

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19, 2002

Present: Ald. Merrill, Lipsitt, Sangiolo, Fischman, Parker, Coletti

Absent: Ald. Gentile, Johnson

Also Present: Peter Karg (Executive Secretary) David Mofenson (Election Commissioner) Fay Cohen (Election Commissioner)

#205-02      HIS HONOR THE MAYOR appointing Suzanne Greenberg of 11 Oakwood Terrace, Newton Centre 02459 as an Advisory Council member of the Human Rights Commission for a term of office expiring July 1, 2005 (60-day Board action date 08/02/03).

ACTION:      APPROVED 6-0

NOTE:        Ms. Greenberg is a photographer who did a photo essay on a year of anti-Semitism in Massachusetts. Presently she works at Newton-Wellesley Hospital in the area of medical safety. Ms. Greenberg has attended Human Rights Commission meetings and would like to work on the web page and serve on the Hate Crimes Committee. President Lipsitt thanked Ms. Greenberg for offering her services to the Human Rights Commission. The Committee approved the appointment 6-0

APPOINTMENT BY HIS HONOR THE MAYOR

#179-02      TED HESS-MAHAN, 871 Watertown Street, West Newton, appointed on 6/5/02 as an ADVISORY COUNCIL member on the HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION for a term of office expiring on 7/5/05 (60-day Board action date 7/19/02).

ACTION:      APPROVED 6-0

NOTE:        Mr. Hess-Mahan is an attorney who has worked extensively on civil rights issues, consumer fraud, and class action work on behalf of people with disabilities. He has lived in West Newton for six years and has been appointed to the PTO Council as liaison to the Metco Program. Mr. Hess-Mahan is the President of the Board of CAN-DO, a non-profit developer of affordable housing and also served with President Lipsitt on uniting systems for housing affordability in Newton. After attending a public forum, Mr. Hess-Mahan volunteered to serve. President Lipsitt moved the appointment and the Committee voted 6-0 in favor.

APPOINTMENT BY HIS HONOR THE MAYOR

#178-02        JANE A. BROWN, 104 Atwood Avenue, Newtonville, appointed on 5/6/02 as an ADVISORY COUNCIL member on the HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION for a term of office expiring on 7/1/05 (60-day Board action date 7/19/02).

ACTION:        APPROVED 6-0

NOTE:         Ms. Brown has been active in the Democratic Party and has been very interested in Human Rights and Civil Liberties. She writes about this in the "Newton Tab". In her view we have to fight to protect the culture and diversity in Newton. Ald. Sangiolo asked if Ms. Brown has had the opportunity to go to some of the meetings and she explained she has been attending since September. Immigrant rights is one of her particular interests. Ald. Merrill moved approval and the Committee voted 6-0 in favor.

APPOINTMENT BY HIS HONOR THE MAYOR

#177-02        PETER BROWN, 79 Washington Street, Newton Corner, appointed on 5/6/02 as an ADVISORY COUNCIL member on the HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION for a term of office expiring on 7/1/05 (60-day Board action date 7/19/02).

ACTION:        APPROVED 6-0

NOTE:         Mr. Brown is an attorney and has lived in Newton since 1994. Mr. Brown's practice is mainly litigation representing cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth. He feels Newton is a wonderful, diverse community and with effort will hopefully stay that way. Ald. Merrill moved to approve this appointment and the Committee supported the motion 6-0.

APPOINTMENT BY HIS HONOR THE MAYOR

#175-02        DANIELLE ILLAN-WARREN, 102 Beaumont Avenue, Newton Centre, appointed on 5/6/02 as an ADVISORY COUNCIL member on the HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION for a term of office expiring on 7/1/05 (60-day Board action date 7/19/02).

ACTION:        APPROVED 6-0

NOTE:         Ms. Warren has recently completed her Master's Degree in Criminal Justice at Northeastern University where she did most of her research on hate crimes and in the fall is starting her Ph.D. in law policy and society. On a personal note, Ms. Warren said three of her four grandparents were holocaust survivors. She is very interested in Human Rights. In 1999 she went to Macedonia and has seen the devastation first-hand of what the destruction of human rights looks like. President Lipsitt approval and the Committee voted in favor 6-0.

