

Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
November 14, 2007
7:30 PM in the Newton City Hall cafeteria

Attendance:

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

Commissioner absent/regrets: Judy Fischbach

Advisory Council Members present: Ann Capoccia, Sam Glass, Myrna Offen, Joan Rubin

Advisory Council Members absent/regrets: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Dianne Chilingerian, Marcia Cruz Redding, Nazik Kazimi, Carol Y. Kelley, Norman Lazarus, Matt McBride, Carleton Merrill, Viviane Planine, David Rosen, Armando Rossi, Sharon O. Stout

Students present: Julijana Englander, Ali Zaidi

Students regrets: David Fisher, Isaac Zarsky

Staff present: Beverly Droz

Guests: Nancy Aykanian, David Boyajian, Sonya Merian, Judy Norsigian, Deborah Raptopoulos, Frank Wolpe

The meeting opened at 7:35 pm, chaired by Marianne Ferguson.
Everyone was welcomed and introductions were made around the room.

The minutes of the of the October 10, 2007 meeting were approved and accepted.

School Updates:

Newton North High School:

Julijana Englander reported that: The Human Rights Coalition recently met. To Be Glad Day is December 19. The Asian Culture Club has a toy drive. BLAC (Black Leadership Action Council) is drafting letter to principal in regards to issues that they see.

Hate Crimes:

Lieutenant Apotheker had to be at another event and called Bev to say that there are no new hate incidents. The Police are continuing to follow up on the few reports he mentioned last time.

Crime Commission

Frank Wolpe is a member of the Crime Commission appointed by the Mayor and he works with the Police Department. Frank stated that the City used to have a finger print program and gun buy back program but there isn't much crime so the need for such programs was not pressing. He also expressed interest in becoming a member of the Human Rights Commission. Bev noted that Colleen Rosenbaum had been attending HRC meetings with the intention of joining but she is now busy with other matters and recommended Frank in her place.

ADL:

Marianne read the following statement:

We, the Newton Human Rights Commission, would like to acknowledge the following, both as information for our members and guests, and as part of our public record:

At the August 21, 2007 Human Rights Commission meeting, we voted to write a letter to the national ADL stating the three actions we urged them to take, including:

- *Fully and unequivocally recognizing the Armenian Genocide*
- *Actively supporting Congressional Resolution HR 106*
- *Immediately reinstating Andrew Tarsy as Director of New England ADL*

At our meeting September 11, 2007, the Human Rights Commission voted to cease participation with ADL's No Place For Hate program until national ADL takes definitive action consistent with our August letter. We sent a recommendation to Mayor Cohen to follow our motion. And on September 18 the Mayor publicly announced that the City would drop out of ADL's No Place For Hate Program.

At the September 11 meeting, we also discussed that the national ADL Board meeting was November 1, 2007 and we would reconsider our involvement with their programs if national ADL took the actions we urged in our August letter.

We are all aware that national ADL did not take such actions as to fully and unequivocally recognize the Armenian Genocide nor to actively support HR 106. Therefore at this time, there is no need for the Newton Human Rights Commission to take any further action, nor entertain any further discussion at this meeting.

We will move on to other agenda items that need our time, energy and attention.

Advisory Council:

Bev had sent an email to all members for Advisory Council members to notify Myrna Offen about what committee they would like to serve on. Myrna will continue to try to follow-up with them.

Awards Committee:

The 23rd annual Human Rights Awards will be **November 29** at 7pm and held again at the Newton Senior Center. Bev reported that the award invitation was mailed to all HRC members and to Dr Wishnie's list from her office, and that the Evening Program and Award Certificates will be printed and brought to the November 29 event. Sona noted that 3 of the student awardees are HRC student Advisory members. We congratulated Julijana, Ali and David. The refreshments will be coordinated by the committee.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Membership:

Muriel welcomed the guests and said she was happy to provide more information to them or to answer any questions they may have.

Fair Housing:

Sheila reported that the City has been moving forward preparing website information on Fair Housing. It involves the HRC discrimination complaint process. Next week there will be another meeting to further plan the education and outreach for the program.

Program:

Brenda thanked all who came to the event last night, November 13 at 7:00pm. The event was well attended.

Israeli - Palestinian Conflict Conversations for Peace was moderated by Father Walter Cuenin.

It took place at Newton Country Day School Sweeney-Husson Auditorium 785 Centre Street

Encounter Point+. an award winning documentary - is a film story of hope and courage that promotes a bold new plan for resolving conflict. The film tells the story of several bereaved Israeli and Palestinians, who despite their losses, have entered into dialogue to try to forge a new consensus for non-violence and peace.

Marianne did an excellent introduction. The school has wonderful equipment. The audience was a mixture of people and the discussion was interesting with different points of view. We'd like to have follow up discussion groups and there is much potential to do that. Father Walter Cuenin did a great job moderating and he reminded people that the film shows a process.

