

Human Rights Commission and Advisory Council Minutes

Wednesday, July 12, 2012

7:30 p.m., Newton City Hall, cafeteria

Present: Peter Brown, Dianne Chilingerian, Sona Petrossian, Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Frank Wolpe, Holly Ryan, Nazik Kazimi, Jane Brown, Brenda Krasnow

Absent: Viviana Planine, Hattie N. Kerwin Derrick, Carol Y. Kelley, Carleton Merrill, Sheila Mondshein

Students: Rachel Bass, Andy Frank, Tuleeka Hazra

Guest: Sharmila Hazra, Shawn Fitzgibbons

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 p.m. Introductions were made. Everyone welcomed the student representatives new to the committee.

School Updates

Rachel said the anti-bullying course is being revised, they meet once a month and are looking for student feedback.

Andy said he is the president of MVP (mentors in violence prevention) program.

Tuleeka said she is starting a human rights club at South. Also, she is applying for a grant to hold a film festival covering the topic of genocide.

It was noted that the 'Days of Remembrance' exhibit is shown during the month of April. The library is a good location at South. North needs a location identified.

Holly asked if the students had heard anything about the new protection law for transgender students. They replied they had not but some other students may be familiar with that law.

Bruce asked about the program "Rachel's Challenge". The students said the program was met with mixed reviews last year. There was a club but membership has dropped off. The banner is still hanging in both school cafeterias and the message is good.

Bruce announced the date for the upcoming Youth Summit on Oct 11, 2012. The summit will take place at Oak Hill Middle School. Everyone is encouraged to attend.

Abby (student rep) sent an email regarding events at South. They will be holding the 'one school one book 'day next Friday. Jothy Rosenburg, among many other cancer survivor,s will be speaking. On October 4 South will have another anti- bullying lesson (continued from last year). And the executive decision has been made to have four homework free weekends in the year!

Holly asked Peter to clarify the program planned with the senior center. Peter has not met with Jayne Colino yet so no plan has been made. Holly offered to be involved as a speaker. She does this work as part of the LBGT Aging Project.

Holly asked to clarify the available slots for the HRC. All the openings are for the advisory council. Any interested people should send their names to Ana Gonzalez in the mayor's office. Brenda noted that the Council on Aging commission rotates the membership from advisory council to commissioners every two years.

Approve Minutes

The vote for the July minutes was held so that further clarification can be made. June and July minutes will be voted on in October.

Hate Crimes

Bruce explained the definition of a hate incident/crime and the process for reporting for the benefit of the students. Two incidents were reported: A damaged bench with graffiti that was anti-black and anti-semitic on Kilburn Rd and a hateful message posted on a blog about a transgender camp. Bruce answered questions about how the City responds to these types of incidents. Peter asked if the State Police is part of the notification process. Bruce explained the work of the fusion center which is a national reporting system. The State Police would have access to this type of information. Peter also explained that the Newton definition of a hate incident is much broader.

Review of Commission Procedures and Rules

Peter reviewed some general rules. First, everyone should be given the opportunity to talk. No one should talk over each other. Raise hand to be recognized. Respect each other and the opinions of others. This sets an example for others. Secondly, agenda items must be submitted the Friday before the meeting. Emails should be sent to Peter with a cc to Linda.

Holly asked if a person just shows up to a meeting, will they be recognized? Peter said this is an open meeting so anyone can attend. One option would be to add public comment to the agenda. The chairperson can exclude anyone who is disruptive. There was also clarification regarding the procedure for votes. Only commissioners vote.

There was discussion about the need to attend all meetings. It was noted that if commissioners miss too many meetings they may miss important information that was covered and this can sometimes present a problem. There is no minimum requirement for attendance and no process for removal. It has always been strongly encouraged to make every meeting and to send regrets if a meeting is missed. It is important for all members to participate as consistently as possible.

New Business

Shawn Fitzgibbons was recognized by the chair. He said he has been an eagle scout since 1991 and is proud to be a scout but has grown uncomfortable with the Boy Scout stance on sexual orientation. The policy was reviewed over the last 2 years and in 2012 the ban was upheld. He wondered if the HRC may be able to play a role in taking a

stand against this position. A recent Boston Globe article covered a story about eagle scouts sending their medals back in protest. He asked if the HRC could take this issue this evening and at a future meeting. Shawn made the suggestion that we could help coordinate and publicize scouts returning their medals. This effort may bring more attention to this issue.

Discussion following Shawn's comments included how other scouting organizations have handled this issue, how Newton scout master handle this locally and how other towns handle this topic. Peter suggested a resolution could be written and presented from the commission to the mayor and board of alderman. He also mentioned making a presentation to the local MAHRC group that included other towns. The discussion continued about possibilities to host a program here in Newton. The October meeting agenda is currently full but this topic could possibly be addressed in November.

Peter reminded the group to submit nominations for the annual human rights award. Please get names submitted before the October meeting. Advisory committee members are welcome to make nominations.

Change of Meeting Day to the Fourth Wednesday of the month

It remains difficult to find a room on our typical meeting date. However the next couple of months have holidays that fall on the 4th Wednesday therefore, the change of meeting day will not be changed until January 2013.

HRC will be co-sponsoring a program by Catrin Lynch on Oct 18th called "Retirement on the Line" at 7 pm to be held at the Newton Free Library.

October meeting will be on October 10, 2012. Boston Principals will be presenting. November will be further discussion about the Boy Scouts ban.

New Business (cont)

There was discussion about the Tab article regarding a transgender camp. This may be a good idea for a program. It could be part of a program Holly would like to do. Brenda will work with Holly. Anyone interested in joining please contact them.

Jane said that racism is happening here in Newton. She mentioned the incident last year at North High School as an example.

The ordinance needs to be changed to include the transgender language. Holly will send it out for the members to review.

Adjourn 9:00 PM

Next meeting Oct 10, 2012