APPOINTMENT BY HIS HONOR THE MAYOR

#174-02        ALBURN E. BLANKENSHIP, 8 Varick Hill Road, Waban, appointed on 5/6/02 as an ADVISORY COUNCIL member on the HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION for a term of office expiring on 7/1/05 (60-day Board action date 7/19/02).

ACTION:        APPROVED 6-0

NOTE:         Mr. Blankenship has lived in Newton for thirty years. He has recently retired and now feels it is time to give back to the community. President Lipsitt said she was pleased to hear Mr. Blankenship's point of view and, in particular, his focus on thinking about our need for diversity along other lines than those traditionally used. President Lipsitt feels we now have to think about housing as well as access to housing as a Human Rights issue. The decreasing diversity in the Newton community is in large measure attributable to what has been an incredible rise in the cost of housing here. She pointed out that any work that can be done on the housing issue as a strong concern of Human Rights will be most welcome in the community and will hopefully get strong support from both the aldermen and the administration. Ald. Merrill moved approval and the Committee voted 6-0 in favor.

APPOINTMENT BY HIS HONOR THE MAYOR

#173-02        ELLEN FORMAN, 37 Kensington Avenue, West Newton, appointed on 5/6/02 as an ADVISORY COUNCIL member on the HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION for a term of office expiring on 7/1/05 (60-day Board action date 7-19-02).

ACTION:        APPROVED 6-0

NOTE         Ms. Forman is a social worker runs a small program that provides information about community resources and is looking forward to serving on the Committee. Ald. Parker moved approval and the Committee voted 6-0 in favor.

#204-02        PRESIDENT LIPSITT reappointing Beth Tishler of 129 Valentine Street, West Newton 02465 to the Newton Community Education Commission effective July 1, 2002. Term to expire on June 30, 2004 (60-day Board action date 08/02/02).

ACTION:        APPROVED 6-0

NOTE:         Beth Tishler has been a resident of Newton for over 30 years and has been very involved with the community. Professionally she is a consultant to non-profit organizations. In addition to serving on the Newton Community Education Commission, she was also Chair of Newton Serves and served as the Chair of the Advisory Committee for the Office of Volunteer Services.

Ald. Parker questioned to what extent have the course offerings changed in recent years to reflect emerging technologies. Ms. Tischler pointed out that on-line technology has been one of the courses that have become very popular.

Ald. Lipsitt asked how people are aware of what courses are being offered. Ms. Tishler said that there is a citywide mailing, as well as web page and brochures available. Ald. Merrill moved approval and the Committee voted 6-0 in favor.

0#442-00      ALD. JOHNSON & ALD. PARKER requesting a dialogue with the Election Commission & Executive Secretary of the Commission regarding Election processes, procedures and practices.

ACTION:      NAN 6-0

NOTE:          Peter Karg, David Mofenson and Fay Cohen were present for this discussion. Mr. Karg has been in his position for four months and is focusing on how the operations and procedures of the Election Commission can be improved. A comprehensive informational packet was prepared by Mr. Karg for the Committee.

One of issues he has been involved with has been training of the Election Commission staff. He was pleased to report that all the members of the staff have recently received one-half day training session on customer service. This was also offered to employees of the Treasury Department. This past March, Mr. Karg invited the Office of Campaign and Political Finance to come in to present training to the Election Commission staff involving issues such as campaign finance report filings. The staff was instructed on what the expectation was on these reports as well as how they should be handled and how candidates would be advised on their reporting requirements. Mr. Karg hoped that next spring the Office of Political Campaign and Finance would come out to Newton and present a program for elected officials and candidates for office. He has also arranged with the Secretary of State's Office (Election Division) to come into the election office in late July to provide further training on the uses of the central voter registry. Included in the packet he distributed was a summary of the registry. This is a state database that is used by all the communities to register voters, access absentee ballots, and to run reports on returned absentee ballots. Mr. Karg reported that he has also been working with the Director of Human Resources to identify additional training for staff development and hopes to have all the Election Commission staff cross-trained so everyone is well-versed in all the operations and procedures of the Election Commission office. He pointed out that it is very important to do a better job on training poll workers. There is an Election Day poll worker handbook which is distributed to each precinct on the operations and procedures that are to be followed in handling the election. Within the last 6 months, Mr. Karg noted there has been a great improvement in written information provided to the poll workers. The Secretary of State's office had provided poll worker training prior to the April 30<sup>th</sup> election. Additional training will be provided around Labor Day. Bev Droz, Director of Volunteer Services, and Jane Colino of the Senior Center, have been assisting Mr. Karg in identifying potential sources of poll workers. There will be outreach to both the Republican and Democratic City Committees and the League of Women Voters. Efforts will also be made to try to find other community and civic

groups which have not been used in the past as potential sources of additional poll workers.

