

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes

Wednesday – July 14, 2010

7:30 pm – Newton City Hall – Veterans Conference Room

Attendance:

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

Commissioners absent/regrets: none

Advisory council members present: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Samuel Glass, Dianne Chilingirian, Lillian Backman, Carol Y. Kelley

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

Advisory Students present: none

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

Guest: none

Meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm and introductions of all present.

School updates

Sona announced that the position held by Jeanne White at NNHS was eliminated in this new fiscal year budget. Sona sent a message to Jennifer Price (principal at North High) requesting a representative be assigned to the Commission.

Hate Crimes/incident reports

Bruce read a report from 6/15/10- police responded to a home on Montrose Street where a mezuzah was broken off of a door. Bruce also reported that he will be meeting with Mayor Warren and community partners involved in addressed domestic violence issues. Brenda asked about booklets that may be able to be placed in visible locations or an article to be written so that people know that help that is out there. Marianne

commented that she had a recent experience as a victim. She felt that the police officers and victims advocates are great but perhaps there could be a better job at letting victims know about free resources especially around self defense training. September is domestic violence awareness month. The Commission has sponsored programs in the past entitled “take back the night” and could consider doing that again. Bruce said that they are trying to target ‘at risk’ people so that the information gets to them before they become a victim because statistics show a person can be victimized up to 7 times before a report is made. Linda said that Newton Wellesley Hospital recently hired a full time person, Erin Miller, to address domestic violence issues. Sona asked if the clergy association is involved. Bruce said he had mentioned this to the Second Step program. Sam commented that the clergy association is meeting themselves and that parents have a big responsibility in this effort. He works with the president, Rabbi Gervis. Sona said she would like to see other organizations included to increase awareness. Sam suggested the Commission and the Mayor’s office could write a letter to the clergy association requesting a representative to get them more involved. Susan thought that a letter from the Commission to the association with a copy to the mayor would be her suggestion. Marianne said that Sam fulfills this role at present as the liaison to the Commission. Brenda asked about school programs regarding domestic violence. Marianne said we should work with the schools in the Fall. Sona said the school have some programs and we should work with them so we do not duplicate efforts. Linda said the program called ‘the yellow dress’ is offered and addresses dating violence. The discussion returned to Bruce’s report. Bruce said that he will report back in September about the mayor’s efforts in this area.

Administrative Business

May minutes were approved without changes.

June minutes were approved without any changes

Marianne requested that the minutes be sent out electronically 2 weeks prior to the next meeting. Linda agreed.

Committee Reports

Fair housing

Sheila said that the program addressing proposed repeal of Chapter 40B is set to take place on September 27, 2010 in the Newton Free Library. Sheila has sent the proposed press release and newsletter article to Ellen Meyer who will do the publicity including bio’s of the speakers. Ellen plans to introduce the program. Aaron Gornstein and John Belski are the speakers. Sheila will speak to Ann Capoccia about the family literacy program. This is federally funded and could be a good resource for Latino families in Newton. Brenda asked if the local colleges could be a good resource. Linda suggested a speaker from the public schools ESL department and/or our city social worker, Ana Gonzalez, Jane suggested the October meeting.

Program committee

Susan reported that 18 people attended the 'continuing the conversation' group on May 18th. All participants said they would like to continue sharing their personal experiences. Brenda, Susan and Dianne met to discuss next steps. They said that a big meeting followed by small breakout sessions is the easiest way to share comments and experiences. The Newton History Museum offered to help. Susan said that Susi Rosenthal can help with the computer and data base. Linda said the work stations and computer programs are still at City Hall and can arrange a time for Susi to work there. Brenda said they are discussing a "living history presentation" showing houses where slave owners lived. For example, the Durant Kendrick house. Carol said she is not comfortable with that approach. She said we should not glorify slave owners houses in this way. Brenda said she understands her comment and this is why these conversations are happening. The history in Newton is certainly not perfect. Judy suggested Carol join them in one of the programs. Brenda said that these topics are uncomfortable. Carol said that the slave owners point of view of so often discussed and she does not want to glorify it in any way. Dianne said she appreciated Carol's comments and welcomes her point of view. She said people should not be discouraged from speaking out and that all comments should be welcomed.

Education committee – none

Communications

Susan repeated her comments about the need for writers and suggested the co-chairs of the advisory board should meet to plan a strategy to get this important work done. Judy asked what would happen if no one volunteers. Susan replies that things will fall between the cracks. Dianne volunteered to be an editor.

Membership – none

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

Peter said there was no meeting in June. It was cancelled due to low attendance. He also reported that 7 people went to the greater Boston food bank on June 23rd. Marianne, Jane, Dianne, and Vivianna unloaded 8,322 pounds of food. Brenda, Muriel and Peter sorted 1166 pounds and a total of 5120 meals were made that night. Jane suggested this be an annual event. All members gave a round of applause to those who attended.

Clergy association

Discussion was held earlier in meeting.

Sub committee reports

Awards

Judy said that 2 nominations had been put forward; Kathy Laufer and Beverly Droz. Kathy is the social worker at Senior Center and Beverly is the former Director of Human Services. Judy asked if the group felt we should ask Bev or perhaps wait a year. Judy thought it might be awkward for Bev. Carol said she wondered if it would be awkward for the mayor. Muriel said we should get more nominations. She said maybe an article in the TAB newspaper. Brenda said we should email the larger group for ideas. Bruce suggested a meritorious or service award might be appropriate. Linda asked if there was established criteria because both nominees are City employees that do this work as part of their job responsibilities. Susan would like to see someone nominated that works for human rights in a larger way. She suggested asking other organizations for nominations sending the purpose of the award. The purpose should be spelled out and the nominees should be described as to how this person furthered the cause. Bruce recommended Fr James Woods of Boston College. Marianne said that nominations are still open. Please forward any suggestions to Judy. The nominees must work for or live in the City of Newton. Sam said to call Audrey Cooper for suggestions. Sona said she would call Audrey. Brenda suggested going outside our committee for additional suggestions. Dianne said the nomination should include a form letter stating why they were nominated and requesting certain information. Sona agreed that it should state why the nominee deserves this award.

Other Business

Muriel announced that next month her term expires and she will not return in the Fall. She has loved being on the Commission for all these years but it is time to move on. The group thanked her for her many contributions.

Budget - Linda handed out copies of the budget. The \$181.00 from FY10 was carried forward for use in the updated brochure.

Brochure – Linda said the brochure is in the mayors office. She asked that all suggested changes be sent to her as soon as possible so that we can be ready to go once the mayor makes his updates.

Sheila said that the zip code on the HRC stationery is incorrect. Linda will make the change.

METCO anniversary – Jane said that the METCO program is celebrating their 25th anniversary in the spring of 2011 and asked if the Commission would like to participate in any way. Sona said she met with the director a few years ago but there was little interest. There seems to be more interest now. Jane will find out more details.

Islam program in Needham – Linda had received a request to cosponsor a program with Needham. She read the email from Barry Barol of the Needham Human

Rights Committee asking the Newton Human Rights Commission to cosponsor a program entitled ' Everything you wanted to know about Islam but were afraid to ask'' featuring Dr Lazzouni and members of the Islamic Center in Wayland scheduled for October 17th in the Needham Public Library. Marianne asked Linda to forward the email to her so that she can contact them for more information.

Linda explained her current position and that she will not be appointed HHS Commissioner. She will remain in her current position as Director and continue to staff the HRC for now. Once the new Commissioner is appointed she will have more information going forward.

Next meeting date set for September 15th at 7:30

Meeting adjourned at 9:15

DRAFT