the seacoast but across the state. Chair Belshaw said that he spoke with Representative Al Howland who recommended reaching out to Betsy Andrews Parker, the director/chair of Strafford County Action Fund. Chair Belshaw left a message with a staff member asking if she would be available to speak to us. He hadn't heard back, but noted that the fact this meeting wouldn't be recorded or televised made it better that Betsy Andrews Parker wasn't able to attend this meeting.

Commissioner Schwartz said that a starting point would be to gather quantitative data about the issue. She said that we could ask Betsy Andrews Parker to provide some of that information.

Town Manager Selig said there are different levels of safety net for those who need help with housing, fuel, and other essential needs. The federal and state governments have programs. The local government is considered last resort for people. He explained that if someone comes to Durham and demonstrates they can't afford their basic needs, the Business Office handles it. Gail Jablonski is the welfare coordinator, and Dina Gosselin is her assistant. Town Manager Selig said that often these are individuals who have lived in Durham for a long time and fell on hard times. Often the town will work with an applicant to see whether they are eligible for state and federal programs because they are more robust than Durham's. Town Manager Selig noted that the town endeavors to not let anyone go without food or to be unhoused. There is a process, and the person needs to demonstrate that they have no money. If they go through the process, the town will provide assistance as long as they qualify.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland asked if they need to provide a physical address.

Town Manager Selig replied that he deals very little with public assistance. There is an arrangement among the towns/cities in terms of who's responsible if a person needs assistance. For example, if someone were to go to Durham from Portsmouth, then Portsmouth would be responsible for a period of time. The goal is to make sure they aren't shuffled around and dropped from the system. The towns figure out who's responsible while the individual has to provide evidence that they qualify. The goal is to not support indefinitely but to help the able-bodied look for work. This is part of the application process. If they claim they can't work, they have to provide back-up information to confirm that.

Chair Belshaw asked about the numbers of people who seek assistance.

Town Manager Selig said that about 5-10 people in Durham have requested assistance, and that for the most part, it's not who we might typically think of as unhoused – it might be an elderly resident running low on funds, an individual who has lived here, or someone who is moving back.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland noted that when Gail Jablonski was on the Human Rights Commission, she recalls Gail saying that if someone came to the Town Hall and said they were unhoused, someone here would take ownership of that for a short period of time...perhaps they would arrange to take them to Crossroads.

Town Manager Selig said that a number of regional support networks exist and that Durham offers them modest support so they help Durham residents, including Casa, Meals on Wheels, Crossroads. If there's someone in an abusive home environment, there's Haven.

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer added Seacoast Family Promise and My Friend's Place in Dover.

Chair Belshaw acknowledged that this is a very complex issue and that everyone has a different story that might include mental health issues or substance abuse. He noted that if someone is using substances, many shelters won't accept them. Chair Belshaw said that Dover, Rochester, and Somersworth have a robust unhoused population, and they have been working with the county to create a shelter. He wondered if here in Durham, they pass through.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland expressed concern about whether we shirk our responsibilities and suggested that we ask other towns how we can help them.

Town Manager Selig said there's not a situation where we are intentionally avoiding the issue but that the bigger communities tend to have more resources and tend to be more of a draw for people who are unhoused or lacking resources. He recommended the HRC invite Betsy Andrews Parker to a meeting, and Chair Belshaw agreed.

Commissioner Schwartz noted that creating a locus of information could be useful, like the Linktree but for people in need of housing and also for friends and advocates of people in need.

Chair Belshaw said that the HRC could invite Gail Jablonski to talk about these things with respect to Durham, specifically. He asked if he should continue to try to get Betsy Andrews Parker to speak to the HRC. Commissioner Schwartz said it will be helpful to have someone with a strong understanding and knowledge of resources available.

Town Manager Selig noted that there's been a significant increase in public assistance needs over the last couple of years. Chair Belshaw said that it's a growing issue, for churches as well, and so that's all the more reason to talk about it and include it on the agenda for next time.

