

**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
October 14, 2009
7:30 PM in the Newton City Hall cafeteria**

Attendance:

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

Commissioners absent/regrets: Judy Fischbach

Advisory Council Members present: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Lillian Backman, Nazik Kazimi, Viviana Planine, Suzy Rosenthal, and Joan Rubin

Advisory Council Members absent/regrets: Ann Capoccia, Dianne Chilingirian, Homer Franck, Samuel Glass, Carol Kelley, Norman Lazarus, Carleton Merrill, Myrna Offen, and Frank Wolpe

Advisory Students present: Haniya Syeda (NNHS)

Staff present: Beverly Droz

Guests: Robert Muollo, Andrea Segal, Doreen Barksdale, Dr. Jack Nusan Porter, Gail Deegan, Leona Markiewiz and Karen Clay

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

Introductions were made around the room and guests were welcomed. Marianne reminded everyone of the meeting format and that as a Commission, our mission is to ensure mutual understanding and respect among all persons in the City by promoting acceptance of diversity and combating discrimination. While the meeting is ongoing, it is important to remember the mission, to respect others and their beliefs. She briefly discussed how we accomplish the mission through education and being reactive to situations as they arise and also that the discrimination complaint process is done outside of HRC meetings.

School Updates:

Newton North High School-

Haniya reported that on October 20, a new non-profit activist organization, Alliance for Climate Education will have a program. On October 15, staff and clients from the Carroll Center for the Blind will be present for a panel discussion. Also on October 15, Get Smart About Credit Day will include discussions on being responsible about credit cards. In December, PAWS, a mediation program presentation will be held.

Newton South High School –

Viviana reported for NSHS. There is a new club which focuses on the problem of child soldiers in Uganda. There was a movie presentation about child soldiers who have been kidnapped from Uganda. The movie was made by a group of teenagers in California who went to Uganda to try to effect change. It was suggested that the topic might be added to the Days of Remembrance. Sona will meet with Viviana to discuss it.

Introduction to Analysis of Impediments (Fair Housing)

Robert Muollo from the City of Newton Planning Department made a brief presentation on the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing (here forward referred to as the AI). The AI is a comprehensive review and analysis of municipal housing, economic, transportation conditions, as well as public and private sector policies in order to ensure that housing choices and opportunities for all persons in the community are made available.

The AI is performed every five years and reported to Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Mr. Muollo is charged with conducting the new AI and is seeking input from commissions and residents. His goal is to broaden participation by getting more representation from varied groups of people. The results of the last AI led to the establishment of the Fair Housing Committee, training and outreach to community residents, City staff, and housing

professionals and a Fair Housing web page through the Fair Housing Initiative Grant. Mr. Muollo stated that he would be providing further details as to how the Commission can contribute in the near future. Marianne stated that the assignment of the Commission is to think about the impediments for next month's meeting. Sheila inquired as to whether there were questions available to guide the thinking process. Mr. Muollo stated that during the last AI, testing was performed and that not only economic factors, but discrimination against protected groups was also a factor. He also indicated that five distinct impediments were identified. He will send a memo to Bev to get to the HRC members before the next meeting.

Hate Crimes/Incidents

Lt. Apotheker reported on two incidents.

- On October 4, some anti-Semitic graffiti was found on a park bench at Crystal Lake. The graffiti was done in blue ink pen and on the bench was written "Jew Shvine, Hitler was here" along with a star of David with an X drawn through it as well as a swastika. The Police are investigating
- A 14 year old boy was arrested for hate crimes (harassment and discrimination) against other teens, one who was Pakistani, one who was Hispanic and one who was disabled. The arrest was a result of the boy being reported for supplying a BB gun to a kid who was involved in an earlier incident. The investigation is ongoing and the teen is being looked at for other crimes. The Police provided the information to the Attorney General's office and a civil injunction is pending.

Discussion ensued: Muriel questioned how kids like these are treated after arrest. Bruce indicated that he has never seen anything quite like this case but that the boy will be tried in juvenile court. Karen Clay inquired why the victims didn't report the crimes and whether it might be due to cultural barriers such as language or the unfamiliarity of the process. Lt. Apotheker stated that he didn't think this was the issue. Dr. Porter asked whether there were rehabilitation programs for kids who perpetrate crimes. Lt. Apotheker stated that the D.A.'s Office will look at these kids individually and determine whether rehabilitation and diversion programs are appropriate. Most hate offenses are due to learned behavior and there are often other issues. The school will perform a risk assessment on him and that it is likely he will not be returning to school. However, the school system is responsible for providing his education. Lt. Apotheker reminded the HRC that any crime that involves bias toward another will be investigated as a hate crime in the City of Newton.

Lt. Apotheker also stated that he is a member of the Crime Commission and they 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; so far this year there are 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 September 16, 2009 meeting was made by Jane and seconded by Lillian and the motion passed unanimously.

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 stated that Rob Muollo is doing great work in conjunction with the Fair Housing Committee (FHC), which is meeting regularly and engaged in long term planning, needs assessment and recommendations. The FHC is also focusing on activities for the current year such as outreach education to enhance the City's fair housing performance.

