

## **Deerfield Human Rights Ad Hoc Committee (Final Minutes)**

Date: February 15, 2023

Attendees: Assistant Town Administrator Chris Nolan, Deerfield Police Sergeant Jennifer Bartak, Grant Bialek, Charlene Galenski, David Wolfram, Deborah Yaffe, and Hannah Yaffe

Absent Member: Shawn Durrett

Meeting Commenced: 6:03 PM using Zoom

Deborah Yaffe called the Human Rights Ad Hoc Committee meeting to order. Deborah Yaffe made a motion to accept the February 9, 2023 minutes with two amendments. The first amendment stated that the Deerfield Inclusion Group (DIG) brought human rights complaints to the Town Administrator who then passed the information to the Selectboard. The second amendment mentioned that DIG has been meeting for six months with the Selectboard to create an antihate statement and recommended creating a Human Rights Committee. After discussing these two amendments, the February 9, 2023 minutes were approved conditionally.

Deborah asked the committee if additional agenda items needed to be addressed during today's meeting. No additions were made.

The first agenda item involved reviewing the Greenfield Human Rights document. Jen Bartak and Grant Bialek did not have an opportunity to meet as a subcommittee but did individually review the Greenfield document. Grant presented the following questions/comments:

- Does the Deerfield Human Rights Committee need to follow Roberts Rules of Order which is a manual on parliamentary procedure? The use of gender-neutral terms was mentioned as important.
- Could a consensus process be the format for the Deerfield Human Rights Committee?
- How will this committee become established?
- What will be the investigative powers of this committee?
- How many members should be on the Human Rights Committee in Deerfield?
- How will members to this Human Rights Committee be recruited?
- Using the Roberts Rules of Order may be difficult to members of the Human Rights Committee if these members are unfamiliar with the parliamentary process.

Chris Nolan will need to check with town council about using a consensus approach to a Human Rights Committee.

Grant was asked to clarify what a consensus approach to conducting a meeting involved. People express their thoughts, and a group discussion occurs, if necessary, around the expressed thought. If there is opposition to a comment, more discussion will be held to try to

bring consensus to the thought. Grant will provide information to the Ad Hoc Committee about the consensus method.

Most of the town committees are run using Roberts Rules of Order. An agenda is published prior to the meeting, agenda items are discussed. Voting on various agenda items involves a “yes”, “no”, or “abstain” vote. Sometimes using “not present” is allowed instead of “abstain”. Committees generally have odd numbers of members to avoid tie votes. The Chairperson recognizes people to speak and maintains an organized process for the meeting to progress.

Jen Bartak also commented on the Greenfield Human Rights document. The following statements/questions were mentioned:

- The vision and mission statements from the Greenfield document were well written.
- The Greenfield Human Rights Committee has nine members. All the members are residents of Greenfield. Greenfield had difficulties filling nine positions. Five members might be a more reasonable number for Deerfield.
- There were three-year term limits for membership terms. Deerfield might consider having the membership have some people serve one-year, other members serve for two years, and some three years. An overlap would avoid having a new committee formed every three years.
- How do you investigate human rights violations?

Charlene mentioned that it may be difficult to get people to serve on the Deerfield Human Rights Committee because some of the current committees have had verbal attacks between some committee members and residents attending the meeting. Some people are afraid of being called names or being accused of false allegations.

Hannah and Deborah Yaffe/e attended a Massachusetts Human Rights Council on February 10, 2023. Deborah asked how a human rights committee deals with compliance of the open meeting law while hearing a human rights complaint. Difficulties bridging a safe environment to discuss human rights violations with an open meeting format was mentioned. To circumvent that difficulty, members could meet in smaller groups or individually with committee members. Some towns are providing mediation training to assist in dealing with Human Rights allegations. Deborah brought up-the idea of Jennifer Bartak, as the Civil Rights Officer and Policewoman -serve as a liaison to the Human Rights Committee was a suggestion. She also mentioned, the town of Reading created an Equity and Social Justice Task Force to address Human Rights, under their library to give the group more autonomy. The legality of some of the concerns needs to be addressed. The next meeting of the Massachusetts Human Rights Council is March 10, 2023.

Some members questioned what the Deerfield Human Rights Committee is truly ready to pursue. As mentioned at the February 9<sup>th</sup> meeting, currently complaints go through Kaycee Warren, the Town Administrator. Recommendations that the future Deerfield Human Rights Committee could do outreach, education, find resources, and locate funding opportunities as their goals.

Jen Bartak explained that the town of Deerfield shares a social worker with other towns to address mental health problems that arise. Deerfield is part of a regional corresponding group. CSO provides this shared social worker. Currently, a 65% decrease in Title 12 reports has been observed. The largest difficulty is getting clinicians to work the shifts. Ideally it would be beneficial to have clinicians available for 16-hour shifts. The goal is to decriminalize mental health difficulties. A clinician can help determine how safe the situation is for other people responding to a call.

The group discussed the importance for having people respect others is paramount to creating a safe environment at town meetings and in our community. Sometimes town officials are unaware of human rights violations. DIG members have groups of people (LGBTQ and Black Lives Matter proponents) that confide human rights concerns to DIG. DIG will then email and/or attend town meetings to communicate any human rights allegations to the Selectboard.

Some other suggestions by the Deerfield Human Rights Ad Hoc Committee are as follows:

- Create a Task Force to address/present Human Rights might be helpful.
- Find ways to expand information that all towns are composed of people with differences.
- There is a concern about being able to recruit people for a Human Rights Committee.
- Some matters have been “blown” out of proportion which complicates investigating human rights violations.
- There currently exists a diverse population in Deerfield.

David Wolfram explained that the town of Deerfield began to become divisive during the Dollar General debate. People in town began to challenge one another’s viewpoints. The Deerfield Planning Board approved a larger building (8,000 square feet) for construction on the approved site. Dollar General changed their plans to comply with some of the town’s requests. The town has a demographic population that would have benefited from this store in Deerfield. Wetlands also was complicating the issue. The ZBA had members following the letter of the law. The Dollar General project was ceased when Dollar General decided to not continue working with the town.

It was decided the Human Rights Ad Hoc Committee will review, as a committee, various mission and vision statements at its next meeting. A suggestion to possibly consider the permanent committee as an advisory group was mentioned. An important discussion about whether town employees can become members of this committee was presented. A short discussion resulted. The Selectboard would make the final decision about town employees becoming members of other town committees.

The next meeting of the Human Rights Ad Hoc Committee will be on February 21, 2023 at 7:00 PM.

The meeting concluded at 7:02 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene Galenski, clerk to the Human Rights Ad Hoc Committee

### **Human Rights Committee Tasks for the February 21, 2023 Meeting**

Deborah Yaffe

- Create an agenda for the February 21, 2023 meeting.
- Send sample mission and vision statements to the membership.

Grant Bialek

- Send information regarding consensus process for meetings.

Charlene Galenski

- Send draft minutes of the February 15, 2023 meeting to Chris Nolan.
- Send finalized minutes of the February 9, 2023 meeting to Chris Nolan.

Chris Nolan

- Check with town council about the consensus process for town meetings.

All members

- Submit agenda items for the next meeting directly to Deborah Yaffe.