

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes

April 21, 2010

7:30 PM in War Memorial Auditorium – Newton City Hall

Attendance:

Commissioners present: Jane Brown, Peter Brown, Muriel Esdale, Marianne Ferguson (chair), Brenda Krasnow, Sheila Mondshein, Susan Thomas

Commissioners absent/regrets: Judy Fischbach, Sona Petrossian

Advisory council members present: Lt Bruce Apotheker, Lillian Backman, Dianne Chilingerian, Samuel Glass, Myrna Offen, Joan Rubin

Advisory council members absent/regrets: Ann Capoccia, Homer Franck, Nazik Kazimi, Carol Y. Kelley, Norman F. Lazarus, Carleton Merrill, Viviana Planine, Susan Rosenthal, Frank Wolpe

Advisory Students present: none

Staff present: Linda Walsh

The meeting opened at 7:30pm and was chaired by Marianne Ferguson.

Administrative business

Linda Walsh addressed the change in staff assigned to the commission. Linda asked for support and information of impending tasks. Discussion yielded the following priorities; name a contact and support person for human rights violations/complaints, general administrative duties, open meeting notices for 2 meetings per month, access to Human Services office a City Hall for use of copier, storage space, etc.

Linda suggested a smaller group meeting to develop a time line and priority list to aid in this transition. Sheila Mondshein, Jane Brown and Marianne Ferguson volunteered to meet soon. They will communicate via email to choose a date.

School Updates

No reports

Hate Crime/Incident Reports

Lt Apotheker reported 1 incident on Charles Street involving a derogatory remark regarding sexual orientation. He gave a history of reports received – 7 incidents in the last year and 3 so far this year.

Lt Apotheker informed the group of a presentation he attended regarding hate crimes. The Massachusetts State Troopers presented it. The State Police Fusion Center analyzes hate crimes. They identify hate incidents or those incidences motivated by hate. They document it and give victims assurance of follow-up.

Committee reports

Fair Housing

Sheila Mondshein reported that the Fair Housing Committee will be holding a training session on reasonable accommodation for disabled persons on April 26, for Newton and other local housing authority staff and for certain City of Newton employees. April is Fair Housing month. The Fair Housing Committee has also begun to plan a program together with other organizations which would encourage Section 8 participation by small landlords in Newton.

Sheila also reported that a date of September 27 has been set at the Newton library for the public education program to be sponsored by the Human Rights Commission on the proposed repeal of Chapter 40B, the statewide affordable housing law. The program will feature speakers presenting the pro's and con's with a moderator leading the discussion. CAN-DO will also present a program on this subject on May 6.

Peter Brown indicated that 11,000 more signatures are needed by July 1st to get this repeal question on the ballot in November. Rallies for both sides of the issue are planned for early May.

Program Committee

Brenda Krasnow reported on recent program held at the library – Traces of the Trade. It was an excellent program with great ongoing discussion. A follow-up program will be held on May 18th with a smaller group. The goal is to continue the conversations. Susan and Brenda have 40 names. They are looking for a room, perhaps one of the churches. All suggestions welcome.

Peter Brown congratulation Susan and Brenda on the success of this program. Marianne Ferguson commented that the traces of the trade program in Brookline had a turn out of over 100 attendees.

Education Committee

The “Days of Remembrance” exhibit was shown and is currently on display. Both Newton South and Newton North received feedback that the exhibit is great.

Communications

Currently there is no active communication committee. Susan Thomas commented that the Human Rights Commission really needs this committee. She respectfully suggested the co chairs of the advisory council members hold a meeting to urge members to take a more active role. We need more participation.

Membership

No report

MAHRC (Mass. Assoc. of Human rights and Human Relations Commission)

Peter Brown reported that he attended the State Trooper program with Lt Apotheker and it was an excellent program

Discussion held regarding the Bridges program/group meets in a mosque in Boston and is working to open dialog.

Also discussion regarding programming in metro west specifically regarding the Brazilian population in Framingham area.

Clergy

No report

Other Business

A question from the group regarding the mayor’s prayer breakfast. No one in the group knew any information at this time. Linda Walsh will follow-up to see if the date has been set.

Discussion about the email distribution list. This is a great way to communicate to all members. Linda Walsh will follow-up to create that list.

Brochures need to be changed. Linda Walsh will follow-up to find the electronic copy and work with mayors office to make changes. Letter from the mayor is on one panel.

Marianne Ferguson asked for a volunteer to attend the Newton Housing Partnership meetings. They are held at 8 AM, which is not a time Marianne can make.

The next volunteer trip to the Boston Food Bank is June 23rd from 5:30-7:30. Those interested can meet at 4:30 and travel together.

The commission members were invited to participate in the Memorial Day parade this year. After discussion, the members decided that they would not be able to attend this year.

Discussion on participating in Newton Serves. Will not be volunteering this year.

Discussion on sending a letter regarding Bev Droz termination. The commission would like to write a letter in response to Bev Droz termination. A draft letter was distributed and reviewed. Edits were discussed. The purpose of the letter will be to express concern regarding the termination and commend Bev on all her work. Send any additional suggestions/edits to Marianne Ferguson via email.

Susan Thomas expressed concern that the Mayor may not understand the commission's needs and suggested a meeting time with the Mayor. She feels that the Mayor should meet with all the commissioners. Marianne Ferguson stated she did have a meeting with the Mayor. The meeting was focused on the ordinance. Discussion was held about the importance to meet with him soon. The mayor will be invited. He has many priorities and may not be able to meet soon. Linda Walsh will convey the request to the Mayor also.

Group discussion was held about the transition to a new staff member and the loss of Bev Droz. Linda Walsh acknowledged the great work Bev did and made assurances that she will serve the committee in moving forward with their mission. Lt Bruce Apotheker assured the group that Linda is capable and will work with everyone effectively. Several members expressed concern that the timing of the layoff and the abrupt nature seemed to be disrespectful and insensitive. One member reminded the group that HR policies dictate the manner in which layoffs take place and must be followed.

The members voted to send a letter to the Mayor and to the TAB newspaper.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm

Note: Wanda Pazmino, liaison to the Latino community in Newton, will be our guest at the next commission meeting.