

Belmont Human Rights Commission Meeting
Belmont Town Hall
April 3, 2008

Members in attendance: Lisa Bernt, Laurie Graham, Moez Rawji, Connie Williams, Fran Yuan

Liaisons in attendance: Kathryn Bonfiglio, Peter Hoerr, Dan Richards, Paul Solomon
Absent: Rosalind Kabrhal, Camille Sarrouf, Janet Boswell, Tricia Lohmar, Nan Donald

Meeting began at 7:12 p.m.

1. Members discussed the success of the March 29th concert, where an estimated 175 people were in attendance. Many attendees stayed for the reception afterwards. Fran reported that we broke even on the event.
2. Lisa reported that the Housing Resource book is at the library. We discussed ways to put these resources on-line.
3. An update to the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing is due on May 5th to Newton, and should be done under the Housing Trust and involve the Town Planning Coordinator. Lisa felt that Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Mass. Commission against Discrimination (MCAD) could provide information on Belmont.
The focus is on the following: "Where there is a determination of unlawful segregation or other housing discrimination by a court, an analysis of the actions which could be taken by the recipient to help remedy the discriminatory condition, including actions involving the expenditure of funds by the jurisdiction."
Information from groups about affordable housing and protected classes (racial, public assistance, low income, elderly, disability, public housing) is needed.
We will hold a public hearing on information gathered at the next meeting on May 1st.
Lisa will contact Jeff Wheeler - MCAD and HUD - to help gather statistics and work with the Housing Trust (Gloria Leipzig) for a determination of housing discrimination.
This report will be on the agenda for the next meeting.
4. With the Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act in April, Connie discussed talking about the work of the Fair Practices Committee in Belmont. It was agreed that we need to begin to do an oral history of that time in Belmont before those who experienced it are gone.
Laurie contacted Kris Comment at the Media Center at high school. Ms. Comment felt it was a good idea to get students involved but a bad time of year to start anything.
In general, the idea is to have a 'tea' first so Fair Practices Committee members can talk about their experiences and then to start the oral history media project. This might kick-off the oral history project. It was suggested that we look up newspaper articles from the library of any relevant news from those times.
5. The commission membership positions in the near future were discussed. Laurie Graham was elected to the school committee and so will be leaving the HRC.
It was acknowledged that this meeting was Paul Solomon's last as selectman.
Moez, Connie, and Lisa's terms are up this year, but all were encouraged to stay on and will hopefully make a final decision on their status by next meeting.
6. The question of co-sponsoring the annual marriage equality ice cream social was brought up, but since a quorum was not present, a vote could not be taken on this. Fran brought up the film "For the Bible Tells Me So", which will be shown by the Belmont Gay Straight Alliance and The First Church. This film has been recommended by AARP and discusses religious groups dealing with the issue of homosexuality. The emphasis is on safety of young people who are gay.

Several people voiced concern about co-sponsoring something related to religious beliefs, as religious organizations can take whatever views they want to. No vote was taken on this.

7. We discussed having a table at Town Day on May 17th. Paul volunteered to pursue a gift certificate from Savenor's. Fran agreed to put together a basket or two of gift certificates and other items for a town day raffle. The issue is the cost of \$75 for the table. It could be shared with another group.

8. BHS Vice Principal Dan Richards reported on this year's Diversity Week and recommendations for next year.

9. It was announced that Tina Sherry will be speaking at the Belmont Against Racism Annual Meeting on Tuesday June 10th at 6:30 pm. She is the mother of a son who was murdered 15 years ago. She helped the Herman Taylor family deal with their son's murder. Ms. Sherry runs the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute through which mothers of perpetrators and victims of violence get together to work on reconciliation.

10. It was announced that Michael Fowlin, a therapist/actor who acts out a range of different characters, would be performing at the Chenery Middle School on April 9th at 7 pm.

11. Capt. Peter Hoerr discussed an incident where a man with a pellet gun threatened to commit suicide and described how police intervened. There is training for police to help them deal with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, which can result from intervening in such traumatizing situations.

At the high school, a victim of gay taunting pulled an exacto knife on the perpetrator, and as a result, the victim was arrested. There is a question as to whether this was a bias crime. The harassment policy reads that it's a hate crime if the person is victim of continued bullying.

Students are expelled from the high school for drugs and having a weapon. There is an expulsion hearing, and then mediation before being readmitted to school. Arthur Darviris is the officer at the school. Kathryn brought up the issue of whether peer mediation is needed.

Meeting ended at 9:05 pm.