

Human Rights Commission and Advisory Council minutes

Wednesday – February 15, 2012

7:30 pm – Newton City Hall – rm 222

Present:

Jane Brown, Sheila Mondshein, Samuel Glass, Brenda Krasnow, Bruce Apotheker, Nazik Kazimi, Peter Brown, Sona Petrossian, Carol Kelley, Viviana Planine, Holly Ryan, student representative, Abby Coleman, HHS Commissioner Dori Zaleznik

Absent:

Ann Capoccia, Carleton Merrill, Norman Lazarus, Joan Rubin, Lillian Backman Frank Wolpe, Dianne Chilingerian,

Linda announced the meeting would be recorded.

Meeting was called to order at 7:30pm

Each member introduced themselves and said a few words about their background and interest in the commission.

Peter started a discussion about the need for a possible change in the language of the ordinance to include gender identity.

School updates

Abby Coleman, from NSHS, gave a report on activities at NSHS. The R.A.D program was offered to students in the months of January and February. Anti-bullying programs continued with lessons and discussion in classrooms. The sustainable Agriculture project sponsored a farm stand sale with locally grown produce. T B'GLAD programs were held in December during B block. These programs are so well attended that a larger space is needed. The environmental club is sponsoring a contest encouraging energy savings. The play 'Beauty and the Beast' was performed last weekend. The Water Aid International (WAI) club hosted an improv entertainment night as a fundraiser. There was juice box drive to donate to 'Birthday Wishes', an organization committed to bringing birthday parties to homeless children. The Black Student Union will be sponsoring presentations for Black History month on March 1, 2012.

Hate Crime/Incident Reports

None

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from November 2011 were approved with some corrections.

New Business

Dori listed 5 areas of interest for the group to discuss: Race/Ethnicity, Religion, Gender/sexual orientation, Immigration and Economic Disparity. She later added gender identity.

There was discussion about holding separate commission meetings. Some members requested clarification about open meeting laws. Dori said that an agenda must be posted to the clerk's office (within 72 hours) and minutes must be taken and posted after each meeting. Some voiced their thoughts on whether the work of the commission would be done more effectively and efficiently if there were more times to meet and plan. Dori said that small groups (fewer than 5) could meet to program plan. Dori also clarified that the ordinance specifies only commissioners can vote. Advisory council members have voted in the past.

A subcommittee structure was discussed. In the past subcommittees would report back to the larger group monthly. The outreach committee helped bring new people into the commission. The program committee could focus on bringing information to the public.

Different ideas for program planning were discussed.

- One program that would address several areas of interest with an expert panel.
- A program to address basic human rights.
- A program on prejudice with several content areas
- Recent legislation on gender identity and access to all

Peter told the group about the 'secure communities' program. Jane and Peter were working on this topic in anticipation of a program to be held in the fall. He told the group about the issue and about the pilot program in Boston. The Governor chose not to implement the program but the Obama administration intends to make this mandatory. Offering a 'secure communities' program would educate the general public.

Holly talked about her involvement in recent legislation. She offered to speak publicly on the topic of gender identity. The greater public should be educated on the law before July 1st. Holly will be given time on next month's agenda to present this topic to the group.

There was discussion about when and how to recognize the previous members of the commission. A suggestion was made to request a proclamation/recognition be sent to Marianne, Judy and Susan thanking them for their service to the commission.

The topic of increasing the membership was discussed. Several ideas were made; hosting an open house, updating the HRC website, creating a Facebook page and/or twitter account.

Dori explained that the process for choosing a chair will be placed on the agenda next month. Holly, Nazik and Dianne cannot vote until the board of alderman votes on their appointments.

Summary of the Conflict of Interest Law

Booklets were distributed and signature pages collected.

Linda will send them to the clerk's office

Old Business

None

Meeting adjourned 9:20 pm