

Wakefield Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes 3/16/2021

Call to order: 7:06pm

Present members of HRC:

Sherri Oken

Maria Muti

Benny Wheat

Jennifer Boettcher

Jeremy Little

Teresa Aravena-Gonzalez

Elizabeth Assenza

Nicole Jacob

Yana Herzog, Youth Council Liaison\

Amy Rando

Faith Defendre

Absent:

Superintendent Doug Lyons, ex officio

Town Administrator Steve Maio, ex officio

Chief Skory, ex officio

Kimberley Ring

Also Present:

Mehreen Butt, Town Council Liaison

Colleen Guida, School Committee Liaison

Daniela Nedbalek (from the public)

Mike Carraggi (from the public)

Public participation (Participants will be limited to 3 minutes each)

No public participation

Approval of minutes

- Approval of minutes from February 16, 2021, general meeting
 - Unanimously approved
- approval of minutes from the Communications subcommittee- March 2, 2021
 - Unanimously approved by present members of the communications subcommittee
- approval of minutes from the International Women's Day subcommittee- Feb. 17, Feb. 24, March 3, and March 10, 2021
 - Unanimously approved by present members of the International Women's Day subcommittee

Subcommittee updates

1. Communications

- Is the Communications Subcommittee an ongoing committee or a task force with specific projects to complete, then disband?
 - Having a communications person would be good. If they're comfortable, they could be in charge of our social media posts, responding to FB messages, posting to other forums (town website, library, etc). This is especially valuable in cases when the Chair is not super FB savvy
 - What we've typically done is that we have event subcommittees who are responsible for posting their events. So if we have someone or a team of people who are in charge of communication/posting, this might cause confusion. Maybe the communications person/committee would have more of a consultative role rather than being the ones to do all the postings/communications
 - For now it probably makes sense to have a standing subcommittee at least for the near future. If it doesn't feel necessary to continue we can always disband it.
 - We'll need new members on this subcommittee after next month because Kim and Jen's terms are ending after April.
 - It's definitely helpful to have this document with the important steps in our publicizing process. This way each subcommittee and each new member doesn't have to reinvent the wheel for every event.
 - Even though some of our current members' terms are ending, people from the public are still welcome to participate, help plan events, etc. Members of the public just can't vote. So if people are still interested in participating we won't necessarily lose all of our brain trust.
 - We should always be sending the message that our meetings are public. Whenever we send a write-up to the paper we should always include a mention of when our next meeting is and that they're open to all
- If we are an ongoing committee, what is our overall charge and specific responsibilities?
 - Liaison/advisors to the rest of the HRC as we are planning events
- What are your suggestions/reaction to the draft material we have provided? (request for public input on the calendar, draft of event marketing checklist)
 - The motive behind having a list/calendar of commemorations/events/etc is to raise awareness and educate about diverse traditions
 - The concern still exists from our previous conversations about this: that we should take care not to try to represent traditions or peoples that we are not knowledgeable about or that are not our own traditions/identities.
 - A calendar like this can also be valuable for us internally in order to avoid scheduling conflicts. We will have a better awareness of when to schedule things in order to maximize attendance by not scheduling on days/weeks when some might not be able to attend.
 - We might send out monthly posts on what is being commemorated during that month as a way to use this resource.

- Sherri will send out the calendar the communications subcommittee has compiled to the rest of the commission for us all to look over and bring our feedback to next meeting
- Everyone who has resources or connections we have built while planning HRC events, please think about who those people or resources are, and send to Kim.
- What vehicles have you used for communication that have worked well? Everyone please send your thoughts to Kim.

2. International Women's Day

- The subcommittee has been meeting weekly and have been reaching out to the community to interview women in our community. Kim has done an amazing job editing them all. They will keep coming throughout the month
- The videos have been really amazing and inspiring.
- It's great how the videos are highlighting locally owned businesses, and a sense of community

Active Bystander Training scheduling

- There was lots of demand for the two sessions we sponsored, there were people who wanted to participate who couldn't because both sessions were full
- The weekday evening session filled up fastest so maybe we schedule another one for a weekday evening
- We have enough money to pay for another session in full. (we have about \$1,300 in our revolving account from a large donation last year). Or we could pay for it in part and ask for attendees to pay a small amount. The money in our line-item budget does not roll over, but the money in the revolving account stays ours.
- If we get another organization/organizations to co-sponsor we could offer more than one session.
- Ideas of other groups who might be interested in co-sponsoring:
 - Boys and Girls Club - would be great to involve more youth. Quabbin Mediation maybe has a youth-specific program. Maria will reach out to B&G Club and ask Quabbin about the youth-focused program.
 - Churches - Elizabeth will reach out to clergy council
 - WakeUp coalition - Maria will reach out
 - WAAV - Amy can ask WAAV at their meeting tomorrow
 - Another HRC, like Melrose or Stoneham - though this might expand the number of people who are looking to attend, might not be able to meet the need for the number of people who want to attend if we expand beyond Wakefield.
- We will talk about this again next meeting after getting more info.

