

Human Rights Commission and Advisory Council minutes

Wednesday – April 11, 2012

7:30 pm – Newton City Hall – Veteran's conference room

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Present:

Jane Brown, Sheila Mondschein, Brenda Krasnow, Bruce Apotheker, Peter Brown, Sona Petrossian, Carol Kelley, Holly Ryan, Hattie Kerwin Derick, Dianne Chilingerian, Nazik Kazimi  
Student Representatives; Abby Coleman, Jordi Batler, Veronica Ingham

Absent:

Ann Capoccia, Carleton Merrill, Norman Lazarus, Lillian Backman, Frank Wolpe, Viviana Planine,

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Peter announced the meeting would be recorded.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm

Alderman Linsky talked about the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a Newton civil rights case that addressed voting rights. Gordon Martin, a Newton resident, was instrumental in bringing that case forward and has written a book entitled "Count Them One by One: Black Mississippians Fighting for the Right to Vote".

School Updates

Jordi commended Tuleeka for doing a great job on her presentation at the 'Day of Remembrance' at South High. She also announced that the 'Tertulia,' a musical celebration in honor of a former student, is being held tomorrow. It will be broadcast live during the day so that all students can watch.

Veronica said Governor Patrick toured North High to see the career and technology programs. She also spoke about an incident that occurred at a boy's basketball game involving derogatory comments made by the '6<sup>th</sup> man' student fan group. The student leadership team (under the direction Principal Price) addressed the behavior immediately. Letters of apology were written, a zero tolerance policy and a code of conduct were created to ensure incidents like this will not happen again.

Tuleeka prepared and presented a program titled "Days of Remembrance" at South HS on April 11, 2012. It was very well received. The theme was modern genocides other than the Holocaust. Mayor Warren appeared and made comments that summed up the day. It was noted that the program for the day's events indicated that the HRC sponsored the event. This is not true - everything was done by Tuleeka.

### Minutes approved as written

Judy Fishbach donated money to be used to purchase books (on the topic of transgender) in honor of Holly's appointment to the human rights commission. Peter bought 2 books; 'Transgender Explained' and 'True Selves'. The books will be donated to the Newton Library.

### Recognition Letters

Peter wrote 4 letters, to previous HRC members, thanking them for their service. The letters were passed around the room to be personally signed. The Mayor's office also wrote 3 certificates of recognition to Marianne, Judy and Susan. They will be mailed this week.

### Trayvon Martin case

Members of the HRC discussed possible responses to the Trayvon Martin incident in Florida. Three options were proposed; Letter to the editor of the TAB, a resolution (to be written by Frank Wolpe who is also the chair of the Crime Commission) and a letter to the joint judiciary committee (suggested by Sen. Creem) that states opposition to any 'stand your ground' policy/legislation in Massachusetts.

Since these types of laws sometimes have unintended consequences that put the lives of others at risk, there could be a response that included how things are different in Newton and how our community manage the risks. Newton does not have an official neighborhood watch/ crime watch. It is helpful for citizens to be the 'eyes and ears in the community' but not take the law into their own hands. Any correspondence could say that HRC is a resource to people for any questions or concerns. One letter could be sent to both the judicial committee and the newspaper. The Mayor would like to be part of the conversation before anything is submitted. So, once a draft is created, it should be sent to the commissioners and the mayor for input.

Peter mentioned a couple of procedural notes. Get any agenda items to Linda or Peter by the Friday preceding the monthly meeting. Any business (not anticipated) can be covered under 'new business'. Only commissioners should vote

Historic Newton has requested the HRC to co-sponsor 2 upcoming events. There was no objection from the group.

## Potential Programs

Brenda has agreed to be the chair of the program committee. If someone has an idea for a program, they should take the lead and develop the program. Brenda can help brainstorm ideas and use her expertise (in planning and logistics) to bring the program along.

There was discussion on available space in the City. The library is a small venue and needs to have a written proposal before the program gets the OK. BC law school and North High are good places for programs. Linda can help in booking rooms for programs.

Occupy Boston is doing outreach to the suburbs and would like to present at one of our meetings. The Occupy Newton group would come also. This would be both educational and informational.

## Reinstatement of separate commissioner meetings

Commissioners could meet in addition to the regularly scheduled meetings. They used to meet on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month. There is no requirement to meet but some additional time could be spent to plan programs. Increasing membership should be talked about in the meeting. Peter will plan a commissioners meeting for May or June. Any additional commissioner meetings (monthly?, quarterly?) can be decided as needed.

## MAHRC meetings

There are two upcoming meetings. On 4/24/12 Brandy Donini-Melanson, the law enforcement coordinator from the US Attorney's office will speak and on 5/18/12 Professor Martha Davis and Angela Dugar, from Northeastern University School of Law, will talk about Boston Principles which is an ongoing project on the economic, social and cultural rights of non-citizens.

## New Business

On April 17<sup>th</sup> "Traces of the Trade" will be presented at Harvard University in the Fong Auditorium at 6 PM.

The Mayor's prayer breakfast will be held on 5/23/12. The HRC members can go as a group and sit together at a table. Each person would have to pay for the ticket. Let Linda know via email if interested.

Tuleeka prepared and presented a program at South HS on genocide on April 11, 2012. She incorrectly noted in the flyer detailing the day's events that her program was sponsored by the HRC. We had no part in preparing or presenting the program. There was a discussion with the conclusion that we have to be careful about this in the future. It was also the consensus of the group that if we, as a Commission, are involved in any similar programs in the future, the Holocaust should be included.

HRC award for next year will be here before you know it. Start to think about any names to be submitted for the 2012 award.

The fair housing committee will be sponsoring a program entitled "Avoid Legal Pitfalls: Current Developments in Housing Discrimination" on May 1<sup>st</sup> at 7:00PM in the Newton Library

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM