

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

Attendance:

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

Commissioner absent/regrets: Muriel Esdale, Brenda Krasnow, and Judy Fischbach

Advisory Council Members present: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Homer Franck, Samuel Glass, Nazik Kazimi, Carol Kelley, Joan Rubin

Advisory Council Members absent/regrets: Ann Capoccia, Dianne Chilingirian, Norman Lazarus, Matt McBride, Carleton Merrill, Myrna Offen, Viviana Planine, David Rosen, Susan Rosenthal, Frank Wolpe

Advisory Students present: Hannah Konowitz

Students absent/regrets: Hannah Yarmolinsky, Chloe Judell-Halfpenny, and Julijana Englander

Staff present: Beverly Droz

Guests: Lillian Backman, Nancy Sasson

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:

HRC members recognized that there are many excellent events and opportunities happening at both high schools, and suggested that students report on only those events or programs that are specifically related to human rights issues.

Newton South High School –

Hannah reported on the various activities, and Viviana brought in copies of program flyers.

- 2 hate crimes both on teachers' sexuality: One was a voicemail and one was on a teacher's blackboard. There was an advisory meeting to discuss and deal with these situations. On March 24, the Advisory block was extended to address these issues of hate crimes and human tolerance.
- Leadership and Diversity class is on retreat 4/7-8 with lots of interactive activities regarding trust building.
- On 3/18/09 the Race Task Force met – they actively support NSHS students & faculty with programs addressing issues of race, class and diversity. They'll host films this month followed by Q & A.
- On 3/19/09 22 NSHS students went to West Roxbury High School and on 3/23/09, the West Roxbury students came to NSHS. This exchange helps address issues of understanding and respect.
- On 3/20/09 students discussed what they accomplished during their community service trip to Nicaragua.
- On 3/20/09 evening they had an Empty Bowls fundraiser to address the issues of hunger and raise money for the Bristol Lodge Soup Kitchen.
- March 23-27 was Minga Movie Week, educating students about the prevalence of child sex trade. Movies were shown each day, some overlapping. These were "open to all" including the public.
- On 3/27/09 evening, Water Aid International held a "Funny Event" with improv groups to raise money.
- Teachers were invited 3/29/09 to ADL's 3rd annual "A Nation of Immigrants" Community Seder which is an opportunity to bring together diverse communities to learn about one another.
- Four students will go on a Russia Exchange trip 4/9/09 – 4/17/09.
- On 4/16/09 there's a slide show and talk by students on the NSHS first ever Spanish Language and Community Service trip to Peru.
- **Days of Remembrance** will take place from April 27-May 1 at NSHS. Days of Remembrance is an exhibit that focuses on genocide from that of the Holocaust to those that have and are still occurring in Rwanda, the Sudan, Vietnam, Armenia and Darfur. There will be 4 speakers. The library will have exhibit related to Days of Remembrance starting April 16. Sona will talk to Viviana about banner placement. Hannah will get reporters from each paper.

Newton North High School –

Sona reported that the Days of Remembrance will take place on May 1. It is difficult to have the full exhibit and speakers at NNHS due to various reasons. She said Julijana and Chloe have been helpful.

Hate Crimes/Incidents

Lt. Apotheker said the incidents at NSHS investigated but could not be labeled hate incidents. The voice mail was left in Boston, and they couldn't verify that it was a student. The message on black board was during a class with a different teacher. As mentioned, NSHS addresses the issues with both the student body and all faculty.

Lt. Apotheker reported on an incident at a student's home – fag and heroin were painted on the outside of the house but the mother would not allow police to talk to her son so it is difficult to follow-up. He also noted that the article in the Newton TAB about the Safe Ride Program made it sound like free taxi rides for drunken kids. The purpose is to get kids home safely.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Fair Housing

Sheila reported the Fair Housing Committee (FHC) will have monthly meetings to discuss action steps to be taken. The committee is made up of 11 members and she has been working to bring it together.

On May 4, our HRC is co-sponsoring the FHC's event: "Predatory Lending, Reverse Mortgages, and Fair Housing – In Newton and Beyond" from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at the Newton Senior Center. She explained that the speakers would be talking about predatory lending patterns in Greater Boston and the role of race and income, as well as reverse mortgages and predatory lending practices. Event flyers were distributed and available for people to take.

