

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes

August 27, 2020 – Remote Meeting – 6:30-7:40 pm

REMOTE PARTICIPATION MEETING

Conducted pursuant to the Executive Order dated March 12, 2020 suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, Gen.L.c.30A &20, et seq., and 940 CMR29.01, et seq.

In response to Governor Baker's declaration of a public health emergency and the related Emergency Executive Order dated March 12, 2020, the Human Rights Commission shall be meeting remotely until further notice. The audioconferencing application Go to Meeting will be used for this purpose. An online link and telephone access number will be provided on all meeting agendas and also on the Human Rights Commission website. This application will permit the public to access and participate in future Human Rights Commission meetings. Instructions for joining meetings in this manner will be provided on the Human Rights Commission website. We extend our thanks for your understanding in this manner, which is intended to keep members of the Commission safe.

Chairman Kevin Merritt called meeting to order, stating the declarations above and asking all members to identify themselves and their home address.

Online for the meeting were:

Kevin Merritt

Rob Bardell

Jane Francis

Lindsay Beal

Pat Kilty

Erin Tracy Bradley

After roll call a motion was passed with all members in agreement the meeting began at 6:35 pm.

First order of business was to approve the meeting minutes for July 23. A few changes typo corrections were suggested. Rob Bardell moved to approve, Jane Francis seconded. Roll call vote was held and July 23 minutes approved.

The subject of the Neighborhood initiative was raised. Kevin Merritt suggested revisiting community-building ideas, maybe through food, music, neighborhood cleanups – helping hard-hit neighbors.

Pat Kilty suggested aligning with Black Lives Matter, which could represent all disadvantaged groups.

Erin Bradley suggested aiming for larger, more urgent issues, less community building: education/talks about white privilege, police reform. HR could facilitate conversation between

Town police and local legislators. Some Stoneham officers feel they are being “painted with the same brush” as bad actors in race-hate events on national scale.

Lindsay Beal suggested revisiting the "Summit" idea. Could we hold it remotely, or maybe outdoors (with possibility safety concerns)? Lindsay agreed that there would be benefits to building connections w/ neighbors even if HRC is focusing on larger-scale, higher-priority issues.

Rob Bardell said residents need to be able to have dialogue with their neighbors regarding their common experiences. Simply talking about common threads (sports, politics, weather) helps people understand each other.

Lindsay offered three suggestions:

1. A youth/senior mentor program. Both groups are isolated during the pandemic. They could learn from each other.
2. Sharing ideas regarding holiday season activities. The holidays are meaningful for many people. We can get by safely distancing in summer, but that is harder in winter, which will probably get in the way of traditional holiday plans. People cannot see their families. HRC could try to generate ideas for adapting the holidays, bringing in different traditions, backgrounds, etc.
3. An essay/art contest -- "what do you miss most?" "What are some good habits you've built during the pandemic?"

Pat Kilty said these are all good ideas, but they are all likely to be stymied by COVID. BLM activism has been stymied too. Talking to family/friends/neighbors, sharing strongly held views on social media – it is all very risky. For example, the Stoneham Theater posted on a personal Facebook site regarding its steps toward diversity, including details about personnel, casting, staff, its Board, etc.; Pat shared the post elsewhere with theater's permission. The responses Pat received were numerous, shocking, appalling, and ugly. Pat was moved to tears. Pat noted that she did not recognize any of the names on the ugly responses.

Rob Bardell stressed that the Town has both good and bad elements. Until you put yourself out there, you don't know what you don't know. We have to socialize and better ourselves.

Jane Francis said Pat was just fostering awareness, which is part of HRC's mission. HRC is still working to get Town residents to know we exist. Another month has passed in which we could have put a flyer out, for example, via the Senior Center. Also, the library is a potential place to get information out. How can we better publicize?

Pat Kilty said Netflix has a number of videos on current events. For example, "Yellowstone" deals with indigenous peoples and conflicts with white people who own land that used to be part of a reservation.

