

Human Rights Commission and Advisory Council minutes

Wednesday – November 9, 2011

7:30 pm – Newton City Hall – veteran’s conference room

Present:

Jane Brown, Marianne Ferguson, Sheila Mondshein, Samuel Glass, Frank Wolpe, Brenda Krasnow, Bruce Apotheker, Dianne Chilingirian, Nazik Kazimi, student representative, Abby Coleman

Absent:

Peter Brown, Judy Fischbach, Sona Petrossian, Ann Capoccia, Carleton Merrill, Norman Lazarus, Joan Rubin, Viviana Planine, Susan Thomas, Carol Kelley, Lillian Backman

Meeting was called to order at 7:30pm

Introductions were made. Marianne announced that the meeting will be recorded

School updates

Abby Coleman, from NSHS, gave a report on the program ‘Rachel’s Challenge’. A club has been formed with approximately 100 students. Also, the ‘empty bowls’ event was held as a fund raiser for Bristol Lodge soup kitchen.

Hate Crime/Incident Reports

Lt. Bruce Apotheker wrote a letter to the editor printed in this week’s TAB about hate incidences and how they are reported.

On Oct 31, 2011 a swastika and the N word were found at the Cabot School. This incident is under investigation.

Bruce is working with the civil rights division of the AG’s office exploring the idea of starting a hate crime task force. This task force could be a regional effort to work with other communities in assessing information and response.

The Newton police department sends out daily reports, via an electronic message, using a new program called NIXLE. Bruce encouraged everyone to sign up.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from October 2011 were approved.

HRC Awards

Linda gave an update on the 2011 awards to be held on December 14, 2011. The location of the event has been changed to the Newton Free Library and will begin one hour earlier, at 6:00pm. The awardees have been notified and invitations have been sent. The names of the student awardees from both high schools have been

decided and the letters were mailed this week. The certificates need to be written and refreshments need to be ordered. It was suggested that there be something more substantial than cookies due to the earlier time. Linda will look into this given our budget.

HRC organization

Marianne spoke about the mission statement and the goals of the HRC. Several members read the mission statements of other organizations. The question was raised if upcoming programs should be planned for next year in light of the expected changes to the make-up of the group. Marianne said she wants the work of the commission to continue so that a footprint is left for the future.

Viviana suggested the members all read the book, 'Zeitoun'. This was the assigned summer reading book for both high schools. This could be followed up by a panel discussion inviting parents and residents to join. Marianne suggested reading the book and discussing it at the January meeting.

New Business

Frank presented information about the RAD (rape aggression defense) program. The crime commission is working with the 'Lily Konowitz foundation' to bring self-defense training to all female students in their junior year. Lily (a Newton high school student) was in Aruba and used her training, from the Newton Police Department (Officer Spaulding), to ward off an attacker. Frank said that the protection of young women is a human rights issue and wants to get this program into both high schools. He will invite Lily's dad, Steve Konowitz, to come to a future meeting. Marianne said perhaps February or March would be possible.

Marianne said Sarah Ecker will be leaving her position at the Mayor's office and asked if Linda knew the plan regarding the interviews. Linda said Sarah and Dori still plan to meet with each commissioner and any interested advisory council member before Sarah leaves.

Jane Brown announced the Hospice choir will be singing on Nov 17th at the Newton Free Library at 7:30 pm. All are invited

Sheila said that she wrote a letter to the editor that recently appeared in the TAB. This was written in response to a case involving a property owner who told a realtor that he didn't want to rent to an African American.

Old Business

none

Meeting adjourned 8:45pm

DRAFT