

Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
June 10, 2009
7:30 PM in the Newton City Hall cafeteria

Attendance:

Commissioners present: Jane Brown, Peter Brown, Marianne Ferguson, Judy Fischbach, Brenda Krasnow, Sheila Mondshein, and Susan Thomas

Commissioners absent/regrets: Muriel Esdale and Sona Petrossian

Advisory Council Members present: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Dianne Chilingirian, Homer Franck, Samuel Glass, Nazik Kazimi, Myrna Offen, and Joan Rubin

Advisory Council Members absent/regrets: Ann Capoccia, Carol Kelley, Norman Lazarus, Carleton Merrill, Viviana Planine, Susan Rosenthal, and Frank Wolpe

Advisory Students present: Lily Konowitz

Staff present: Beverly Droz

Guests: Ted Cullinane, Henry Turner, Mark Hall, Rich Catrambone, Lillian Backman, and Youth Officer Jeff Mace

The meeting opened at 7:32 pm and was chaired by Marianne Ferguson.

Introductions were made around the room and guests were welcomed.

School Updates:

Newton South High School –

Lily reported on the various activities and brought in copies of program flyers.

- On June 13, members of the Newton South Faculty and Gay-Straight Alliance will participate in the annual Boston Gay Pride parade, in which gay men, women and their friends and supporters will carry the Newton South GSA Banner through the parade route.
- Ms. Archana Tyagi, the Global Coordinator of St. Marks Public School in Delhi, India, visited NSHS for a week. She is the NSHS partner in Newton South's India Exchange Program for next year.
- A fundraiser was held by the Water Aid International Club to raise money for water projects run by Water Partners International in Africa.
- On May 21, a student made a presentation about service dogs to build students' awareness about service dog interaction and disabilities.
- On May 22, *Invisible Children of Uganda*, a documentary series exposing human rights abuses taking place in Uganda, was screened at NSHS.
- Sustainability Week took place May 26 – June 1 with daily presentations on a variety of issues such as: the socio-economic challenges at the Epiphany School in Dorchester, improving women's education and economic development in Tanzania through environmental sustainability, sustainable farming, unsustainable practices of global agribusiness and the effect on homeless population, alternative energy sources that can better sustain populations, and understanding Latin America.

Guest Presentation on Restorative Justice

Rich Catrambone, a counselor at Newton South High School, along with guests Mark Hall and Henry Turner, discussed the Restorative Justice (RJ) program in Newton. All three guests recently attended a national conference on RJ. Rich gave an overview of the program, which builds on an already-existing Restorative Circles Program and applies those principles to the schools. The idea behind Restorative Circles and RJ programs are to confront criminal activity with a healing approach, bringing together the offender, the victim and the community in ways to restore trust, and ultimately, to reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

RJ is part of a national movement, and has been successfully implemented around the country. In Newton, the goal is for the schools to build a coalition with the courts and law enforcement to implement the RJ program in the

schools. Mark discussed the Safe Schools/Healthy Schools (SS/HS) grant, which is partially geared toward implementing the RJ program. One role is to coordinate with the schools and one role is for training.

Rich then gave an example of RJ in action. Rather than a student getting suspended for his/her behavior (and being completely removed from the consequences of the behavior), the student was engaged in a RJ circle. He became engaged and realized the impact of his behavior and how he could rectify the behavior. In the restorative circle, there is a person who plays the role of *keeper*; the keeper works with everyone: students, parents, police, and any other involved people. A facilitator helps with whatever the circle decides to do to rectify the behavior and heal the community.

Henry stated that NSHS is currently piloting the RJ program. The school has had four circles thus far, and they are training students, teachers, and parents how to participate in the circles. The offender must admit that he/she carried out the offense. They are trying to change the culture and help disenfranchised students. This should help with achievement gaps and reduce the number of offenses. However, they do not want to re-victimize the victim, so they are not focusing on domestic violence or some bullying incidents yet. To begin with, they are working on school-based offenses.

Rich noted that the Police Youth Officers have always worked with the schools, and they expect that this will build on their relationship. Henry noted that this will not replace the peer mediation program, as each has its own place.

Rich requested two volunteers from the HRC to help join others to design and implement trainings. Their group is getting volunteers from other community organizations as well. The orientations and training for volunteers will take a commitment of several hours. Rich stated that Judge Klein has been spearheading this effort, and it's time for Newton to adopt it. However, successful implementation will take a committed group of volunteer parents and community members.

Lt. Bruce Apotheker noted that the SS/HS grant also has a pilot program for bullying prevention. They are now doing it in selected schools, but it will soon become curriculum for all Newton schools.

Brenda suggested the HRC doing a joint education program with them. The HRC thanked Rich, Mark and Henry for coming before the HRC and for this informative presentation.

