

Wakefield Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes 7/21/2020

Call to order: 7:03

Present from the HRC:

Sherrri Oken
Faith Defendre
Maria Muti
Benny Wheat
Jennifer Boettcher
Mehreen Butt
Yana Herzog

Present from the public:

Daniel Lieber

Public Participation:

Brought up the issue of the High School mascot as a racist symbol. It would be great to address this on a local level, although there's also movement on this at a state level.

- Contributions from our student leaders:
 - Would like to see the racist symbol removed but keep the name Warrior
- What the HRC has done re this issue:
 - We had some conversations about this last year and decided to wait and see what happened with the State legislation
- If the HRC wants to take this up on a local level it would make sense to connect with organizers in other towns in MA who have successfully won these kinds of campaigns
- Melrose recently changed the name and logo for their sports teams administratively, the superintendent took that action.
- Wakefield tends to follow other local towns, so the change in Melrose could influence the school administration in Wakefield
- The Wakefield schools have made progress on this. For example all the schools besides the HS have developed other names and logos
- Having current students push for this would make a big change
 - Youth council
 - Student Council
- Why is it that some of the elementary schools still seem to use the W and the warrior logo? (have seen recent "proud woodville grad" lawn signs with the racist logo)
- And what is the connection between school sports teams and other sports teams in the town
- This is probably also a conversation that should be taken up with the school committee
- We should invite Senator Lewis to a future meeting, he filed the state legislation

Introduction of our two new student members:

- Faith Defendre is our newly appointed Student member. Will be a senior at Wakefield High this coming year. She and a few other friends put together the Black Lives Matter march in Wakefield earlier this year
- Yana Herzog is our liaison from the Youth Council

Minutes from 6/16/2020

- Roll call vote to approve minutes from 6/16/2020. Unanimously approved

Pride month wrap-up

- Any feedback or thoughts?
 - Most of the 300 flags were given out, there seemed to be interest in the flags. Though we didn't see many of them out in the community (though this depends on what part of town you are in)
 - Our FB events had lots of likes though not a lot of comments. What comments we got were positive
 - It was a great pride month considering the pandemic.
 - We got feedback from the public that we should fly the flag on the flag pole in the common rather than the flag pole at the civic center in order to be more visible
- We still owe people the raffle books. We had said that if someone liked or commented on a video they'd be entered into the raffle. We will have to go through the comments. We could go through all comments for all the videos and then to a raffle among all those names.

Anti-racism action updates

Sherry did some follow up from our meeting last month.

- Library: they are always excited about doing events with the HRC, but right now they're at capacity just trying to get the library back up and running. So it was an enthusiastic yes but not right now. She was interested in suggestions and Sherry said we should have a conversation to brainstorm
- Wakefield/Lynnfield Chamber of Commerce: they did not have a resource relating to black-owned businesses. He said if we have materials on the topic of racism he would be willing to share it. This sounds more like an opportunity for education
- North Shore Chamber of Commerce: haven't gotten any response
- Tried contacting a website re Black-owned businesses: never heard back. So we don't know much about how current or well-updated this list is. Even though she did not get a response from them, the Black owned business web site is public and a link can be posted on our web site as a follow up to the request from those who attended our June meeting.

Maria also did some follow-up:

- Connected with Matthew Cadwell from the clergy association. Things are quiet with them recently. They will touch base again soon about partnering re antiracism and about the clergy appointment to HRC
- On a related note: the UU church got a new pastor who seems excited about engaging with issues of racism and antiracism

Post on social media/getting our message out to the community:

- There was an anonymous post on social media about the experience this person (White) and her husband (Black) have had in town. It was very disheartening
- The people who tend to be the most vocal on FB in Wakefield are often also the least accepting
- It would be great for the HRC to be more of a proactive rather than a reactive participant in social media, affirming and supporting an inclusive message to all Wakefield residents
- We could also look into other social media outlets, which we currently aren't on
- Being a public body is not conducive to quick responses because we have to meet and decide on our response. We should check with Tom Mullen about whether we're able to respond to social media posts without having to confer as a group. There might be a difference between making a 1-off response vs. getting into a debate. In a debate situation there might be an open meeting law concern.
- The HRC as an entity on FB doesn't have the ability to post in all the Wakefield FB groups.
- We have a FB page, but of course if people don't know about us or follow us they don't actually see our posts
- Our website has a feed from our FB page, but things get buried on that. We could ask to get sub-pages on our page. Like an LGBTQ/T page, and an anti-racism page, etc
- The town is going to do an actual newsletter. We could talk to Steve Maio, Sherri Dalton, and Jenn McDonald about getting on that newsletter
- We do also usually have a list of our annual events

Social media presence and roles

Right now we have an email account, and a FB page. Do we want more of a social media presence (instagram, twitter, etc). If yes, do we assign people to the different platforms to be checking and responding.