Program Committee: Brenda reported on the Program Committee meeting, which took place on September 30, with 12 in attendance. At the meeting, discussions were held on having a program based on the movie "Traces of the Trade", a history of the slave trade in U.S. history. The movie was ordered and is in and will be viewed by the

committee next week. The committee will then decide if this would be good to include as part of a program series. Brenda stated that Katrina Brown, who was responsible for investigating her family's involvement, may be available to speak as she usually attends screenings. However, Brenda indicated that she was not certain if there was a fee involved. It might also be possible for one of the other family members, who wrote a book entitled Inheriting the Trade, to also be available as a speaker. Brenda indicated that the committee is looking at also having a program on restorative justice, as was presented to HRC at the June meeting. Susan read an excerpt from Inheriting the Trade that advocates adopting the principles of restorative justice. Viviana suggested that if restorative justice was a subject to be included in programs that the Newton Youth Commission be involved.

Education Committee: Sona reported that she has been working with both high schools to get the 2 student nominations from each for our Human Rights Award. For HRC, we currently have 2 Advisory student reps from NNHS and 1 from NSHS. Viviana reported that there was a new principal at NSHS and she has proposed to him the idea of getting credit for students. She will work with Sona to develop a proposal to present to him. Sona noted that there we have a new interim school superintendent and he may be in favor of the student credit idea.

Communications: Susan Thomas requested that other Committee members who are interested in writing articles and helping with communications to be in touch with her and join this committee. Bev continues to get calendar announcements listed in the Newton TAB.

Membership: Muriel welcomed the guests and invited them to take informational brochures about the HRC and stated that the HRC is seeking new membership. She suggested that interested individuals attend several meetings to get a feel for what the HRC is about and asked that those who are considering joining to keep in mind that the HRC is about human rights for all not just for people's personal agenda.

MAHRC: Peter stated that the next MAHRC meeting is scheduled for this Friday, October 16. He described the MAHRC as an umbrella group that typically meets monthly to exchange information and ideas. They hold some programs. For example, he saw the "Traces of the Trade" movie that we are considering for a program at one of the MAHRC meetings.

Clergy Association: Sam was in absentia due to the mayoral forum, therefore no report was provided.

HRC Awards Committee: Bev reminded everyone that the awards ceremony is scheduled for December 3. The award recipient, Audrey Cooper will be at the event, but due to a conflict with the opening of the new teen center, many of her friends will not be able to attend. Bev will be in contact with Newton Community Service Center.

Other Business & Announcements

MCAD Training

Peter and Sheila briefly discussed the MCAD training that was held on September 24. Peter, Sheila, Suzy and Bev attended this day-long session. Marianne had attended the training in July. Much of the training involved unemployment issues but a little about fair housing was included. Bev stated that she has copies of the information should anyone be interested in obtaining copies and that the session was very informative.

Food Pantry Collections

Susan noted that the HRC is advocating for everyone to donate to the food pantries on a monthly basis. Bev reported changes in the Hellenic Food Pantry. The woman who ran it is elderly and has fallen ill and there will be a change in leadership.

The Newton Food Pantry is located in the basement of the Waban Library Center. The WLC is run by the Waban Improvement Society and they are willing to accept donations to the Newton Food Pantry during their hours of operation. The Newton Food Pantry has specific limited hours that it is open.

Peter reported that he has taken a tour of the Boston Food Bank, which included a training session. He stated that it was a great experience and asked if the HRC would be interested in getting a group to go and participate. The response was positive and Peter will distribute information and organize the field trip.

Other

Viviana suggested that the HRC form a team to do a service project for NewtonServes 2010. There was interest and this will be pursued at a later date.

Jane informed the HRC of a program on October 18 at the Eliot Church on Afghanistan: Resisting Occupation and Fundamentalism.

Nazik stated that while in the War Memorial, she noticed that there were flags missing from certain countries. She inquired with Mayor Cohen's office about the procedure for determining flag inclusion and she was told her that they were donated by individuals in the community to represent the country of origin of Newton residents. Originally, the flags were put up to represent the countries of origin for children in the public school system. The Mayor's office indicated that if she wanted to donate flags, she had to go through the HRC to approve it. Marianne discussed the process for approving the donation of flags. Marianne asked for Nazik to state her intentions. Nazik stated that it was her wish to donate the flags of Pakistan, Palestine and Lebanon to the War Memorial. A motion was made by Suzy and seconded by Jane, to accept the proposal of the donation of the three flags, and the motion passed.

Reverend Porter stated that there is a Palestinian film festival at the Museum of Fine Arts next week.

Marianne reported that Bev's 8th Volunteer Job Fair is Monday, October 26 at the Newton Library and the HRC would again like to have table space. Sona, Nazik, Brenda, Muriel and Marianne agreed to take turns staffing it.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM.

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, November 10 at 7:30 PM in the City Hall cafeteria (since Nov. 11 is a holiday).

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