

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

**Attendance:**

Commissioners present: Jane Brown, Peter Brown, Judy Fischbach Brenda Krasnow, Sheila Mondshein, Sona Petrossian, Susan Thomas

Commissioner absent/regrets: Muriel Esdale, Marianne Ferguson (Chair)

Advisory Council Members present: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Dianne Chilingirian, Homer Franck, Sam Glass, Nazik Kazimi, Carol Y. Kelley, Norman Lazarus, Carleton Merrill, Viviane Planine, Sharon O. Stout

Advisory Council Members absent/regrets: Ann Capoccia, Matt McBride, Myrna Offen, David Rosen, Joan Rubin, Frank Wolpe

Advisory Students present: Julijana Englander, Chloe Judell-Halfpenny, Hannah Konowitz, Hannah Yarmolinsky

Staff present: Beverly Droz

Guests: Susan (Suzy) Rosenthal

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(Note change to Tuesday due to Jewish Holidays & now scheduled for 7:00-8:30pm due to Presidential candidates debate.)

**The meeting opened** at 7:00 pm and was chaired by Jane Brown. Everyone was welcomed and introductions were made around the room.

**The minutes** of the September 10, 2008 meeting were approved.

**School Updates:**

We welcomed the new student representatives and thanked Julijana for serving for a 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

**NNHS** - Julijana reported that much is going on. They had "Club Day" and set up tables to recruit students to participate in various clubs and social action issues. They're having theatre shows including "View from the Bridge" and 'Raisin in the Sun'. The Mentors Violence Prevention Program is looking at other activities and outreach.

**NSHS** – Tomorrow is "Club Day" at South. Amnesty International students are going to Boston for a rally. They are holding mock elections to better understand the process. Viviana brought flyers and also noted Friday is Minga Day, dedicated to fighting the global sex trade of children. Oct. 15 Rosabeth Moss Kanter will speak on Leadership in Trouble Times. On 9/18/08 they had Nicaragua Folklore Dancing.

"Leadership in a Diverse Society" Retreats are being held in both high schools. There is a violence program dealing with dating and peer pressure.

**Hate Crimes/Incidents**

Lt. Bruce Apotheker reported on 2 items:

- An incident at the Senior Center on 9/24/08 in the morning: 'Dirty Jew' and a swastika were written on a back bench. High school student often hang out on the benches when they have free periods. No one witnessed the incident.
- On 10/3/08 evening, a student reported he was walking down Homer St when a vehicle passed and something was thrown at him, hitting him. Then someone yelled an epithet at him. The juvenile was a 17 year old black male from Chelsea and was on his way to NNHS.

The Police are investigating both incidents.

**Announcements**

1. Jane urged members to be sure to educate themselves about the ballot questions for Nov. 4, particularly Question 1 to eliminate the state income tax. This measure would reduce the state budget by 40% and have enormous consequences for all communities including Newton. Bev had some hand-outs from STAND which explained the ballot question.
2. Jane will host a sub-committee meeting to look at possibly planning an Israeli – Palestinian program. It will be 10/29/08 at 7pm at her house. Anyone is welcome.

### **Full Commission Discussion**

NOTE: As per Bev's 9/29/08 notice to everyone, the Commissioners decided to open this meeting for full discussion about what Human Rights issues are important to everyone. They suggested we consider different approaches such as sharing our knowledge on a subject, collaborating with others to present a community program, writing an article for our website &/or The TAB. The following reflects an overview of the discussion (and Bev thanks Susan Thomas for her notes on this as well).

Brenda opened the session reminding everyone that we are open to any subject in which members are interested. Members are welcome to form sub-committees to work on a program or project.

- Show residents that Newton is a friendly community, and is welcoming to immigrants (Viviana)
- Should the HRC be more proactive? Are we only or mostly reactive? (Peter)
- Focus on local issues because that is the charge to the Commission. 2 examples: our recent collaboration on women with problems in Newton; issues for seniors. (Sheila)
- Need a format/system to deal with times when people (members?) do disagree, e.g. at a HRC meeting, so that the issue is not just ignored or swept under the rug; but we try to find a way to address it. (Judy) Maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect for everyone's varying opinions (within HRC as well as within Newton community). (Sona) HRC members could talk more openly among ourselves about any/all topics that concern us. (Brenda) Our summer meeting helps us to get to know each other on a more personal level. (Brenda)
- In Newton, we are blessed by good leadership and support for our work by the Aldermen and Mayor. For example, on the Cape, it was difficult for them to pull together the Cape County Human Relations Committee. (Peter)
- Impressed by students and the diverse programs they have at the high schools. Part of HRC work must be to increase sensitivity towards issues of race, religion, ethnicity, class (socio-economic level). (Sheila)
- At time of a human rights incident in community, HRC must make a rapid statement – within days, not weeks. (Sona) (Bev commented that with the current list-serve we have the ability to notify everyone as soon as we have the information.)
- When she first attended, she was frustrated because we were reactive, but now realizes that we give voice to the voiceless (Viviana) (Susan commented that we had an open forum 5 years ago that parents attended regarding gay rights and it was well attended. Do we need another one?) Dianne shared she has been discriminated against as if she was Jewish, which she isn't. So discrimination is still a problem.
- We should promote the fair treatment of all people and accentuate the positive, promoting safety and tolerance. There are national/world issues that are of great concern to Newton residents. (Homer). (Comment by Susan: An example was the Patriot Act several years ago but then our ensuing public program, a 3-person panel on the Patriot Act was very sparsely attended).
- Perhaps a questionnaire to citizens to ask what they think? (Bruce)
- There was much discussion about adding a question to the annual Census, to provide residents an opportunity to address human rights issues in Newton. (1) Sheila drafted and members suggested text, such as: The HRC would like to know what human rights issues locally are of concern to you. (2) Your response will be anonymous and will be separated from the census page that has your name on it.
- Other ideas were discussed: Is there any way to recognize businesses or organizations in Newton that have made positive contributions or taken steps to further human rights? (Dianne) Can we have the high schools pass out a similar question like the one we may put in the Census? (Bruce). We can pick a particular time of year and do a film. (Viviana) We could have a suggestion box at the Library or City Hall. (Brenda) We can make announcements in the TAB. (Peter) We need more people to volunteer. (Judy)

**The meeting was adjourned at 8:25pm.**

**Next meeting: Wednesday, November 12, 2008 at 7:30pm at the City Hall cafeteria.**

Respectfully submitted, Beverly Droz, HRC staff director