WHRC applicant recommendations

- There are 4 seats to fill. For two positions the current members will not be staying on (Jen and Kim) and two members are re-applying (Jeremy and Teresa)
- We make our recommendations to the Town Council (and maybe School Committee?). And the youth member is appointed by the superintendent and HS principal.

- Jeremy and Teresa have really jumped in with both feet, they would continue to be really valuable members of the board.
- Eileen Rooney has been volunteering with us for several months as a member of the public, has helped put on the MLK & CSK Day planning committee and the International Women's Day committee
- It's great that we're getting so many excellent people who are interested.
- Daniela's application stood out when she mentioned that she is also working on her own learning. It's good to work with people who acknowledge that they are not experts.
- Maria will send our recommendation along

Anti-racism action updates

1. Black student union

- Participating in a panel with a bunch of other schools on the topic of the school logo
- Faith will send the flyer about this when it's finished
- Juneteenth: a letter from the North Shore Juneteenth Association was sent to the town of Wakefield and Steve Maio forwarded it along to us. They are encouraging towns and Cities to raise the Juneteenth flag for the week of Juneteenth. Here is their website: <https://north-shore-juneteenth-assoc.constantcontactsites.com/> Nicole is a part of this group!
 - We are in favor of raising the flag. Steve Maio said the town is in favor and they would buy the flag.
 - Juneteenth is also during pride month. We could use this opportunity to push the town again to use both the flagpole on the common and the flagpole at the Civic Center. Or if that's not possible, we can take down the pride flag for a week to make space for the Juneteenth flag.
 - The BSU are currently planning a trip to celebrate Juneteenth. But Faith will check in with them about possibly co-sponsoring a Juneteenth event in town
 - Maria will follow up with Faith and the the BSU about this.

2. Youth council

- Sen. Jason Lewis came to the Youth Council meeting recently, and his daughter was there also. It was great to talk to her because they live in Winchester which recently went through the process of changing their team name and logo
- There will be a survey going out to all students on the topic of the logo. It is going out to all students grades 8 through 12 who are enrolled at the Galvin and the High School.
 - Does this also go to grades 8-12 students who live in wakefield but don't go to those schools? Like students at the Voke, or private schools or homeschooled? Colleen will double check on this.
- There is a panel tomorrow evening with tribal leaders on the topic of Native American logos/mascots
- Shout out to the youth council! They have so much grace

High school logo community conversation

- We gave our statement at the community forum and also sent it to the Item

- We are publicizing the panel with tribal leaders tomorrow. The public can attend but it is in webinar format so only panelists will be able to speak. The Indigenous leaders, school committee, and legislators will all be panelists.
 - Will there be Native American panelists with different perspectives on this issue, or all of the same opinion?
 - Most of the panelists are aligned with the state legislation of banning Native American mascots. There will also be a panelist who was recommended by a community member who is more aligned with keeping the logo. Dick Bayrd was invited to participate but he's very ill and won't be able to participate. But his nephew will be able to participate.
- Are there other steps we should be taking?
- We can post the link to the panel discussion stream in our FB. Jen will see about doing this.
- There will also be a survey going out to the community at large.
 - Is this open only to people who live in Wakefield? People who have previously lived in Wakefield? Colleen will check in with Doug Lyons about this.
 - Is it open to parents of Wakefield students even if the parents don't live in Wakefield (like Metco parents and other parents who don't live in Wakefield)? Yes, anyone who's in the WPS messaging system will be sent the survey
- Timeline: the school committee's vote will take place in a March or April meeting, prior to the town election.
- The public discourse about the school logo is tying in really strongly with what we've been learning about being active bystanders. The discourse about the warrior logo being part of the town's tradition is problematic not only for Indigenous people but for other people of color. There are many horrible forms of oppression that were at one point "tradition", such as lynching. Certain comments about the warrior logo can bring up a lot of that history and make it very hard for people of other oppressed groups, in addition to Native Americans, to go about their life in town. Otherwise the town can feel like a pretty unsafe place these days for Indigenous people, Black people, and other people of color. Please think of our active bystander training as these conversations are going on about town and stand up actively using those skills.
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Networking with other HRC's

