

Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
September 16, 2009
7:30 PM in the Newton City Hall cafeteria

Attendance:

Commissioners present: Jane Brown, Peter Brown, Muriel Esdale, Marianne Ferguson, Brenda Krasnow, Sheila Mondschein, Sona Petrossian, and Susan Thomas

Commissioners absent/regrets: Judy Fischbach

Advisory Council Members present: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Lillian Backman, Dianne Chilingirian, Samuel Glass, Viviana Planine, Suzy Rosenthal, and Joan Rubin

Advisory Council Members absent/regrets: Ann Capoccia, Homer Franck, Nazik Kazimi, Carol Kelley, Norman Lazarus, Carleton Merrill, Myrna Offen, and Frank Wolpe

Advisory Students present: Camilla Jackson and Lily Konowitz

Staff present: Beverly Droz

Guests: Andrea Segal and Susan Sirotty

The meeting opened at 7:40 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 NSHS program Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids on September 14.

- Students were encouraged to take a stand against tobacco and participate in an extreme sports show that featured several of the world's top professionals in skateboarding, biking and inline skating.

Viviana announced that the Restorative Justice program is going to take place on Monday, September 21 at 2:35 PM and invited all who were interested in attending. Bev indicated that she would email out the information for the program to members.

Newton North High School-

Camilla reported on the upcoming MINGA Day to take place on Wednesday, September 23 and is open to anyone interested in attending. There will be speakers all day. She also stated that fundraising efforts for MINGA have been extremely successful; the fashion show that took place in the spring raised a lot of money for the program.

Hate Crimes/Incidents

Lt. Apotheker reported on several incidents.

- On July 30 at a home on California Street, someone painted a swastika on the sidewalk in front of the home. Further investigation of the street showed that a wall in front of another house was also damaged.
- On August 28 at the same address on California Street, another swastika was painted on the sidewalk.
- On September 9, the principal of the Learning Prep School called to report a threatening message in one of the stalls in the boys' bathroom. The message indicated that the individual had a gun and was going to shoot the kids on 9/11.
- On September 16 at the Franklin School there was spray painting on the back of the school that read, "fags" and other inappropriate remarks.

All of the incidents reported on are currently under investigation by the police department.

Lt. Apotheker also stated that he is a member of the Crime Commission that met today. They are trying to come up with a crime watch program in Newton, which may cut down on crime and increase the quality of life. This would involve identifying certain members of the community who want to look out for the betterment of their villages. The

village associations can take small actions to help their neighbors. It was also mentioned that education is an integral part of the program goal, reminding residents to lock doors, lock vehicles, etc.

Lt. Apotheker also stated that as of this week, total crime for the city is down 47% compared to last year. At this juncture last year, there were 838 crimes, whereas this year there are only 642. Sheila inquired as to how the hate crimes were this year by comparison. Lt. Apotheker stated that he didn't have exact figures, but that it appears that they are down significantly and pointed out that Newton counts some crimes as hate crimes that wouldn't necessarily be included by other municipalities.

Administrative Business

A motion to approve the minutes from the July 8, 2009 meeting was made by Sona and seconded by Suzy. The minutes passed unanimously.

The Treasurer's Report was given by Bev. The operating budget for the year is \$850 and a small part of that has been used for postage. Sam inquired as to what the average budget has been in past years. Bev stated that the budget has not changed recently.

The new Human Rights Commission brochure was unveiled. Bev explained the addition of another panel, which now includes a section for support of the Commission. Contributions that are generated through this will be added to the revolving account, which may be used to pay for programs where speakers need to be paid. Sam asked whether the brochures were going to be mailed out to the community. Bev stated that it was not possible due to the amount it would cost in postage, but that it would be included with other mailings for different groups such as those attending the fair housing meeting and that it would also be included in the mailing with the invitation for the awards program in December. Peter questioned how the HRC contributions could be tax-deductible. Bev said she would double check with the law department.

Lt. Apotheker mentioned the Touch A Truck event to take place at NSHS on October 18 from 12-4PM. He stated that there will be various non-profit organizations with information tables. Marianne asked whether the Commission was interested in having a resource table at the event. Bev will email out the information to the HRC and see if there is enough interest generated to warrant having a table.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Marianne asked for the advisory council members to feel free to offer any input they have on programs, projects and focus.

Fair Housing: Sheila reported that the Fair Housing Committee in the City of Newton has been meeting throughout the summer and is meeting monthly. She stated that most of the meetings have been focusing on reviewing plans, projecting needs and strategic planning. One plan under discussion is the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing. They are in the process of collecting information. Sheila asked if Rob could come and speak at the November meeting to get input. Marianne questioned whether it might be better for him to speak at the October meeting since there will be an open house and he might get more feedback due to an increased attendance. Sheila said that she would check with him to see whether that was feasible. The October open house was changed from 7:30 to 7PM to allow for Rob to give his presentation.

Program Committee: Brenda announced that the committee will meet next week to discuss ideas for this year's programs. At this time, programs on racism and gay and lesbian issues are being discussed as possible programs. She asked for additional suggestions. Susan Thomas added that the meeting is open to anyone interested in participating and sharing ideas.

Education Committee: Sona reported that she and Viviana have been working on getting the schools involved and that a student application for the HRC has been formalized. To date, there are two new student representatives and they are looking for two more. Sona sent detailed letters to NNHS and NSHS principals for assistance in recruiting students for these positions.

Sona read a moving letter that she received from last year's representative, Julijana, expressing what she had gained from working with the HRC. A suggestion to use excerpts from the letter for recruitment was made.

Sona mentioned how much time she had spent exploring how to get students credit for participating in the HRC, but was told it isn't done. She indicated that she will try again to make headway on this issue.

Communications: Susan Thomas stated that at the present time, there was nothing to report.

Membership: Muriel welcomed Lillian Backman to the Advisory Council. She invited everyone to attend the open house in October and bring friends who might be interested in joining.

MAHRC: Peter had nothing new to report.

Clergy Association: Sam said that the first meeting has not yet taken place. He stated that on October 14 at 7 PM at Temple Beth Avodah, there would be an evening with the mayoral candidates where they will discuss various issues including expanding senior transportation, environmental issues, nurturing and developing youth and preserving an inclusive community and expanding affordable housing. It was noted that this takes place the same date and time as the HRC open house. Sam apologized for having to attend the mayoral event instead of the open house.

HRC Awards: Bev reported that Audrey Cooper was nominated for the HRC award, which will take place on Thursday, December 3 at the Senior Center. Audrey was instrumental in developing the Newton Senior Center and has been extremely involved in community service over the years. Sona is working on student nominations. Invitations for the awards event will go out at the end of October.

Other Business & Announcements

Sona indicated that the HRC website was in need of updating to remove the statement regarding ADL recertification. Bev said that she would get IT to remove it.

Susan announced that September is Hunger Action month and reminded everyone about the importance of contributing food to the food banks on a regular basis. Sona suggested that an invitation to bring food to the open house be extended.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM.

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, October 14 at 7:00 PM in City Hall, changed to the cafeteria. Open House from 7 to 7:30, followed by a regular meeting.

Respectfully submitted, Suzy Rosenthal, HRC Advisory Council and Beverly Droz, HRC staff director