- If we do want a presence on different platforms, we definitely will need people who are delegated to monitor and respond. Without that it doesn't work
- Since we often would post the same thing to each platform, would it make sense for the same person to post to all platforms? There's also software that will do this in terms of pushes. But we'd still need people to monitor activity on the platforms
- Are there other town bodies that use a variety of social media? We don't know of any.
- We could check out some of the other HRCs in MA to see what they're doing. The Arlington one is really active for example, and the Melrose one has been around longer than we have.

- Getting an Instagram or Twitter account would really benefit us in terms of reaching more people, reaching younger people, students.
- It's important to shifting the dialogue, shifting the culture to post things that are not totally innocuous, posting things that are potentially controversial. But to do that we would need to be prepared for that. We would need to be on-mission and have a strong analysis about how we engage in discourse on different topics
- We will table this conversation until we have more members to be able to give the attention necessary to different platforms
- In the meantime Maria will respond to emails that come in to the HRC email account
- Jen and Maria have been sharing the role of responding to FB messages. They will coordinate who responds to what. Maybe use the "assign" feature

Vacant positions and new member orientation

Vacant Positions:

- The postings for the vacant positions went out earlier today. We have one vacant position from the town and three vacant positions from the school committee.
- There was a request to do a little tweaking re the interview process. Maria will keep us posted
- The deadline for people to apply is August 19th.
- Because of when the town council and school committee meetings fall the positions won't be filled until September

New member orientation/onboarding:

- It's confusing for new members to understand how the HRC works, what is expected of us, etc. It would have been great to have an orientation and onboarding.
- This can help people hit the ground running
- This will be especially helpful as we have so many new people coming on soon

Matters not anticipated

We got an unsolicited donation from Greenwood Wine and Spirits for \$1,000. Blown away!! Maria sent them a thank you. Maria communicated to Steve Maio about this, because as a town body we have to ask permission to accept the donation. She will go in front of Town Council at their next meeting

International Women's Day poster: Jen reached out to the town to see about posting the poster at town hall, but haven't heard back. So what do we do with the poster?

- Could transcribe the individual notes or take good pictures, compile them, and post on our website.
- We don't necessarily need to keep the hard copy.
- We could repeat this type of poster activity at other events

Posters with positive messages:

- Yana has been making posters for school teachers to hang in their classrooms that say “stronger together” with positive multiracial messaging
- This fits in with an idea we had last month about putting more visual messaging around town, in businesses etc.

We will meet in August, because there is still a lot going on and we don't want to lose our momentum.

Roll call vote on motion to adjourn: approved

Meeting adjourned 9:06

Action Items:

- Benny: send approved minutes to Sherri Dalton
- Benny: invite Senator Jason Lewis to a future meeting to talk about the Native American mascot, state seal, etc legislation
- Benny: reach out to activists in other MA towns
- Maria: go through the names on Pride events and draw raffle
- 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
- Everyone: send ideas to Sherri about ideas for how to collaborate with the library
- Sherri: send along the ideas we generate re how to collaborate with the library to Catherine at the library
- Maria will reach out to the MA coalition of HRCs to ask about what they do on social media platforms
- Maria and Jen: work out who replies to what FB messages
- Jen and Sherri will work on putting together some orientation materials
- Everyone send Jen and Sherri thoughts or ideas about what would be (or would have been) helpful to you when you first started on the HRC
- Yana and Sherri will communicate about the posters
- Sherri will contact the chamber of commerce about putting the posters up in local businesses
- Jen will transcribe the IWD action steps from our poster
- Maria will reach out to Jenn McDonald about expanding content on our website