

THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
Minutes of June 23, 2020

Commissioners Present—Hattie Kerwin Derrick, Bryan Barash, Jane Brown, Eli Ingraham, David Kuppenheimer Tamika Olszewski, Brooke Welles

Commissioners Absent – none

Advisory Council Present—Bruce Apotheker

Student Representatives Present—Imani Fonfield

Guests – Kate Carpenter Bernier, Cindy Greene, Dana Hanson, Casey Houlton, Lakshmi Kadambi, Renande Loayza, Susan Lowcock, Maura O’Keefe, Amy Sangiolo, Katani Sumner

Staff to the Commission –Shin-Yi Lao

The meeting was called to order by Hattie Kerwin Derrick, Chair, at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom

1. Introductions

2. Student reports

- Imani Fonfield reported that students of color, and especially Black students, at NSHS have been feeling “emotional, overwhelmed, and over responsible.” She reports that many students are taking their own actions in response to recent events. Many book lists and resources are being circulated, including book clubs and a viewing of “Little Fires Everywhere” with discussion. There will be a training in August for teachers on how to teach and have discussions with Black and Brown students.
- Imani Fonfield and Katani Sumner reported on the newly formed NSHS Human Rights Commission which was formed in response to numerous Zoom bombing incidents.

3. Hate crimes/bias related incidents – Lt. Bruce Apotheker

- 5/8: Someone wrote the N-word on the white board at a NNHS Zoom meeting
- 5/11: While conducting a routine inspection, a Newton Environmental Health Specialist overheard the comment “I thought you Indians like it hot.”
- 5/15: NNHS Zoom incident where individuals tried to enter with the names “N-word toes” and an obscene name. The teacher did not admit them.
- 5/16: A man who did not wear a mask into JP Licks was asked to put one on. He left and returned wearing a mask and made the Heil Hitler gesture.
- 5/19: Image posted on Instagram by a student of a knight surrounded by swastikas
- 5/19: Anti-Hispanic comments made to a Newton firefighter by a terminated Newton firefighter
- 5/20: Asian male had his car window shattered, believed it was intentional
- 5/25: Graffiti related to Japan on a house under construction
- 6/10: A woman waiting in line at the Post Office heard laughing in the back followed by someone saying, “I can’t breathe.” The involved employees were placed on administrative leave.
- 6/14: Obscenities spray painted on the street
- 6/17: A Black Lives Matter sign in a couple’s yard was taken down by an unknown man. When the couple confronted him the man accused them of supporting terrorists.
- 6/19: An Asian male reported an older woman walking by him and saying, “China, Chinese maggot.”
- 6/21: Graffiti on a WWI memorial statue: ACAB, Defund 12, Black Lives Matter
- 6/22: Report from Assistant Principal at Bigelow – a group of students were on the House Party app and an unknown person made threatening remarks, including bias-related remarks. Currently under further investigation.

4. Complaints received

- No complaints received

5. Declaring racism as a public health crisis – Bryan Barash

- This is part of a ten-point plan (one of two municipal-level actions) presented by the Massachusetts Elected Officials of Color.
- Maura O’Keefe explained that there are some legal hurdles to doing this:
 - i. The Health and Human Services (HHS) Commissioner has the ability and authority to declare a public health crisis under Chapter 111 of the MA General Laws. However, under the law, the crisis has to be a ‘disease’ and it is unclear whether racism meets the law’s definition of ‘disease.’

- ii. Using the health code means HHS would be in charge of enforcement for racist events. Current enforcement involves issuing tickets and district court.
 - Boston and Cambridge city councils have adopted resolutions, but aren't currently executing them.
 - Action item: Maura will do some research on what Boston and Cambridge are doing
6. Create a civil review board/commission – Bryan Barash
- This is another part of a ten-point plan (one of two municipal-level actions) presented by the Massachusetts Elected Officials of Color.
 - Dana Hanson reported that the Mayor is putting together a task force (currently reviewing applications) that will look at all facets of policing in Newton. One of the aspects they will consider is the creation of a civil review board.
 - Action items:
 - i. Hattie will draft some language for an HRC statement on this and declaring racism a public health crisis
 - ii. The discussion will be continued at the next meeting
7. Dissemination of information regarding events
- Discussed sending information about upcoming events to Hattie so they can be emailed out to the group
 - Discussed other options for spreading the word such as flyers, WhatsApp, and WeChat
8. Newton OneRead
- Four books were selected:
 - i. How to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo
 - ii. How to be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi
 - iii. For younger readers
 - 1. New Kid by Jerry Kraft
 - 2. The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas
 - Participants will read the books in July and there will be a series of events including events that amplify the voices of Black Newton residents and activities for students.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30. Next meeting on July 7, 2020 at 7:00pm on Zoom.

Respectfully submitted by Hattie N. Kerwin Derrick