

Town of Boone
Human Relations Commission
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 20, 2023
5:30 P.M. Virtual Meeting

Members Present: Laura Buck, Steven Yow, Anneliese Thomae Elias, Meredith Sánchez-Sánchez, Joan Brook, Harley Atkins, Dana Bango, Emily Brewer

Members Absent: Sean Morris, Tiffany Christian

Council Liaisons present: Todd Carter

Staff Present: Laney Wise

Call to Order:

Ms. Brewer called the meeting to order at 5:36pm via Webex. Mx. Thomae Elias made a motion to begin, and Mx. Sánchez-Sánchez seconded. With all in favor, the meeting was officially open.

Minutes of the November meeting were reviewed and Mx. Thomae Elias questioned the Native American Heritage Month reference about Ms. Roseman submitting a proclamation. Ms. Roseman was to be contacted by Ms. Bango to inquire about the proclamation's origin and correct the minutes if needed. The November minutes will be revisited for approval at the January meeting.

Ms. Brewer asked to have the December agenda approved, which was adopted unanimously by all present.

Discussion of Charge:

1. HRC Officer Roles: Ms. Brewer is moving out of Watauga County and regrets to announce her impending resignation from the HRC. Ms. Brewer promoted Mr. Atkins as a possible candidate for the HRC Chair. Ms. Bango, motioned to vote Mr. Atkins in as Chair, Mr. Yow seconded, and Mr. Atkins was unanimously approved as new Chair of the HRC. Ms. Brewer expressed her thanks for being able to serve the community and expressed her support of the HRC.

Discussion of who to move into the Vice Chair position ensued, with Ms. Bango nominating both Mx. Thomae Elias and Ms. Buck as potential candidates. Mx. Thomae Elias feels overcommitted presently and Ms. Buck will consider the role and report back in January with a decision. Mr. Carter brought up the topic of an HRC regular member replacement as a result of Ms. Brewer's resignation, and suggested that AppState student Olivia Hayes, who applied for the student liaison position, re-apply for the position on the HRC, if interested. Ms. Bango will email Ms. Hayes to see if she is

interested in re-applying for a position. As a reminder, an email form response is submitted through the TOB website and Nicole Harmon looks at any applications, which are then considered.

2. Peace & Justice Initiative Event: Should the HRC discuss how to respond to the Israel/Gaza conflict and should a statement/proclamation be issued? At the High Country Peace Initiative meeting which both Mx. Thomae Elias and Ms. Brook attended, there was disagreement about how to respond to the conflict and how to support peace. Ms. Brook felt that AppState closed all possibilities of dialog. Ms. Brook also felt that speaking out against ceasefire rhetoric was unsafe in that space, which was dominated by support from Muslim student organizations.

Ms. Brewer asked what our limits are as the HRC are regarding a greater world conflict. Mr. Carter advised that focus on what we can do in our own community to forward equity and peace are our prime responsibilities and looking to our leaders, like Dr. Tariq and the Rabbi in Boone, should inform our actions.

Ms. Brook agreed, but feels, as a member of the local Jewish community and the Temple of the High Country, that being Jewish in Boone is not safe and that information being discussed in public is not accurate or complete. For instance, the US government at this specific date has not been supportive of a ceasefire and, the Temple has had to install bullet proof glass in response to threats to the local Jewish community. No other place of worship in the High Country has had to deal with such issues. There has also been a 400 percent rise in Antisemitism since the October terrorist attack on Israel by Hamas.

Mx. Thomae Elias suggested calling for a ceasefire as the killing of children in Gaza has been widely reported and noted that not all Jewish people of the High Country feel the same way about actions in Gaza. Ms. Brook and Mx. Thomae Elias as well as the rest of the HRC will need to continue the discussion in and with the community as no compromise can be made currently. Mr. Carter suggested that as the heads of the Islamic Center of Boone and the Temple of the High Country are working together; we can follow their lead and become an example of a way forward to peace. The HRC can be supportive to both communities. Ms. Brewer also reminded members that as individuals, members can join any community groups and support them outside of the HRC.

Ms. Brook forwarded an email link to the mayor's Holocaust remembrance proclamation submitted by the mayor and forwarded by Center for Judaic, Holocaust and Peace Studies director Amy Hudnall. After approaching Ms. Hudnall regarding creation of a proclamation for the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, no agreement could be reached regarding wording of the proposed proclamation.

Ms. Buck proposed an idea used in family mediation called the Way of Council, a method of communication that she and her family have used successfully in order to facilitate understanding. More will be discussed in further meetings about communication training.

3. Upcoming noted calendar dates-

- Ms. Buck suggested a possible event regarding World Religion Day on January 21st and promoting an event themed “What Religion Means to You”? Ms. Brewer suggested forming a subcommittee and Mx. Sánchez-Sánchez, and Ms. Brook were interested in joining the group.
- January 27: International Holocaust Remembrance Day activities have been scaled down according to Ms. Brook (see above discuss under section 2). There will be one event at the Turchin Center that Ms. Brook would like to have promoted by the HRC and was advised to submit a post/poster through Ms. Wise at the TOB. There is also the traditional Remembrance Day commemoration that Center for Judaic Holocaust and Peace Studies Director Amy Hudnall has invited all of the HRC to attend.
- Mx. Thomae Elias will reach out to Bridge International to initiate work with them regarding an initiative regarding human trafficking next year. Meanwhile, Mx. Thomae Elias will make a post and submit to Ms. Wise promoting resources available for helping those affected by human trafficking. Ms. Brewer suggested Mx. Thomae Elias consult with Dr. Christian as she is a good local source regarding trafficking.
- February is Black History Month, February 20th is World Day of Social Justice, the 16th is National Caregivers Day and the 15th is Susan B. Anthony’s Birthday. Dr. Christian is the lead on Black History month initiatives.
- Mr. Atkins will pass out the master calendar for events in March going forward through the rest of 2024.

4. Subcommittee Updates-

- Pedestrian Safety: Ms. Buck has been reading and researching the topic and will distribute findings to Mx. Thomae Elias, Mr. Morris and Ms. Bango. Subcommittee members should be observing pedestrian conditions around Boone and making their own notes.
- Mx. Thomae Elias will investigate obtaining a zip file from the TOB with email resources in order to distribute HRC posts and will report back in January.
- Ms. Bango will have results of the initial survey responses from the AppState Sociology Department students after the winter school break.

Discussion of Next Steps:

Next meeting will be held in person on January 17 at the TOB chambers, as usual.

Adjournment:

With no further discussion and no public comments, Ms. Brewer initiated a motion to adjourn at 7:05pm (Mx. Thomae Elias forwarded, and Mx. Sánchez-Sánchez seconded). Members unanimously voted to adopt the motion.