

BELMONT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Minutes of the Meeting of February 10, 2005

Members Present: Garrett Barry, Chair; Judie Feins, Art Heron, Doug Reynolds, Bill Rudman, Steve Shestakofsky, Bev Whitten, Fran Yuan.

Members Absent: Cynthia Bannon, Maria Turreilles.

Other Attendees: Angelo Firenze, Farrah Raskin, Jill Smilow, Paul Solomon.

The meeting was called to order by the Chair and the attendees introduced themselves; Mr. Shestakofsky volunteered to be the scribe for the meeting.

The Chair indicated that he had invited Ms. Raskin and Ms. Smilow from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) for the purpose of presenting information the “No Place for Hate” initiative. The speakers indicated that the program was created by the ADL in partnership with the Massachusetts Municipal Association to oppose hate and intolerance and support respect for individual and group differences. At present, 57 municipalities in Massachusetts are active in the program. A community signs on to the initiative by the issuance of a proclamation by chief municipal officers – which, in Belmont, would be the Board of Selectman. Communities are certified by the program if they annually conduct at least three new activities that promote the goals of the program. A packet of information was provided to HRC members and other attendees. After discussion, it was agreed that the question of the Commission recommending participation in the program to the Board of Selectmen would be discussed at the next meeting [March 3rd]. Further information would be provided to the HRC. The Chair thanked the presenters.

The Commission unanimously approved the Minutes of the meetings of December 15, 2004 and January 12, 2005. It was noted that the meeting scheduled for January 25, 2005 did not convene due to the lack of a quorum.

Mr. Rudman volunteered to be the scribe for the next meeting.

The Chair noted that the Belmont Police Department’s liaison to the HRC, Lt. Peter Hoerr, was unable to attend. However, the Chair reported that it was noted Lt. Hoerr would be reporting on a recent incident of computer hacking at the Belmont High School at the next meeting.

The Chair reported that the Commission’s Annual Report had been submitted to the Board of Selectmen.

A discussion ensued regarding the open meetings law and when it is permissible to go into executive session if discussion an individual’s character; it was agreed that such an executive session would be legal.

It was reported that the first round of Community Feedback forms had already been mailed out as an insert by the Belmont Electric Light Department; Mr. Rudman volunteered to pick up completed forms sent to that Department and to the Town Hall. Ms. Yuan volunteered to pick up completed forms at the Belmont Public Library. Ms. Feins reported that she was in the process of arranging for forms to be circulated at Belmont High School (through the Social Studies Department) and to the METCO students in Belmont. It was agreed that the Commission would discuss the creation of a review process for the Community Feedback forms at the next meeting.

The Chair reported on activities in other communities that had been circulated to him by Diane McLeod of the Massachusetts Association of Human Rights Commissions; Ms. Yuan volunteered to forward all such information to HRC members via email.

The Chair reported that he would be willing to pay for two attendees at the forthcoming Urban League event.

The Commission agreed that the meeting following March 3rd would be held on March 14th; Mr. Rudman volunteered to secure the room.

Selectman Solomon reported that he would re-send to the Chair information regarding the Commission's acceptance and utilization of donations.

Mr. Reynolds raised the issue of an incident in Belmont that will result in legal action and questioned whether the HRC could play a role in resolving such disputes in the future. After discussion, it was agreed that while the incident at hand was not before the Commission, one of the HRC's roles should be to try to more amicably resolve such issues in the future by educating the citizenry and Town employees about the availability of using the Commission as a resource.

Mr. Shestakofsky presented a draft complaint process for discussion. He suggested a process that involved the receipt of a complaint, the screening for appropriate jurisdiction, the requirements for a formal complaint, and the possible outcomes available. He also suggested that, at least initially, the entire Commission should participate in most aspects of the process. It was agreed that Mr. Shestakofsky would prepare a written draft of his proposal for discussion at the next meeting.

Selectman Solomon asked the Commission if this was an appropriate time to fill the vacant eleventh seat on the HRC. The Commission had no objection to an appointment being named.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Shestakofsky