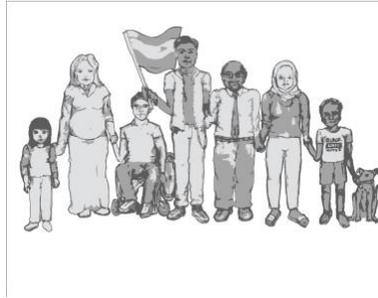


To commemorate International Human Rights Day in December, 2018, the HRC held conversations in each of Northampton's seven Wards in collaboration with our City Councilors. Based on the results of these conversations and our desire to hear from a broader cross section of all Northampton residents, these conversations will continue through 2019, with a public report timed to coincide with International Human Rights Day in December 2019. This document reflects the collected notes from those 2018 Ward meetings



Reports from HRC listening sessions on the state of human rights in Northampton

Ward 1, December 10, Jackson St School. Facilitator team: Davina Miller, Karen Bellavance-Grace (Jeromie Whalen also attended, and Booker Bush arrived half way through)

Attending: 4 members of the public (including Jeromie), all appearing to be white; two men, two women

Comments and Insights:

- Lifelong resident of Northampton raises challenges of being poor here
- Ongoing effect of de-institutionalization on housing market – many people continue to live on our streets, in the woods
- We lack ‘true’ shelters – where people can go to be warm without meeting any threshold (eg, not having had anything to drink, arriving between certain times) Substance users also need shelter.
- Forbes Library does great work welcoming people in to warm space – literally a life saver – but a library is not a home
- Loss of 24 hour Dunkin Donuts on King Street felt by homeless community
- Taking the public buses, I have heard bad stories from LGBTQ people
- Neighbors who are on the Sex Offender Registry face huge barriers to safe housing – and often their presence on the Registry is more about a lack of financial resources than the offense they committed
- Refugees: we have welcomed students from Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. Families were given accommodations in hotels, but no transportation to school. Students had to walk up to there miles, and these are students unaccustomed to New England winter weather
- HRC could be more proactive in getting the stories we need to hear, like the students without transportation – this is a factor that correlates with school attendance

- Sidewalks in Northampton are terrible and this is an accessibility issue. Especially hard for people using wheelchairs and walkers
- Bus service keeps getting cut; we could use more service to more neighborhoods
- Northampton has come a long way over the last 20 years in supporting workers' issues
- The reliance on service sector jobs in Northampton contributes to wealth disparity here
- We don't have enough mental health resources easily available & accessible by public transport
- Trauma informed community
- Disparity of pay based on gendered (caring) professions

Priorities for HRC:

- Income inequality – work with other organizations already engaged in this
- Encourage fraternal clubs to leverage their assistance for specific cases
- Engage in long-term thinking – not just duct tape / band-aid solutions
- Gather conversations from all wards and make the feedback public

Ward 2, December 11, YMCA, Facilitator team: Karen Bellavance-Grace, Norma Akamatsu

Attending: YMCA director and City Councilor and one other Northampton Connects member. No members of the public attended.

Ward 3, December 12, Senior Center, Facilitator Team: Laurie Loisel and Stan Schapiro. Jeromie Whalen also attended

Attending: 9 participants, (including Jeromie), all appearing white, almost all (except Jeromie) appearing age 50+

Comments and Insights:

- Our town is built on stolen land. We are not immune from the history of slavery. Grappling with these realities of history is ongoing work
- Northampton sidewalks need to be improved for accessibility
- Equity in Education
- The civility pledge was appreciated; next steps might be in invitation to explore structural racism and confronting whiteness

- Housing Authority: poor neighbors struggle with housing insecurity
- There are “alternatives to calling the police” movements that would invite boundaries around Police presence in the city
- There are global issues we must pay attention to
- Sanctuary efforts balance the loss of home with the generosity of neighbors
- People in poverty and homeless people essentially live in a separate community
- Our built community can promote human rights opportunities (like the opening of Pulaski Park)

Priorities for the HRC:

- Build community through shared spaces
- Create opportunities to gather across differences
- Raise awareness of disability needs
- Investigate racial disparity in educational attainment
- Support culture of civility in schools
- Place articles in the Gazette on Human Rights issues and how local groups are working together
- Lift up stories of good people doing good work

Questions for follow up:

- What actual power does HRC have?
- What is the status of the city’s sidewalk report?
- Should HRC be a voice for values based budgets and overrides?

