

Human Rights Commission and Advisory Council Minutes

Wednesday, May 9, 2012

7:30 p.m., Newton City Hall, Veterans Conference Room

Present: Jane Brown, Peter Brown, Dianne Chilingirian, Nazik Kazimi, Sheila Mondschein, Sona Petrossian, Holly Ryan, Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Hattie N. Kerwin Derrick, Viviana Planine, Frank Wolpe
Student Member: Jordi Batler
Staff: Teresa Kett

Absent: Brenda Krasnow, Carol Y. Kelley, Lillian Backman, Ann Capoccia, Carleton Merrill, Norman Lazarus

Peter announced the meeting would be recorded.
The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.
The members introduced themselves.

Jordi Batler, a Newton South student representative, presented **student updates**. She spoke about the following programs:

1. Dreamfar, a program for students to train them to run a marathon. Jordi said she had participated until she was injured and thought it was a great program that mixed both at-risk and typical students all working toward the marathon goal.
2. Twelfth Night, a joint presentation of Shakespeare's play by both North and South students
3. One School, One Book: All students would be reading *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green, a book about someone who has cancer.
4. Global Communities: A program for sophomores through seniors that links the history and English curriculum. Jordi is participating and thinks it's a great program. There is a waiting list for students to participate.
5. Write a Book for A Kid, a contest for students to enter books they have written. Winners read their books to the preschool students.
6. A new Free Tibet club has been started and will begin with two speakers.

The members thanked Jordi for her updates, asked a few clarifying questions, and Jordi departed.

Holly said she thought the amended **minutes** from the last meeting created too broad a sentence that could impede a future program. After a lengthy, much debated discussion by the group, the minutes unanimously were approved with the following amendments: *Drop the last sentence "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" and add "Two members voiced concerns about the student's decision to exclude the Holocaust from her program and said that the Holocaust should be represented and included among the speakers. When sponsoring any program, consideration should be taken to respect all the diverse groups in Newton."*

Bruce said there have been no **hate crimes** since he last reported, however he wanted to bring up another issue that has been concerning him. He said the problem is there need to be more services for when a person is not a danger to themselves or others, and that he plans to talk with the district attorney's office to see about introducing legislation to mandate more mental health services.

Peter suggested bringing in a representative from the city's Customer Support Initiative group that meets to talk about residents who need additional help in this area, and Bruce reminded him that both Linda Walsh and he are a part of that group and could speak to it if he wants them to.

Sheila raised concern about such legislation infringing on civil liberties if receiving mental health services wasn't voluntary. Peter said Bruce should let the group know about his progress, what he would like them to do, and if there is a future program possible around mental health issues so they can better understand his concerns.

Peter explained that Linda worked on updating the **website** and if there are any more problems or updates, they could be sent to him or Linda. He explained that instead of the IT department making changes, we now have the ability to make changes ourselves. Teresa added that Linda invited one member from the group to come into the office to work with her if further changes are requested.

Peter talked about the desire for the group to have a **standard response** to things that happen. The challenge is that it might not always be appropriate. He talked about how to get the word out about the HRC, and raised the city's reverse 911 system as a possibility. Bruce explained that the reverse 911 system is just for emergencies and said explained the Police Department's use of a system called Nixle. There was discussion among the members about how to get the word out about HRC events and responses, which led to a discussion about the Occupy Boston presentation scheduled for the June meeting. Sheila volunteered to draft a short statement for the Tab. Peter said he would try to get it to the Tab and get the information on the website.

Holly asked if the group was planning to work on getting speakers every other month during meetings, which led to a brief discussion about the June meeting and how it would primarily be the Occupy Boston presentation because they won't have any students in June and they will try not to add anything else to the agenda so it's just that presentation. The group decided to ask Linda to look into another location to have the meeting so there might be room for more people.

Peter said he bumped into Jayne Colino and is pursuing a program idea about **Aging**. He said he is thinking grandiose on a variety of aging topics and would hope to get sponsors with the idea to then get each sponsor to commit to sending two people to the program. Sheila said the group would have to be careful about the topics for this program because there are many programs on this topic already. Peter agreed they needed a new way of approaching it and said he would meet with Jayne and get back to the group.

Peter said the stand your ground bill, #661, proposed in the legislature is a bill like in the Trayvon Martin case that would give people immunity criminally and civilly in the event the shoot someone in their home. Frank said he had spoken with Cynthia Creem's office and that it won't come out of committee. The group agreed to wait to send a letter if necessary, but agreed that if the bill won't come out of committee they don't need to worry about it at this point.

Peter said the group has about \$600 left in its **budget** for the year. He said they have to spend it by the end of the fiscal year, or it goes back into the general fund. He said they wouldn't be penalized in the next year for not spending it, they would still get the same about they previously received. Several ideas for spending the money were tossed out including creating a film library, buying a microphone and buying name placards for members during meetings and paying in advance for program space.

Peter said the group's **regular meeting time**, the second Wednesday of the month is a busy meeting time in City Hall for aldermanic committees. If HRC considered a different day of the month, such as the fourth Wednesday, it might be able to get a better room on a regular basis. Peter said he didn't want to vote on it now, but wanted members to think about it and consider it for starting in September. Commissioners meetings could be scheduled at another time.

The group went back to a discussion about the location of the **next meeting**, how to get the word out about it, and whether refreshments should be served. The consensus was that the group wanted to start doing more publicity around their events, starting with the Occupy Boston presentation, that fruit and cookies should be served at that meeting and that they wanted to try to get the Senior Center for the June meeting. They want to make sure the meeting is advertised to the broader HRC email list.

Jane strongly encouraged everyone to read the notes sent around about the MA HRC meeting.

Holly said **Secure Communities** is going into effect. Bruce explained the process for the Newton Police Department interacting with Homeland Security, ICE and the FBI when someone is printed and booked. Peter expressed concern about the Hispanic community being disproportionately targeted. Bruce explained there is a process for reporting a civil rights violation around profiling.

The meeting adjourned at 8:57 p.m.