### **Discussion on Citizen Education Topics/Presentations**

#### **Other Business**

Chair Belshaw raised the question of joining the amicus brief for the court case involving the Indonesian community of NH and ACLU v Trump administration.

Town Manager Selig explained that the Trump Executive Order about birthright citizenship is considered inconsistent with federal law and the Constitution. Plaintiffs are challenging it in court, seeking entities to sign on to show support. Durham has been approached by a Portsmouth attorney to sign on to the amicus brief. Council Member Curtis Register thought this made sense, and wants it on the next Town Council agenda. Town Manager Selig reached out to Madbury (the Community Church in Madbury has been a host to Indonesian community for the last several years) The town administrator and church administrator confirmed the association. Town Manager Selig noted that we don't often get involved in national matters although, in this case, it does make sense as it impacts our community. He went on to say that the lawsuit is right, frankly.

Commissioner Schwartz asked if Town Manager Selig wants a recommendation from the HRC? Town Manager Selig said "Yes."

Chair Belshaw said he is fully in support. The HRC discussed it and is also fully in support of the Town of Durham signing on to the amicus brief.

Chair Belshaw asked to move on to other business. Karen Edwards sent an email about the new council goals for this year, including proactively responding to state laws and policies through coordinated action with partners. Chair Belshaw lauds the goal and said that Karen Edwards will be in touch to see how we're doing with regard to the goals.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland said she would venture to say this conversation can be combined with agenda item VI about how we might present and discuss Human Right issues in town.

Chair Belshaw said the goal asks for us to monitor our work on the matter.

Commissioner Perkins-Howland said that agenda item VI is related to the goal because it calls for volunteers but it also calls for all of us to stay on top of anything that may concern human rights and bring the matter to the attention of the HRC.

Commissioner Schwartz said that we need to periodically remind citizens that this entity, the HRC, exists and that our community can bring matters to our attention. We can't monitor everything, and we need the public to help. She suggested we can add some kind of outreach to the Friday Updates to remind folks that we exist and welcome their input.

Councilor Vogt stated that the Town Council has been vocal and has spoken with committees and commissions recognizing that if a human rights issue arises, it should be brought before the HRC.

Commissioner Schwartz noted that this is a great way to answer the question, "What does the HRC do?"

Councilor Vogt noted that the Town Council wants to give more power to committees and commissions to take on issues within their purview rather than having the Town Council taking on everything.

Commissioner Schwartz said that it is helpful to have the correct entities handling issues and going through information to add input and then take it to the Town Council.

Councilor Vogt said, for example, having Betsy Andrews Parker come before the HRC and then the HRC goes before the Town Council will carry a lot of weight.

Chair Belshaw returned to agenda item VI and asked if there's any discussion on topics/presentations for community education?

Commissioner Perkins-Howland said we can solicit ideas from the community, to find out what's on people's minds.

Chair Belshaw asked if there is anything coming up. Commissioner Perkins Howland said the Indigenous Peoples' Day celebration at Durham Public Library is on 10/7. It's co-sponsored by HRC. It's a presentation by Damian Costello, Hiding in Plain Sight.

Commissioner Schwartz asked how is co-sponsoring defined. Commissioner Perkins Howland said that last year, we helped introduce the event and participated in the conversation. Commissioner Collins asked to know about any other ways the HRC could help out.

Councilor Perkins-Howland took a moment to acknowledge what a difficult week it had been for our community given the tragedy in Madbury. She said it can be hard to know how to help each other heal.

**Motion to approve the meeting minutes of July 29, 2025**

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer made a motion to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Schwartz seconded the motion. It was unanimously approved.

The next meeting of the Durham Human Rights Commission is scheduled for 10/16 at 4:30 pm.

Commissioner Perkins Howland made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Collins seconded the motion. It was unanimously approved.

The meeting ended at 5:40 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Kathy Collins.