Hate Crimes/Incidents

Lt. Apotheker had nothing new to report. He introduced Youth Officer Jeff Mace, who has investigated many hate crimes and also serves as the police representative on the Newton Youth Commission.

Other Business & Announcements

Letter of Support for the Mass. Transgender Political Caucus: The committee followed up on last month's presentation by the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC) and Susan Thomas drafted the letter of support of legislation (S.1687 and H.1728, "An Act Relative to Gender-Based Discrimination and Hate Crimes") to be sent to Senator Cynthia Creem and Representative Eugene O'Flaherty. The Commissioners voted in support of the letter at their meeting last night and it was handed out for review by members. Brenda made a motion to approve the letter of support, which was seconded by Peter. The ***motion to approve the letter of support for the legislation was approved.***

July Meeting:

We agreed to have a meeting in July and to have a pot luck dinner before it. Jane Brown offered to host it at her home on Wednesday, July 8 with the pot luck dinner starting at 6:30pm and a brief meeting to follow it, probably starting at 7:30pm. Bev will e-mail the HRC to inform everyone and take RSVP's.

Commissioner's Meeting:

Marianne reported that the Advisory Council Co-Chairs attended last night's Commissioners' meeting. They discussed how committee reports are reported and alternative ways for committees to make their reports. For example, committee reports could be emailed to everyone before the meetings. This would be helpful when we are having presentations at our regular HRC and don't have time for in-depth committee reports.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

For tonight, Marianne asked for committees to report "updates only" given the late hour and the need to talk about other issues following these reports.

Program Committee: Brenda noted that the Program Committee is meeting on June 16 at 7:30pm in Room 203.

Fair Housing: Sheila announced the workshop on “Diverse Housing Opportunities to Address a Diversity of Housing Needs” at the New Arts Center on June 11 at 7 PM. Vince O'Donnell will moderate the workshop which addresses accessory apartments, housing in business areas, and new uses on public sites.

HRC Awards: Judy noted that it is time for members to submit nominations for the HRC Awards which typically take place in early December.

Other Announcements:

Jane reported that she and Carol Kelly attended the Democratic State Convention. She said single payer health care passed and Congressman Frank's proposal to cut the military budget by 25% passed.

HRC Community Visibility and Membership:

Marianne Ferguson then requested that members discuss their priorities. Some highlights included:

- Peter Brown remarked that HRC mostly has education programs, and the aldermen have asked why we are not more proactive.
- Susan Thomas noted that the HRC should follow up with the presenters and work on the Restorative Justice program. Dianne Chilingierian noted that she would be one of the two volunteers, depending on the time requirements.
- Dianne stated that the HRC is not visible enough throughout the community. She asked about coming up with a sticker or something similar that can be displayed at religious institutions, businesses, etc.
- Sheila Mondshein suggested that the HRC organize programs to support those impacted by hate incidents and troubles caused by the economic times.
- Peter suggested that the HRC present ideas of inclusiveness to the community.
- Susan suggested that the HRC develop a flyer to hand out at the Farmers' Market and other events.
- Homer suggested that the HRC develop position statements on various human rights' issues that can be taken to the Aldermen and to the TAB.
- Committee members then discussed submitting the MTPC letter of support to the TAB as well as to the Board of Aldermen.
- Judy suggested that one member take on these tasks.
- Homer noted that a legislative action committee could form to take on the tasks.
- Peter has asked the MA-HRC, but there is no clearinghouse for all human rights' issues.
- Myrna noted that part of the goal is to engage new people to become part of the HRC.
- Bev suggested putting an advertisement in the TAB for the September meeting and for potential members.
- Marianne suggested including the skill sets that the HRC is looking for.
- Brenda suggested using questions that would entice people to become part of the HRC.
- There was a discussion of developing a buck slip in the city mailing. Myrna and Judy will draft something.
- The Commission discussed the idea of making a sticker for businesses and organizations to display. Dianne, Brenda, Marianne and Bev will form a committee to discuss the logistics of the sticker. The committee would have to persuade businesses and organizations to display the sticker.

Marianne Ferguson moved to continue the discussion of the visibility of the HRC at the July meeting.

Marianne noted that there was also discussion at the Commissioners' meeting of possibly getting a consultant to help with HRC with difficult issues. The problem is cost, so members are encouraged to think of potential consultants who would be willing to do this on a pro-bono basis.

MINUTES

Peter moved, and Judy seconded a motion to accept the 5/13/09 minutes, and the motion passed.

Homer Franck then asked why his two paragraphs were deleted. Peter noted that it's not an action or proposal, so the information does not need to go into the minutes verbatim.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 PM.

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, July 8, 2009 and will be held at Jane Brown's home.

Respectfully submitted, Beverly Droz, HRC staff director