

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes

June 9, 2010

7:30 PM at Newton City Hall, Veterans Conference Room

Attendance:

Commissioners present: Peter Brown, Marianne Ferguson, Brenda Krasnow, Sheila Modshein, Sona Petrossian, Jane Brown.

Commissioners absent/regrets: Susan Thomas.

Advisory council members present: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Ann Capoccia, Samuel Glass, Nazik Kazimi, Carol Y. Kelley.

Advisory council members absent/regrets: Dianne Chilingierian, Homer Franck, Norman F. Lazarus, Carleton Merrill, Myrna Offen, Viviana Planine, Susan Rosenthal, Joan Rubin, Frank Wolpe.

Advisory Students present: Lily Konowitz - NSHS.

Advisory Students council members absent/regrets: Camilla Jackson-NNHS, Haniya Syeda-NNHS, and Stephi Dworkin-NSHS.

Guests: Andrea Segal, Josie Greene.

Staff: Teresa Kett and Helen Langone

The meeting opened at 7:30pm, Welcome/Intro's

Students: Lily Konowitz NSHS

Lily said there was a presentation about driving at her school for juniors and seniors called Survive the Drive. It was in between the junior semi-formal and the prom. She thought it was very good. She will return in the fall and the commission members wished her a good summer.

Hate Crimes/Incident Reports Lt. Apotheker

Learning Prep School has had numerous incidents over the years, three this month alone. Recently anti-Semitic graffiti has appeared on bathroom walls, written, he thinks, by the same person. The director of the school is Jewish; this seems to be directed at her. Bruce said he discussed this with Linda Walsh and the Anti-Defamation League.

There is new anti bullying legislation that focuses mostly how schools report it. Police enforcement hasn't changed significantly. He said it is very hard to enforce. Kids can now take out restraining orders on each other. Unlike other state laws like 51A for child neglect, there is no fine if someone does not report bullying.

Administrative Business

Some people had trouble opening the latest version of the May minutes. Teresa said she could have them made into a PDF in addition to the word document if that would help. Ann Capoccia said "par" on page 4 should be changed to "part." With that correction, and the corrections emailed by Susan, the group could approve these at the next meeting.

Marianne asked Teresa to find out what is left to spend for the 2009-2010 budget. Sona said they had left \$225 in there to have the brochure printed. Marianne asked what the status of the brochure is, and Teresa said Linda had let her know that the brochure remains in the mayor's office for his changes. Marianne also asked to know the amount for next year's budget. She said they also need new stationery with correct letterhead. Teresa suggested doing this electronically. The group agreed this would be a good idea.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Fair Housing

Sheila said they have gotten an architectural consultant who is an expert on access for the disabled. A study will commence for July, August and September with a report due October 1. She said this is a big milestone to have someone with this expertise to look at the problems and it will help set priorities for the next year.

Sheila said that on June 22, there will be a community wide event at Fenway Park, to support Chapter 40B which provides affordable housing in MA communities. It helps people of low income including families, seniors, and the disabled. Contributions for attending are welcome but not mandatory. Sheila passed around information about the event. There was discussion about sending it out to the group, but eventually it was decided that because it takes a position and requests funding, it would be best not to email it out from the HRC. There was some discussion on this law and Sheila explained that some people feel that it is important to leave in place, yet others feel that there are better ways to provide access to affordable housing without this law. There will be a referendum in November to repeal this law.

Program Committee:

Brenda said that there was a good turnout, about 16 people, to Community Conversation. Talked about "Traces of the Trade" a film about people whose ancestors were involved in the slave trade. They got their relatives together, and researched what their families had done. It was a very uncomfortable situation for these people. Brenda said it was a good starting place for conversation and to get people to talk about it. The two facilitators agreed to participate in a similar event again next year.

Education:

Sona said the programs at Newton North and Newton South ended for the year. In the transition with the new mayor, they felt it was important to make clear to the Mayor's Office what they do. Sona took a page of information from one of the school newspapers to the mayor's office and sat with one of his assistants and explained everything. She said the group wanted to add

Native Americans to the program and would need help finding print materials.

Membership: No report

MAHRC (Mass Assoc. of Human Rights & Human Relations Commission)

Peter said he wasn't able to go to the last meeting, but wished he was because he read the minutes, and there was a group called "Bridges" at the last meeting. It's a group of Arabs, Muslims, and Sieks who meet with law enforcement agencies to promote sensitivity. Peter also mentioned the Sharewood project would be at the next meeting. It's a group of Tufts students who provide free translations and medical care for immigrant groups. He also mentioned singer Robin Lane who does a show about women who have been traumatized, which is supposed to be excellent. Peter said the group is going to volunteer at the Food Bank on June 23 and anyone who is interested should meet with him for 1 minute after the meeting to figure out logistics. Spouses and teens are welcome. It's not a strenuous activity.

Clergy Association: No report

Other Business:

Judy said that she is taking nominations for the award. It is given in December usually and it is for someone who lives or works in Newton who has impacted Human Rights. Judy said she could use a co-leader this year because in the past Beverly Droz had done a lot of the leg work, like copying. Jane nominated Beverly Droz for the award. Andrea Segal nominated Kathy Laufer, the social worker at the senior center. It was decided that Judy would take nominations until the September meeting.

Marianne asked what is going on with the Women's Commission. Teresa said she would find out. Jane said a woman named Barbara Dick is in charge and it is a mayoral commission.

Marianne asked if anyone had attended the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast. Several people had and said it was excellent. Sam elaborated, and said it was the best one he had been to in awhile, as was the Democratic Convention in Worcester over the weekend.

Ann Capoccia provided information about Family Literacy to the group and stressed how important programs like this are for parents to know what is going on with their children. There was discussion about how important it is, and it was related back to the previous month's presenter who spoke about the Latino population in the schools. This transitioned into a discussion about immigration and the recent Arizona law, and how some feel the tide is shifting against immigration in the US. Sheila suggested immigration as a possible program topic for the fall.

Guest Josie Green mentioned she went to an open house at the Islamic Cultural Center and found it very enlightening. Nazik said she helped plan the event, but could not attend because she was away. Others hadn't heard about it, and she said she thought it had been in the papers, but would let the group know next time.

Teresa mentioned that Linda and Sona had worked on a few changes to the HRC website and people should check it out.

Marianne said the next meeting will be in July, and that the group will not meet in August.

Sona said she attended an event where she talked with Nahdav Timer and he gave her a book that she will donate to the HRC. He passed along a message for her to share with the group they should keep doing what they are doing and that they were very brave.

8:45 – Adjourned.