Ward 4, December 13, Facilitator: Nural Mohammed

- One of our attendees was one of the first people to be on the HRC back in 1998. She stated that she was so excited to see the direction that the HRC has headed in and that she is proud of the accomplishments of the HRC and how far it has come from when it was first founded.
- Attendee above shared a lovely story about how the HRC's first point of action, after being created, was to talk to local Boy Scout groups in the area about their homophobic / transphobic policies and to create a safe space for any future Boy Scouts.

- Discussed the desire to see the HRC deal with national issues. Discussed support for Sanctuary Cities and the Safe Communities Act
 - Discussed how things like resolutions (which some members of the community sometime feel like don't really create change or are a passive way of dealing with issues) can have a domino effect that does create larger change. For example the Welcome Refugee Program that was created out of a resolution that the Council passed
 - Discussed Who Northampton is For?
 - White Middle Class people
 - LGBTQA+
 - How can we open up positions to have more diverse leadership and have a local government that is truly representative of its people?
 - Childcare?
 - Sliding scale for stipends?
 - Special Education / Disabilities
 - Handicap Parking
 - Disabilities Committee
 - Transportation / parking
 - Housing / Homelessness
 - Northampton is currently having a "War on Homeless People"
 - How to help / assist members of the homeless community
 - Shelters only available in the winter
 - Bathroom City Hall has Resource Cards
 - Rules and policies that create an endless cycle (need an ID to obtain a job, need an address to obtain an ID, need a job to obtain an address...) / (can only go to certain out of area shelters if shelters in area are full but you need something to prove / show that the other shelter was full otherwise you will not be let in) etc.
 - Northampton Police Department
 - Attempted trip to Israel / what Israel teaches police forces / how police forces that are trained in Israel tend to take on a more combative and racially motivated way of dealing with citizens
 - Racial profiling / bias
 - Civility Pledge
 - Ask local businesses their input on what they are going to do to promote civility (other than just hosting a space for people to sign the civility pledge)
-

Ward 6, December 10, Facilitation Team: Joel Morse and

Eight people attended

6 female

2 male

Age, 50+

Comments and Insights:

- Lived 35 years in Chicopee and it's not like Northampton. "We are an exception. Tough to complain as this is a little bit of heaven." However, challenges do arise.
- Have cried a dozen times over the incident where the local kids attempted to cover up a murder. We sit around and do nothing. What did they experience that made them feel it was ok to do this? These were neighborhood kids. My kids knew them. What caused them to ruin their lives like this? What could we have done?
- Was a teacher in Northampton. Observed major kindness to those who had disabilities, however no kindness whatsoever to those who had "hidden illnesses" like Aspergers, OCD, ones that are not so obvious. We need training on how to deal with those. It's an ongoing problem.
- Real concern about our city. The past couple of years there has been an outcry with our police dept. People have concerns. How do we get people to believe it's a good police dept? We're not working closely enough with them. We need to get trust back.
- Northampton is an accepting community. But we need to find ways to communicate with other cities. We're not an island. There is a large part of the community that we are not hearing. We hear only the small minority who voice complaints the loudest. Biggest example is the "high five Fridays." This was a wonderful experience for the kids. The vast majority loved it. However a small minority of people complained and they dropped the whole thing. A lost opportunity. The majority is not being heard. How do we get them to voice their opinion? "Small groups tend to hijack the conversation."
- We are not ethnically diverse. We make wonderful comments, but we're not terribly friendly.

Priorities for the HRC:

- We need money in the budget for interpreters at various events (sign language, different languages, etc).

- Outreach to the Latino community. We only hear the negative comments, yet there is a vast network of wonderful people.
 - Outreach to our children
 - Need to be more involved with Commission on Disabilities/HRC needs to have someone attend meetings and become more involved. We need to be more educated as to their needs, and to work together with them.
 - There are not enough opportunities available for minority communities in this area. We talk a good game, but are not as accepting as we should be.
 - We need to do more to protect immigrant workers. HRC needs to create exposure for immigrant workers.
 - Encourage better police relations
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Wards 5 & 7, Dec. 11; Location, Florence Civic Center. Facilitator team: Gail Perlman, Booker Bush and Laurie Loisel (scribe)

Attending: 5 people from public, all appear to be white. Four women and one man.