Other issues Mr. Karg is working on include on-going recruitment during the year as well as developing a data base of potential workers in order to staff polling locations. Ald. Merrill asked if students of voting age could be employed and Mr. Karg said if students are duly registered to vote and live in the city they could be hired. It makes it somewhat impossible to employ seniors in high school because during the first half of the year, most have not turned eighteen. Also included in Mr. Karg's packet are the results of a survey of other cities and towns. (Newton seems to be comparable in pay to other cities and towns.)

Mr. Karg said sandwich boards would be posted in village centers informing residents of an upcoming election approximately three weeks prior to Election Day. Notices will also be included in tax bills that are sent out to residents. Advancements also include use of the city web site to convey election information and polling locations. Links have been added on the Election Commission page to assist candidates in terms of accessing information. Post card notifications will be sent out prior to the September primary informing every household of their ward and precinct as well as the September primary and the November election dates and their voting location. Mr. Karg reported to the Committee that there had been a lot of voter confusion this year due to the re-precincting. He further noted that being proactive and mailing post cards to all households can minimize uncertainty.

Mr. Karg said accessibility for handicapped persons at polling locations as well as signage are other areas that can be improved. One recent change for the fall is that the polling location for Ward 8, Precinct 1 has been moved from the Brown Middle School to Oak Hill because it is more handicapped accessible. The ground is level allowing people in wheelchairs direct access right to the gymnasium.

Customer service and quality control are other areas Mr. Karg is looking to improve. He pointed out that he had the opportunity to talk with other communities for information on voter equipment. The present equipment is about thirty years old and within the next year the purchase of new equipment should be explored. Recently a presentation was made to the Election Commission on electronic voting. A Texas based company demonstrated a system at the Clerk's Association meeting and at that time they agreed to make a presentation to the Election Commissioners. Next month a presentation has been scheduled for a system presently used in Brookline, Plymouth, and starting in September the City of Boston (Accu-Vote). The results could be modemed to City Hall and the election results could be noted as early as 8:30 p.m.

Election Commissioner Mofenson addressed the Committee and said since Mr. Karg has assumed the duties in the Election Department, the work of the Election Commission has been made much easier because of the creativity, diligence, energy and spirit that he has

brought to the job. Faye Cohen said when she first came on as an Election Commissioner things were in a state of turmoil and now there has been positive progress.

Ald. Parker reported to the Committee that there has been progress in dealing with the host of challenges before the Commission. The biggest problem Ald. Parker referred to were concerns regarding absentee ballots. Ald. Parker suggested that a database be kept and accessible to all staff members. Mr. Karg responded by explaining that a tracking system was being used. It was further noted that included in the packet provided by Mr. Karg is a summary sheet of what the central voter registry does. Often times absentee ballots are requested but not returned. This past election had approximately 1300 absentee ballots processed. The Central Voter Registry is the system that should be used for the tracking of all absentee ballots. Setting up an additional system or to run a parallel system does not serve the purpose.

Ald. Parker questioned the date prior to the April 30<sup>th</sup> special election that absentee ballots were mailed to the residents who had requested them. Mr. Karg responded that they were sent out as soon the ballots were received. President Lipsitt expressed concern regarding developing a system that will encourage proper training of poll workers. One suggestion President Lipsitt had was to have some clear identification of who the person is that is in charge at each of the precincts. Ald. Lipsitt asked when the new voters' list would be available. Mr. Karg hopes an accurate list would be available around the first of July. Ald. Merrill suggested that a fact sheet be accessible. He also said there had been marked improvement in the process. It was reported by Ald. Parker that some polling places had closed earlier than 8 p.m. and feels there should be some procedure for having an accurate closing time. Ald. Parker feels there needs to be better communication with appropriate enforcement people on poll closing times. Ald. Parker pointed out that he feels very strongly that replacement of voting machines is of the utmost importance. Mr. Karg reported to the Committee that the postcards that will be mailed in the fall would clearly delineate the ward and precinct. The Committee voted NAN 6-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Ald. Amy Sangiolo  
Acting Chairman