Erin Bradley said that HRC is not a big group. We are in a critical time in history right now. Not all of the issues within our mission are on the forefront politically. We should focus. We could

do a letter in the local paper. Social media is not the best way to spread awareness – there are lots of trolls. A local woman with three black sons told Erin she has been crying out of fear that they won't come home at night.

Kevin Merritt said triage of issues is good, but how do we do it? HRC is an advisory group. We are probably most effective by showing the Select Board there is a volume of support for the most pressing ideas.

Lindsay Beal noted that intersectionality is important too. LGBTQ issues persist amid the pandemic and all the race tensions. There are times when Lindsay does not feel safe here in town. Trans kids in school have it very difficult.

Erin Bradley acknowledged that other issues besides race are still huge. Erin sees issues of medical inequity, domestic violence, etc., among LGBTQ people.

Rob Bardell cautioned that we should not get caught in semantics. "Human rights" as a concept affects everyone. Discrimination happens all across many different groups. Yes, we are advisory; that means we can educate, but we can also get groups talking to each other. We can create better understanding within the community. Until you have cops on you while you're picking your kids up from school, because someone else the called cops on you, you don't understand. It is especially important to reach the kids, because they will be where the real change happens.

Jane Francis asked, can HRC do something to continue our prior conversation with the Stoneham PD? Jane wants to know (and thinks other people would want to know) what Stoneham PD is doing to address some of these race issues.

Kevin Merritt said we could send a letter to Stoneham PD with questions.

Pat Kilty suggested partnering with Stoneham Alliance Against Violence.

Erin Bradley suggested we can make ourselves directly available as a resource to residents on race issues, microaggressions, etc. Her workplace has an "inequity box" to receive reports of such concerns anonymously. We could do something similar. Maybe it would help if more people came to us, so we would have a better idea of what issues they're having.

Kevin Merritt said if we need to hear from more people, then we should focus on visibility. Many residents still don't know HRC is here. We have partners we can work with Rachel Warren from the School Committee had reached out and will be sending over a document about volunteer interest. The Senior Center is another good resource. We need to keep working with them.

Rob Bardell agreed that HRC needs to keep working with partners and crowdsourcing information.

Pat Kilty suggested maybe Stoneham TV?

Kevin Merritt said TV would require a deeper conversation. We did vote on the TV issue months back.

Lindsay Beal wishes we could have gone ahead with the Human Rights Summit idea. It would have been a big help with visibility. Lindsay is still trying to figure out what we could do instead.

Kevin Merritt agreed the "summit" still seems like our best idea for visibility and furthering conversations with and among partners.

Jane Francis agreed, and also offered the idea of helping residents with genealogies.

Erin Bradley said she would advocate specifically for an anti-racism summit. We all need education on this. It would be cheap to do remotely. We could publicize on social media.

Pat Kilty requested that HRC check in with the Select Board. Pat feels HRC is stymied and struggling.

Kevin Merritt said we can turn to the Board if that's where we are, but he is not convinced yet. Maybe we should check in with the Board just to ask if the summit is still feasible? The members agreed.

Lindsay Beal offered to research what other human rights groups are doing for online learning and advocacy during the pandemic.

Rob Bardell said having our partners talk at an event similar to bringing them in at HRC meetings – i.e., very helpful and educational. We should bring more them in.

Kevin Merritt asked if there is a tentative date that might work for the summit. The members suggested October 22, HRC's normal meeting day/time (i.e., the fourth Thursday of the month).

Discussion turned to HRC's critical incident plan. Kevin Merritt circulated a revised draft. Erin Bradley noted that as a medical professional she has mandated reported duties that might conflict with the draft plan's direction not to talk about individuals involved in critical incidents. Kevin Merritt thought there shouldn't be a problem because of qualifying language in the draft, but offered to connect with Town counsel for clarification.

Chairman brought discussion of New Business, and reiterated the possible collaboration with Rachel Warren of the School Committee.

Next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, September 24.

Motion to adjourn was made by Rob Bardell, seconded by Lindsay Beal. A roll call vote was taken and the meeting adjourned at 8:00pm.