

Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 14, 2008
7:30 PM in the Newton City Hall cafeteria

Attendance:

Commissioners present: Jane Brown, Peter Brown, Muriel Esdale, Marianne Ferguson (Chair), Judy Fischbach
Brenda Krasnow, Sheila Mondschein, Sona Petrossian, Susan Thomas
Commissioner absent/regrets: (all were present)

Advisory Council Members present: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Dianne Chilingerian, Sam Glass, Norman Lazarus,
Armando Rossi, Joan Rubin,

Advisory Council Members absent/regrets: Ann Capoccia, Homer Franck, Nazik Kazimi, Carol Y. Kelley, Matt
McBride, Carleton Merrill, Myrna Offen, Viviane Planine, David Rosen, Sharon O. Stout, Frank Wolpe

Students present: Julijana Englander, David Fisher, Ali Zaidi

Students regrets: Isaac Zarsky

Staff present: Beverly Droz

Guests: Dan Fritz

The meeting opened at 7:35 pm

Everyone was welcomed and introductions were made around the room.

The minutes of the April 9, 2008 meeting were approved.

School Updates:

Newton North High School:

Ali Zaidi reported:

- He was part of a group of 15 students from NNHS and 15 from another school who went to New Orleans. They cleared out an acre field and a house that hadn't been touched since the storm. They stayed at a local church. The people there were very grateful. Most of the work is done by volunteers. It doesn't seem like the government has done much. The students all learned a lot from the experience.

Julijana Englander reported:

- The Black Leadership Cultural Day was yesterday.
- Days of Remembrance took place successfully.
- Posters that they made of "Lost History" are being put up.
- Day of Silence was also successful.

Newton South High School:

David Fisher reported:

- Today is his last meeting with HRC. He thanked everyone. He has gained a lot from the Commission.
- Another student, Han, should be joining.
- They had a productive day on the issue of Racism.
- Their school had a Day of Silence as well.
- STAND sponsored a week on Darfur issues. He thinks more could have participated.
- In June, they'll have a La Crosse Day to raise awareness about China and the Olympics.
- The Anti-War Club is focusing on awareness and educating people.
- Students are concerned about the override and whether or not it will pass.
- A Mass STAND event at Boston College focused on the Olympics and corporate support of China by companies like Staples.

Joan expressed how proud we are of these students and everyone gave a BIG THANK-YOU to them.

Hate Crimes/Incidents

Lt. Bruce Apotheker reported:

- Franklin Elementary School had racial graffiti in the boys' bathroom.
- Burr Elementary School also had graffiti and they think they found the student who did it.
- 66 Winchester Street where unknown person(s) had vandalized a company truck and buildings by spray painting various symbols and words including a large swastika.

Lt. Apotheker also reported that he recently attended a forum that discussed "Rachel's Challenge". Rachel Joy Scott was the 1st student shot at Columbine. She was a person who outreached particularly to those who needed help. He went on to tell the story and said how this story is being used in other school districts to help bring people together and help young people to set goals. He hopes it will also be use in our community.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Membership:

Muriel thanked Bev for all her work on NewtonSERVES. She also thanked the students for their active participation both on the Commission and in their respective schools.

Fair Housing:

Sheila said the Task Force is expected to meet next week and look at a near-final draft of the Action Plan. The 18 month grant will be finished this June.

Program:

Brenda reported a small group went to Cambridge to hear Tolman, Author of The Lemon Trees, speak and it was very interesting. The bottom line is that the Israelis and Palestinians can't keep looking backward. They need to look forward and it is difficult given the feelings involved. Susan noted that there are hundreds of articles and books on this subject. Brenda had some resources from the Cambridge group. The Program Committee will try to meet next week. Judy suggested having 2 sub-sets of the Program Committee, with 1 focusing on local and 1 focusing on more global issues.

Education:

Sona reported last month was busy with the Days of Remembrance and she thanked the students for their involvement. The school newspapers covered it well. The Globe reporter covered the Wall of Shame instead. We still need to get the History Department involved. The list of speakers has grown. The committee will look at involving Native Americans. Ali stated that in the NNHS leadership Class they did spend a month on this issue.

Communications: no report

MAHRC:

Usually on the 2nd Friday, this month's meeting is 5/30 with a special focus on a group from Russia being sponsored by Worcester. After the meeting, they're going to MCAD. They'll have an all-day meeting in September on the Cape where now there exists a county-wide Human Rights Commission.

Newton Clergy Association:

Sam reported that the recent meeting was focused on the information from the override. They are adjourned until September.

NEW/OLD BUSINESS:

- Bev displayed the draft stand-up banner as well as the revised brochure. The banner order will be placed this week and included in our budget. There was discussion about the brochure and Marianne suggested that a sub-committee work with Bev to finalize it.
- Jane reported that the Women's Commission had a 4th group meeting with The Second Step. The women, victims of domestic violence, spoke to their problems and hurdles, particularly daycare, getting a job, and transportation. Most have restraining orders and have trouble getting housing. Bev reminded everyone that HRC co-sponsored these series of meetings and we expect to continue our relationship with them.
- Judy reminded all that there's 6 months to the Annual Human Rights Award and we should be thinking of recipients.

- Susan suggested that the June 11 meeting be a potluck and a discussion of the issues. Jane Brown offered to host the event at 6:30pm.
- Sheila presented information on Darfur that she'll give to Bev to circulate. She also gave Sam a packet of the information "Save Darfur: A Call to Action" – containing what religious institutions can do.
- Bev reported that she and Homer Franck attended the Human Services Network Providers forum on May 9 about immigration. Marianne said we see if we can determine what is provided and not provided to immigrants. There was a general discussion about services and barriers, such as language.

Marianne asked if there are any in issues in Newton that we are not discussing. There was a lengthy group discussion including:

- Social economic class is an unspoken reality
- The issues of bullying which sows seeds of intolerance, and internet safety
- The reality that parents bully also and there isn't a consistent policy across the school department
- Issues of anti-Semitism and how best to educate the public
- The problems of trying to tackle too large a subject matter with given lack of resources
- The balance of issues facing Newton verses International issues.

This complex discussion will be continued next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30pm.

Next meeting: Wednesday June 6, 2008 at 6:30pm at Jane's house.

Respectfully submitted, Beverly Droz, HRC staff director