

**Northampton Human Rights Commission**  
**Aug. 26, 2020 Minutes**

**Present:** Karen Bellavance-Grace, Megan Paik, Booker Bush, Laurie Loisel, Nural Mohammed

**Visiting:** nominated member Deidre Cuffee-Gray

**Guest presenter:** Wayne Feiden, Northampton Director of the Office of Planning and Sustainability

**Meeting convened:** 6:35 p.m. (special meeting time)

1. **Approved** July HRC meeting minutes
2. **Introduced** ourselves and discussed the HRC with Deidre, as well as hearing from her. She may be appointed to the commission by our September meeting.
3. **Discussed** need to name an HRC member to the Police Review Board. HRC Commissioner Booker Bush agreed to be our nominee for appointment by the mayor. All members of the commission express thanks for his willingness to take on this important role. Work on this has not started, but we agree that we will allot time each month to discuss progress the review board is making and the issues they are discussing with a lens of human rights on all matters up for discussion.

In terms of HRC's role on the panel, we hope to bring to the table a commitment to work together respectfully and to engage in civil discussions even when strong disagreements might arise, keeping in mind the HRC's city-wide civility pledge.

We mentioned these as potential issues to look at that have implications for human rights within our community, and which, when appropriate we will discuss at HRC in greater depth:

- police surveillance

- militarization of local police (i.e. this refers to increased military-like equipment within our PD) Does this benefit our community? Why is it necessary? Just because equipment is offered from feds, do we say yes to it?
- the role of unions
- diversifying ranks
- how and what to peel away from police in terms of duties that should be done by others, including social workers or mental health specialists
- training is important, but how do you change culture?
- civilian review board as an accountability tool
- Racial bias training: how effective is it
- de-escalation training, do police need more more? Is it effective?
- Does police presence in itself escalate situations and if so, what should be done?

We agree Booker and the Police Review Committee work will have at least 15 minutes on HRC's monthly agenda so that we can air the issues as they come up.

4. **Statewide HRC meeting** convened in June by Commissioner Karen B-G drew about 20-25 people from Arlington, Belmont, Cambridge, Easton, Lynn, Medford, New Bedford and Northampton.

Discussed biggest challenges for HRC's since COVID shutdown -- folks say consistent membership is ongoing problem. The group feels this gathering is a good opportunity to gather to speak as one voice on statewide human rights issues but also acknowledge that that timely response is not easy to make happen. Consider meeting quarterly. There will be a November meeting.

5. **Resilience Hub presentation** by Wayne Feiden: Wayne explained goals and outlined history of Resilience Hub planning for the city. It is seen as meeting two needs: a place to meet the needs of people who experience chronic housing instability in terms of daily living matters

and possible case management, etc.; also a shelter for emergency situations and acute disasters. Large cities have both, and typically they are not combined. Northampton's would try to serve both needs. Resilience Hub planning has received small grant funding and seemed on fast track, but finding suitable space is a big issue. Have made some progress, developing space plan, hiring architect and now are working on more grant writing. This would be a facility created by city but operated by a suitable organization or agency such as Community Action. Location would need to be within easy walking distance of downtown for a variety of reasons.

HRC fully supports the efforts on this project and hopes to see it move forward in a timely fashion.

6. **Community outreach:** we decided to draft a letter to editor that would address our concerns about folks who are homeless, tying in the July presentation from Ahalya Raman of ServiceNet about shelter issues amid pandemic and the August presentation from Wayne Feiden about resilience hub, and looking ahead to our September meeting with Pam Schwartz of the western mass. homelessness network.

**Meeting adjourned** at 8:10 p.m.