

Belmont Human Rights Commission
Minutes
October 5, 2004

The meeting was called to order by Interim Chairman William Rudman. Present were: Bannon, Barry, Feins, Heron, McCants, Reynolds, Shestakofsky, Tourreilles, Yuan. Also present was Diane McLeod of MAHRC (Massachusetts Association of Human Rights Commissions)

Minutes of September 21 meeting read and approved

Diane McLeod of MAHRC spoke about establishing a commission and the many points we should cover as a commission.

1. In which direction do we want to go? The hardest part of living with this decision is keeping consistent.
2. Developing working procedures – determine terms and duties of officers
3. Determining policy regarding handling of emergencies i.e.who would take over if chairman not able to attend regular meeting.
4. Recording of minutes (rotating position perfectly o.k.)
5. Determining if there are any particular area we want to pursue i.e. education and appoint a sub committee for each area specified.
6. Developing contacts and relationships with many local groups such as media, police department, school department.

Priority

Getting an informational letter out to as many people as possible (probably through the newspaper) stating

Who we are
What's important
What are the issues
Plus GOALS FOR 2005

First year don't get too ambitious. Choose a couple of issues to work with. Get community input.

If we are to act as mediators, there are many other agencies, both state and federal, that we can call on for help such as MCAD. Cases can be turned over to most other agencies for mediation.

Above all, we must remain neutral and appear that way to the whole community. We must put aside our personal feeling. MAHRC has a list of agencies that we can call if things get out of hand and we need assistance.

Diane McLeod feels our group would benefit from additional speakers and forums. There are many people "out there" willing to help. Professors from surrounding colleges are a very good source of help and are often available. Also federal and state agencies can send speakers.

Suggested HRC enlist liaisons from many town department. Police Chief usually would be able to suggest a good candidate from his department. Supt of Schools should have an appointee. Housing Dept sends another important representative

Another priority suggestion: Establish a "Hot Line" for the HRC. Can be as simple as a phone with a message machine. Should be installed in a "safe place" where confidentiality can be assured, usually the Town Hall. Messages would have to be picked up regular and responded to quickly. Important to follow up on this. Garrett Barry volunteered to investigate and report back at next meeting.

If we have a good relationship with the Police Department, their liaison should attend meetings regularly, if possible.

Ms. McLeod recommended contacting D.J Wilson of Malden who is the volunteer Commissioner for MAHRC. He can be very helpful with suggestions, advice, etc. She also spoke briefly about the issue of liability raised by town counsel. Felt HRC was no different from any other town commission. No reason to limit any activities if following Selectmens' Charge to the Committee. Suggest Belmont Town Counsel contact Medford City Attorney Mark Rumley regarding this matter because 1) Diane McLeod works in the Medford HRC and knows him, and 2) Medford City Counsel has fielded this type of question before..

Doug Reynolds volunteered to contact Paul Solomon and the Board of Selectmen regarding this matter. Also to speak to Mark Rumley about his opinions about commission's liability..

Diane McLeod can be reached by e mail at DMcLeod @Medford.org. Glad to help us in any way she can.

Ms McLeod departed at 8:05.

Regular meeting commenced.

Chairman Bill Rudman still waiting for answer to his letter from the Board of Selectmen regarding liability.

Date for regular meeting set for Thursday, November 4.

Diversity Plan Discussion

Target date or due date for Diversity Plan – February 1, 2005

Question: What is the next step towards meeting our goals?

Doug Reynolds, who created a working outline for the group, led the discussion.

Began by asking each member to list a benefit of creating diversity. The committee had many ideas.

1. Greater awareness of the composition of the community.
2. Diversity is interesting and dynamic. Success builds upon success.
3. Reducing incidents of discrimination through awareness.

4. At some point making HRC unnecessary
5. Create a safer environment in which to grow
6. Next generation should be more aware of and feel less threatened by diversity
7. Better prepares children to go into the world
8. With more diverse school staff, should learn more about different cultures
9. To survive, it is necessary to accept change -
10. Many economic benefits thru diversity such as new business, better employees
11. If people feel welcome , more apt to maximize their potential.
- 12.

Costs of Diversity – seeing actual results

1. Emotional – willingness to give up certain ideas, benefits, privileges and learning to share with others.
2. If accept and support diversity, could be a fear of criticism or ostracism
3. Human Capital – time, money, training
4. Risk of discovering alternatives
5. Erosion of quality – making commitment
6. Actual dollar costs in terms of police time and effort, human capital.

If things left “as is” or “Status Quo”

Big cost would be no resolution of HR issues. Also complacency.

Discussion to be continued at October 18th meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia Bannon