Reasons for attending:

- Human rights a great interest and now more relevant than ever.
- Just wanted to hear what was on people's minds.
- Saw notice in paper, looked interesting.
- Concerned about schools -- "We're more alike than different" -- hopes children understand this.
- National politics on radar, have been involved in electoral politics and Indivisible, but want to anchor back into local work.
- Concerned about mental health issues with regards to human rights.
- Distraught about national tensions and hatred expressed, scared for our country, want to focus locally.
-

Stories told/ concerns raised:

- One person describes being in her favorite store and witnessing folks panhandling. Shop-owner shared concerns. Sympathy for shop-owner who sees panhandling as deterrent to business and on the other hand "why aren't we as a community supporting people supporting themselves?" "It was an interesting conversation because it was really about the rights of people to support themselves in any way that they can." Acknowledged the tension and conflict with no clear answers. "An issues

that keeps getting kicked down the road. And these folks feel like our neighbors!" The other piece of this is wondering whether

- One participant describes working at a job puts him in touch with a lot of social service agencies. "It's been an eye opening experience in terms of how much is being contributed but how much services are needed. I am interested in bringing in the voices of the people who are receiving services". Also shared how impactful personal travel outside the United States has been in shaping his perspective: "Human rights are something easy to take for granted." Once picked up by the police; during a coup, saw children die. "It gave me a real appreciation for coming back to the states and how good that experience is" At the same time he acknowledged that there is plenty of work to still be done: "We got to constantly work at it".
- Another participant said as a white woman, experiences the privilege of not having to worry about racial violence and physical survival. Even so, there are gendered human rights issues. For example, the inverse relationship between assertiveness and successful outcomes for women. Women have to go the extra mile to be heard, recognized, validated. And as for racial injustice, this person expressed personal commitment to critical cultural competency and inclusion. How can we be better white allies? What are the rules of engagement when vulnerability is so immediate for target populations?
- Another person: Since the elections, struggling with the number of ways issues can be sliced. How do civil rights differ from human rights? There are differences but there are intersections. The whole concept of racial inequality in this country has become more urgent. During the Obama years, many of us congratulated ourselves on progress and then Trump got elected. Has sunk herself into study groups but acknowledges more is needed. Also concerned about downtown and wonders whether human rights are embedded in both the shopkeeper's and panhandler's concerns. How to bring these voices together?
- Speakers said they want to ensure that immigrant experiences are also captured in this conversation. "ICE is picking up people who have been working at the farm. These are our neighbors who can't be safe going to work or going home!" A sense of feeling outmatched by the force of these institutions.

What would like to see HRC focus on:

- Immigration issues. ICE has been in parking lot at Jackson Street School. Don't want to see children taken away from parents.

- How to bring programs to schools that focus on active bystandership, anti-bullying efforts.
 - Concerned about people convicted of sex offenses; they need to be able to live somewhere
 - Class issues; affordable housing should be a human right.
 - How can privileged white people be better allies?
 - How to include voices of people most impacted by human rights violations?
 - Skill building, cultural competence, work with police?
-

Ward 3, Dec. 12; Northampton Senior Center. Facilitator team: Stan Schapiro, Jim Nash, Laurie Loisel, Karen Bellavance-Grace

8 people from public, 4 women and 4 men. All appear to be white.

Reasons for coming:

- a teacher, who wants to bring youth into conversation
- wanted to listen, hear what people have to say
- grew up in third world country, saw poverty and despotism and noticed sense of community lacking
- wants to build up a sense of community
- cares about human rights
- loves Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Interested in human rights
- Interested in rights of disabled people

Issues raised:

- We're living on stolen land, what to do with that reality? Reparations to native people?
- Poverty, low-income issues.
- Right to safe space to live. People in housing complexes don't feel safe.
- When you deny human rights, that becomes normalized.

Priorities for HRC:

- Build on skills for people to respond to human rights violations on the spot
- Look at structural issues, institutional racism.

- Look at white fragility
- Reading groups in the city
- Could the HRC play a role in facilitating a dialogue between police and the community?
- Sidewalks hard to navigate
- Bathrooms gender-neutral
- Create list of free resources
- Focus on this: “Human Rights are really good for everybody.”