Programs

Jane Brown made several brief announcements:

- Both Jane and Carol Kelly were delegates to Mass. Democratic State Convention, and Jane testified before them as to the reasons we should support Cong. Barney Frank's plan to reduce the military budget by 25%.
- Congressman Barney Frank will give a talk about his plan for a 25% reduction to the military budget on April 26 from 7 to 9pm at the Eliot Church, 474 Centre St. This will be a town hall style format and is sponsored by Newton Dialogues for Peace and War (NDPW). A petition is being developed to support Cong. Frank's proposed military budget cuts and Jane will bring it for people to see, once it is finalized.

Jane and Nazik reported that the HRC program, "**Prospects for Peace between Israelis and Palestinians**" is Thursday, April 30 in the War Memorial Auditorium from 7 to 9pm. The moderator is Father Walter Cuenin and the speakers are Nadav Tamir, Israeli Consul General for Newton England, and Husam Zomlot, Palestinian Scholar and Guest Lecturer at the Kennedy School, Harvard University. Audience participation will follow the presentations. Jane expects that New TV will tape it. Police have a plan in place in case of protesters. An overview of program was discussed.

It was noted that the HRC is also co-sponsoring an upcoming program, "Immigrants Targeted: Extremist Rhetoric Moves into the Mainstream", Thursday, April 23, 6:30 – 8:00 pm, at the Boston College Law School, E Wing 120, 885 Centre St. The main sponsors are the ADL and MIRA.

There is a summer program at ISPRC (the Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture), Taking Action against Racism, June 26-27, 2009. Visit the website: www.bc.edu/isprc

Event flyers for all of the above were distributed and available for people to take. Flyers for the programs sponsored or co-sponsored by HRC on April 23 and 30, and May 4 had been emailed out to the HRC list-serve and mailed out to our growing list of 70 people interested in HRC events, as well as to the religious institutions in Newton. Bev thanked Suzy Rosenthal for helping with these mailings.

Education:

Sona stated that as discussed within the School Updates, the Days of Remembrance exhibit is the focus at this time of year in the schools. She described an exhibit from CA that may come to Newton. We briefly discussed ideas about displaying it for the HRC and maybe the public. If we could display it in the Library or War Memorial Auditorium, we could plan an evening event.

Communication/PR:

Bev is following up with calendar announcements and setting Mayor's Press Conference.

Susan suggested having photos taken of the Days of Remembrance and then we could make a PowerPoint slide show and put it on our website, as well as show it at events. Everyone thought that was a great idea.

Membership: No report was presented.

MAHRC (Mass. Association of Human Rights Commissions)

They had no meeting this month. Peter sent information by email that he would like to invite Gunner Scott, the Director of the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition to make a presentation at our May 13 meeting.

Newton Clergy Association:

Sam updated us that a change in leadership is taking place within the NCA so they will not be holding meeting this spring while they work on overhauling and reorganizing the way MCA operates. They want to have more institutions involved and participating so it is effective.

Sam reminded members present to take some of the program event flyers and post them in their local villages.

MINUTES & TREASURER'S REPORT

A motion to accept the 3/11/09 minutes was approved. (A change will be made to correct the typo of April 20 to April 30 for the date of the HRC program).

Bev presented the Treasurer's Report. The unexpected cost for the website domain renewal for five years was \$115.00 and \$336.00 was spent on redoing some of the materials for the Days of Remembrance exhibit along with \$83 for poster printing. The current balance is approximately minus \$54. Bev is directing the Health staff to pay this deficit from our revolving account which currently has a balance of \$518.62. **A motion to accept the Treasurer's report and support the transfer of payment was approved.**

Sona noted the contribution to the revolving account in honor of one of the award recipients and suggested that ideas for fundraising to get money into this account should be sent to Bev.

NEW OR OLD BUSINESS**Needham Human Rights Committee**

Bev reminded members that we are co-sponsoring a program with the Needham HRC on immigration myths. The speaker will be Aviva Chomsky, discussing the ideas in her book "They Take Our Jobs and 20 other Myths about Immigration". The program will take place on May 19, 2009 at 7:30 PM at the Needham Library. Bev is waiting to receive the flyer designed by the Needham HRC. We would have no financial involvement. We would just help publicize the event in our city.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM.

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, May 13, 2009 at Newton City Hall Cafeteria.

Respectfully submitted, Beverly Droz, HRC staff director