

Wakefield Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes 8/18/2020

Call to order: 7:03pm

Present from the HRC:

Sherri Oken
Faith Defendre
Maria Muti
Benny Wheat
Jennifer Boettcher
Yana Herzog
Amy Randeau
Mehreen Butt

Present from the public:

Teresa Aravena-Gonzalez
Beverly? (this member of the public did not identify themselves)
Nicole Jacob-North

Public participation

No public participation

Approval of minutes from July 21, 2020 meeting

Motion to approve the minutes from our July 21 2020 meeting: unanimously approved

New member orientation- what should be edited/added/deleted from the proposed orientation Coverage?

- Sherri and Jen put together a document outlining what a orientation could cover
- There were some questions that came up in putting together this outline
 - who oversees the HRC? We think it is the Town Council and the School Committee. Maria will check on that and get back to us
 - What is our reimbursement policy: if you make an approved purchase, you send the receipt to Sherri Dalton, she has you fill out a form to get reimbursed from the town
 - How are we funded?
 - How do we make spending decisions as a group? Someone on the HRC makes a proposal, make a motion, if approved we spend the money accordingly. We don't have to go back to town council.
- Another thing to include in the process could be introductions: getting to know the members of the commission, hopefully in more than a superficial way

- Ground rules/group agreements: there are some ground rules included on the document, which is a great thing to include. It would be great for the commission to have a conversation about what are our group agreements so we can commit to them
- Group priorities/goals would also be important to orient new members to. This would require having a conversation as a commission and agreeing on what our priorities are.
 - This could be a good conversation each spring as a new Chair is elected and new members come on
- There are some required things that new members and ongoing members have to do, like the conflict of interest test.
- Please send more ideas for things to include to Sherri and Jen

Posters

- Yanna made 4 amazing posters!!
- Are we comfortable sending them to the chamber of commerce to get them out to businesses
- Should we put the HRC logo on them before distributing them? Yes, that would be good. Sherri can add the HRC logo once she gets the jpegs.
- Should we give businesses their choice? Another option is to send them out to businesses on a regular basis, like a quarterly basis. “Here is your quarterly HRC poster” and every business gets the same one so the message is consistent around town
- It would be great for them to also be in public spaces, like the town kiosks, the library, the public safety building
- They should also all have Yanna’s name on it
- Sherri can present them to the chamber of commerce and see what the reaction is.
- Maria will contact the town about putting the posters up in town spaces

Motion: add “A message from the Wakefield Human Rights Commission” and our logo to the posters. And present the posters to the Chamber of Commerce and town bodies for display in town. Passes unanimously.

Black student union update

- Faith is the co-president of the Black Student Union
- The BSU is planning a town-wide vigil at the lake. You can’t have open flames, but maybe with glow sticks
- The governor reduced the limit for public gatherings to 50
- It is normally necessary to get a permit for public events, and a lot of those permits have already been revoked (the WAAV road race for example couldn’t get a permit)
- Having events to highlight and visiblize black lives, anti-black violence, etc, especially in Wakefield which is so white-dominated. Creating opportunities to push back against the white-only narrative is important, even though there is a public health crisis

- Faith, Mehreen, and Maria will set up a meeting to think about how to do an event while following guidelines
- ReignYah is the other co-president of the BSU and she would like to come attend our next meeting.

Library collaboration

- Sherri has a meeting with the Jacki from the library on 8/25. She'll have more updates then
- If anyone has ideas or suggestions on how we can collaborate with the library send them along to Sherri

State bills updates

- Benny reached out to some other towns about what their process has been in changing their native mascots and/or team names. Of the districts only one responded, which was the Mohawk Trail Regional School District in western MA. They successfully got rid of their Indian Head mascot within the past few years. For them the process started with a concern that came from the students, the superintendent sent it to the school committee and the school committee oversaw the process. They had public hearings which were fairly painful. In the end the decision was up to the school committee and after hearing information about the harm that comes to native students as a result of these kinds of mascots and considering the guidance that has been put forward by various Native American advocacy groups they voted to get rid of the Indian head mascot. Her advice to any town going through this process was to decide on the process in the beginning and then be clear, transparent, and consistent about that process from beginning to end.
- Winchester changed their mascot recently. They might be another town to check in with.
- Since this is a school committee issue, if people in town are interested in this issue we will direct them to bring their concerns to the school committee. It would be great if students voiced their concern since that carries a lot of weight.
- Benny didn't reach out to Senator Lewis's office to invite him to our meeting to give an update on the bills at the state level, but she'll do that for our next meeting.

Chair's comments

- Someone in town expressed interest in organizing an active bystander training. Maria is gathering information and will get back to us at the next meeting
- We were listed as a partner on a Technical Assistance grant for anti-bias training through the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission that Steve Maio applied for. If the grant comes through that will be great. If it doesn't it would still be great to pursue anti-bias training
- The openings for our vacant positions close tomorrow at 4. If you know anyone who is interested in applying let them know!

- Earlier in the spring Maria had reached out to a few black and biracial families in town, and one message that came out of that was that they would love to be more connected to other black and biracial families. If you know of any black or biracial folks in town who would like to build these connections please send them in Maria's direction so she can connect them. For now we will keep it word-of-mouth
- Steve Maio is trying to put together a virtual Wakefield 101. If/when that happens that could also be an opportunity to connect new black and biracial families to this group.
- Jenn McDonald is very responsive to getting more content from the HRC to put on the town website. Maria is working on a sort of history project, documenting the work that the HRC has done over the years. Maria is going through agendas and minutes from the past three years. Once she has a summary together, she'll send it out to us and see if there are things we should add that aren't captured in those minutes.
- Is there even an archive of past members of the HRC? No, it would be good to have one.
- The HRC has been the subject of a lot of discussion on facebook and in other venues recently. Some of those conversations are not respectful and can be very stressful. If anyone wants to talk or decompress about that stuff, please feel free to reach out to Maria.

Matters not anticipated

None

Adjourn

Roll call vote on motion to adjourn: approved

Meeting adjourned 8:17

Action Items:

- Benny: invite Senator Jason Lewis to a future meeting to talk about the Native American mascot, state seal, etc legislation
- Benny: reach out to Steve Maio and Tom Mullen to ask about what the process is for flying the pride flag on the flag pole in the common
- Maria: check on who oversees the HRC
- Maria: check if the student member has to take the online ethics test
- Sherri: take pictures of Yanna's images, make jpegs with the HRC logo on them
- Sherri can present the posters to the chamber of commerce and see what the reaction is.
- Maria will contact the town about putting the posters up in town spaces
- Sherri and Jen: continue working on the orientation document
- Faith, Maria, and Mehreen will meet about vigil planning

