

**Belmont Human Rights Commission**  
**Minutes**  
**November 3, 2005**

**Members Present:** Fran Yuan (Chair), Steve Shestakofsky (Vice Chair), Cynthia Bannon, Cheryl Morrissey, Bill Rudman, Moez Rawji, Donna Ruvolo, Connie Williams

**Members Absent:** Judith Feins, Regie Gibson

**Liaisons Present:** Paul Solomon, Selectman; Dan Richards, Vice-Principal, Belmont High School; Lt. Peter Hoerr, Belmont Police Department.

**Minutes**

The minutes of October 5, 2005 meeting were unanimously accepted.

**Liaison Guest Speaker**

Belmont High School Vice Principal Dan Richards was invited to address the Commission. Richards has been at BHS for the past four months, where he is responsible for the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades as well as working with students and faculty on celebrating diversity. Working with the Diversity Club and the Gay Straight Alliance, Richards hopes to reintroduce a Diversity Week program which had been very strong a few years back.

A question was raised about what type of discrimination a student can experience at the High School, based on varied issues such as sexual preference, body size, economic status, and race. Richards expressed that everyone comes in with baggage and it is up to the high school to model good behavior. When questioned about what he has experienced in terms of METCO, Richards said there is a wall that hasn't been broken through. Perhaps one idea is to have METCO students from other school districts participate in a panel in Belmont to answer questions about their experiences. He also mentioned trying to create opportunities where Belmont residents and METCO students can have an opportunity to get to know one another. Another idea is to establish METCO/Belmont matching parent connections when students are in elementary school.

Richards was questioned whether there could be a renewed commitment to the bullying and teasing programs that had been presented in the past, as well as introducing these programs even as early as the middle school years. Richards responded that there has been an effort to create standards for responding to bullying from a state level and that the Assistant Principal Conference this year will focus on bullying. While budgeting for this type of training can be an issue, there is potential funding available in a matching grants program from the Anti-Defamation League under the No Place for Hate program and other groups in town. Richards also mentioned the Martin Luther King breakfast as a tremendous opportunity for students, teachers and the community to be involved.

A question was raised to the number of non-white faculty currently teaching at the High School, which is quite low. Members of the Commission asked what can be done to recruit higher numbers of non-white applicants, as it is important for minority students to feel represented in the faculty. A conversation followed that, while it is important for minority students to have role models in the school, it is important and worthwhile for all students to work with faculty representing different racial and cultural backgrounds.

A conversation then followed with a concern that World History (as taught in High School) is basically European History.

A question was directed to Lt. Peter Hoerr of the Belmont Police Department regarding what, if any, issues he has seen around the schools with regard to discrimination and whether the High School could take a more pro-active stance. Lt. Hoerr responded that the High School response has been good to excellent, especially in the areas of bullying. Although he didn't have much exposure with racial issues, the Police Department remains alert to conflicts of all types, and he hasn't had occasion to charge anyone with a civil rights violation.

A concern was raised that in a school dance, students from other schools are not permitted to attend, but for a Gay/Straight Alliance sponsored dance, students from other towns are permitted to attend. It was suggested that dance policies should be consistent.

Next month's speaker will be Laurie Graham, representing the Disabilities Access Committee and the Belmont Special Needs Advisory Council.

### **Commission Training:**

Fran, Donna and Bill will meet with Lorie Miller from VISIONS on November 7 to discuss the HRC training to take place on Sat., December 3 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., location to be determined. Trainers will be Lorie Miller and Deborah Walker. In accordance with Open Meeting guidelines, this meeting will be open to the public.

It was then suggested to move the next scheduled meeting (December 1<sup>st</sup>) to a date following the December 3<sup>rd</sup> training to allow for a recap of the training. The group discussed, and later approved, Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup> to be the next scheduled meeting of the HRC.

### **Massachusetts Association of Human Rights Commissions:**

The October MAHRC meeting featured a speaker from the ACLU talking about first-hand accounts of individuals impacted by the Patriot Act (including having been detained and having information gathered about them) and how this might be considered discrimination. The book "Mass Impact" which explores this topic is available through the ACLU. Commission members also brought up "Forgotten Country" by James Yee. It was suggested that members of the Belmont HRC might find it helpful to read this book before the training session. The next meeting of the MAHRC is Friday, November 18<sup>th</sup>.

### **Activity Planning:**

A column of up to 700 words would be welcome by the Belmont Citizen Herald. Paul Solomon urged the HRC to take on this project. Everyone should come up with an idea for a column to educate, communicate and promote awareness for events and activities.

Moez talked about an idea for an International Music Festival. Commission members could ask members of the community to provide music, food and donations to support an event, scheduled for January or February. Music is a universal tie to pull people together, and Moez has had a great deal of success with a classical music program at MIT. There was enthusiasm for this event although there were concerns about the scope of work and expense that might be involved. It was suggested that Moez pull together a plan to present at the next meeting.

The Meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.  
Respectfully submitted, Donna Ruvolo