Brenda thanked the Program Committee and she will call both Sister Rogers and Father Cuenin to thank them. Bev will send thank you letters as well.

Susan brought up that the film, Encounter Point, is good education material and members can borrow it from the office. Bev will work out tracking procedure.

Education:

Sona reported that they discussed the **Save Darfur Campaign** with the Mayor but he considers a sign on City Hall property a political statement. However, they discussed how to promote such a campaign. HRC could use it as part of the kick-off for the December Human Rights month and we can ask the Newton Clergy Association to promote it through their congregations. The Education Committee will be working with the school to plan the spring exhibits.

Public Relations:

There was discussion of PR plan of action. While it's a little time consuming, it really is best for Bev to email press releases and calendar announcements to the media from her office. The PR Committee will continue to write the articles. For the HRC Awards, we are focusing on an after-the-event article and photo. Bev will email Dr. Wishnie's bio to the Committee so they can write the article. The TAB did run the announcement of the Nov. 13 program for 3 weeks. Susan will summarize last night's event so we can send out a post press release.

MAHRC:

Peter reported that they had a joint meeting with the Greater Boston Civil Rights coalition. There was a discussion with Kevin Burke- secretary of Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, about the reactivation of a Commission on Hate Crimes. There used to be one but the funding was yanked under Governor Romney. It will happen sooner than later.

Burke and Martha Coakley (Office of Attorney General) would serve as co chairs and have a lot of agency input. There'd be an emphasis on training law enforcement. Peter is worried it won't have lot of community involvement. There used to be program involvement in local high schools and communities.

Sheila also attended the meeting. She thought he wanted it to be cross disciplinarian. Many members of the Civil Rights Coalition spoke. (Sheila is a member). They spoke about their diverse constituencies needing protection and involvement.

Massachusetts has very strong hate crimes laws but for a while these laws were not enforced. The first Hate Crime Commission was set up to help communities, so this will be helpful to have it re-activated. Frank Wolpe mentioned that Lt. Apotheker has been involved with this effort. The HRC noted that we are very appreciative of the fact that Lt. Apotheker is a part of the HRC.

MAHRC meeting are on the 2nd Friday at Medford City Hall.

Multi-Cultural Groups:

No report

Clergy Association:

Sam reported that they met last week and had a speaker from NH who spoke about he trade and abuse of children.

The **Martin Luther King Day** will take place at 2nd Church in West Newton and the Newton Clergy are taking a more active role in planning the event. Muriel asked if thee are any programs to get the students involved in.

There was discussion about having MLK Day be the kick off day for a meaningful project which could last through April, the anniversary of his death. Ali Zaidi said that at NNHS they have a guidance group which might be able to help think about this. December is Human Right kick-off month. Bev will email the High School Students to ask them to look into it and perhaps come up with some ideas.

Marianne Ferguson's suggestion was to strive to collect a can of food for each victim of the Darfur genocide, and collect them at a single location where the size of the piles of cans would have a tremendous public impact. The project doesn't have to be a can food drive but hunger was 1 of the issues King worked on.

Brenda relayed the example of the students in a southern town who collected a paper clip for each person killed in the holocaust. They somehow got a hold of an actual cattle car used in the holocaust and filled it with the paper clips. You can imagine the educational effect. This was made into a movie and had great impact. Sheila said one of Dr. King's projects was hunger, so can of food drive would fit in.

OTHER BUSINESS

Women's Commission:

Brenda reported on the recent Women's Commission meeting attended by Jane, Bev and herself to help them plan their spring workshop. March is women's history month and typically the Women's Commission sponsors an event around that time. This year they would like to focus on women in need in our Newton community and how we can help bring together strategies and resources to help them. They would like the HRC to co-sponsor the event with them. There are no costs involved for us. The next planning meeting is Nov. 29.

HERvoices:

Bev reported on hearing from Rachel King, a senior at Boston College, currently volunteering at the Newton based non-profit organization HERvoices. Their mission is to facilitate cross-cultural knowledge, empathy and understanding by empowering and amplifying the voices of underrepresented women and girls from communities around the world. They collect personal testimonies from underrepresented females to develop participatory, multimedia presentations which are shared with diverse audiences. She wanted to know if the HRC would like to team up with their programs.

They are currently touring a presentation entitled: "HERvoices: Survivors of Contemporary Slavery", a layered and intimate slide show documentary which shares the journeys of three women, who after enslavement in the United Arab Emirates, Northern Sudan and Massachusetts are living and prospering in our own city of Boston.

Sheila said the HRC should definitely network with them

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50pm.

Next meeting: Wednesday December 12, 2007 at 7:30pm in the City Hall cafeteria.