- It would be great to have a local HRC coalition for the towns in this area. We could bounce ideas off one another, learn from one another.
- We don't have much of a connection with other groups, so we would have to reach out to other towns.
- Jeremy has talked about this with a member of the Stoneham HRC who is bringing this back to their commission.
- Not sure if this would be a formal coalition, or more along the lines of inviting some members of neighboring HRCs to our meetings and vice versa.

- Maria is waiting to hear back from Melrose and Lynnfield. She's going to reach out also to Reading. After hearing back she's going to connect back with Jeremy and make a proposal to bring to our next meeting.
- North Reading is also interested in starting an HRC.

Chair's comments

1. Central electronic storage for HRC documents

- Maria has started the process. Waiting to hear back from IT to get confirmation of her account set-up before she can get into the electronic storage space.

2. Finance update

- We now have 2 accounts with the town. One is the line item account where our budget from the town goes. The other is a revolving account that now contains the balance of our old bank account which came from past donations. That money is ours and will not be reabsorbed into the town's coffers the way our unspent line item budget does.

3. Upcoming months- Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage (May), Pride (June)

- AAPI Heritage month would be great to recognize
 - We can do a book reading like we've done for some past months.
 - Benny and Sherri will work on this
 - We could put out a call on our FB page for volunteers to give public feedback about this, esp people who have an AAPI identity. Benny will write up something like this to post.
- Pride
 - Pride isn't until June, but it might be wise to get some stuff moving
 - The flag might be the earliest thing to get moving on. We had talked last year about asking the town again about using the flagpole by town hall instead of the flag pole by the civic center.
 - Benny will reach out to the town about the flag
 - Benny and Maria will touch base off-line to make sure we're not having rivaling flag conversations between Pride and Juneteenth
 - We had also talked about using a different flag this year, the Progress flag. Maria will look up how much the Progress Flag might be
 - An interfaith pride service could be a great thing to do. Many "interfaith" services include only Christian and Jewish traditions, but it would be so great to reach out and include a much broader cross section of the many faiths that are represented here in town.

Matters not anticipated

- Is there physical storage space that we have in the town? Jen has several boxes of HRC stuff at her house, but as Jen leaves the HRC we should figure out where to put those things. At some point Rich had been in communication with someone at the town about this (maybe Julie Smith-Galvin)

- The next poster in our year long series will be coming out in the beginning of April. Keep an eye out for them! Sherri will be doing this.

Action Items:

- Sherri will send out the calendar the communications subcommittee has compiled to the rest of the commission for us all to look over and bring our feedback to next meeting
- Everyone who has resources or connections we have built while planning HRC events, please think about who those people or resources are, and send to Kim.
- Everyone please send your thoughts to Kim about what vehicles of communication you have used in planning HRC events that have worked well
- Maria will reach out to B&G Club about co-sponsoring an active bystander training and ask Quabbin about the youth-focused program.
- Elizabeth will reach out to clergy council about co-sponsoring an active bystander training
- Maria will reach out to the WakeUp coalition about co-sponsoring an active bystander training
- Amy will ask WAAV at their meeting tomorrow about co-sponsoring an active bystander training
- Maria will get clarification on who is appointing the various open seats on the commission and send our recommendation along to them.
- Faith will send the flyer about the BSU's participation in a panel with other schools about the logo question
- Maria will follow up with Faith and the the BSU about the possibility of co-sponsoring a Juneteenth event in town
- Jen will see about posting the link to the panel discussion stream in our FB.
- Maria is waiting to hear back from Melrose and Lynnfield about networking as local HRCs. She's going to reach out also to Reading. After hearing back she's going to connect back with Jeremy and they'll make a proposal to bring to our next meeting.
- Benny will write something up to post on FB soliciting volunteers to participate in planning our AAPI book reading, especially people with an AAPI identity.
- Benny will reach out to the town about the pride flag
- Benny and Maria will touch base off-line to make sure we're not having rivaling flag conversations between Pride and Juneteenth
- Maria will look up how much the Progress Flag might be
- Sherri will bring the next batch of posters out to the local businesses.

Adjourn

Roll call vote on motion to adjourn: unanimously approved

Meeting adjourned 9:09pm