



*Belmont Human Rights Commission*

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**Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, March 5, 2015**  
**Belmont Town Hall**  
**Conference Room 1**

The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:05 p.m.

The following were in attendance:

Members: Carl Brauer, Nan Donald, Jirair Hovsepien, Paul Solomon, Daniel Vernick, Barbara Watson,

Liaisons: Belmont Against Racism: Kathryn Bonfiglio

Police Department: Peter Hoerr

Community Members: Athena Edmonds and family and two aux pairs currently residing in Belmont (one from Albania, and one from Portugal)

1. **Meeting minutes:** The January 4<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes were accepted unanimously with several minor corrections.
2. **Report on phone line and e-mail correspondence:** Carl reported that the Arlington Human Rights Commission had contacted the phone line regarding the scope of our authority.
3. **Upcoming Events:** Nicholas Kristof, the investigative reporter and co-author of the book *A Path Appears* will be speaking at Belmont High School on April 15 at 7:30 p.m. The event is free, but tickets are required.
4. **Public Accommodations and Transgender Individuals:** Athena Edmonds was in attendance with her husband and son, and spoke about the issue of public accommodation and transgender individuals. The 2011 Act Relative to Gender Identity added gender identity to Massachusetts non-discriminatory protections in the areas of housing and employment, but not public accommodation. Twelve Massachusetts cities and towns, encompassing roughly 20% of the population have already passed transgender inclusive non-discrimination ordinances or by-laws, and it is the Edmonds' hope that Belmont will similarly pass a local by-law giving transgender individuals protection that include public accommodation. Ms. Edmonds spoke movingly about her family's experience and urged the Human Rights Commission to support a by-law offering such protections for Belmont. The Commission determined that the appropriate next step would be to determine if Belmont already has any by-laws regarding non-discrimination. It was observed that while the ultimate goal of passing legislation on a statewide level, passing bylaws or ordinances like this can help individuals at least feel safe in their own communities, if not in the larger community, until further progress is made.
5. **Institutionalization of Appointment of High School Liaison/Member:** Daniel Vernick presented draft versions of materials to assist in recruiting a new student liaison from Belmont High. The materials were discussed and some further edits are planned.

6. **Selecting a new HRC chair:** Barbara Watson noted that HRC members should start thinking about nominations for a new HRC chair in May or June.

7. **Liaison Reports:**

*Belmont Police Department:* Captain Hoerr observed that the recent Department of Justice report found evidence of widespread discrimination by the Ferguson police department against African Americans. During discussion of the Ferguson shooting, it was noted that at least 50% of the individuals who end up being fatally shot by law enforcement are individuals with mental health issues. Belmont police officers are offered special training in how to respond to persons in mental health crisis, according to Captain Hoerr. He also reported that a retired Belmont Police Department sergeant has alleged that the Belmont Police Department and Police Chief Richard McLaughlin have discriminated against him with a biased motive since his retirement.

*Belmont Against Racism:* Kathryn Bonfiglio reported that Belmont Against Racism currently was primarily focused on Metco support, including funding transportation for Metco students. Based on monies raised, BAR anticipates transportation is funded through the winter.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Submitted by recorder: Nan Donald