

Belmont Human Rights Commission
Belmont Town Hall
April 4, 2007

Meeting Minutes

Members present: Lisa Bernt, Judie Feins, Laurie Graham, Roz Kabrhel, Donna Ruvolo, Fran Yuan (Chair), Moez Rawji.

Members absent: Janet Cudmore-Boswell, Trish Lohmar, Cheryl Morrissey, Connie Williams.

Guests and Liaisons present: Kathryn Bonfiglio (Belmont Against Racism), Lt. Peter Hoerr (Belmont Police Dept.), Hildy Dvorak (Council on Aging), Paul Solomon (Selectman)

The meeting began at 7:00 p.m.

1. Administrative

It was decided that Rosalind Kabrhel would check the HRC phone line for the month of April.

Motion: The minutes of the March 1, 2007 meeting were adopted with minor amendments.

2. Programming

A. Fair Housing Event

i. Flyer

A flyer advertising the upcoming Fair Housing Event, "More than Money: Fair Housing in Metro Boston" on April 26, 2007 was circulated. There were differing opinions as to the wording on the flyer, which contained two questions: What factors influence where homeowners of color choose to live? What leads to racial segregation? It was determined that the questions should focus on the Northwest suburbs, and be limited to homeowners (instead of expanded to renters) for the purposes of this discussion. Focusing on the Northwest suburbs was determined to be consistent with the speaker's research on fair housing, and yet did not single out Belmont. It was also suggested that the focus on the Northwest might draw a larger audience to the event.

Motion: It was agreed that the questions would be revised as such: What factors influence where homeowners of color choose to live? Why do so few choose to live in the Northwest suburbs? How can communities encourage diversity?

Subsequently, it was also suggested that the flyer be changed to reflect that Donna Brescia would be leading a discussion of issues in the region as opposed to just Belmont. This was agreed-to. It was also suggested that the questions identified above should have a positive "spin." Several options were discussed, and it was decided that Fran would consult with the speaker to ensure that the questions adequately reflected her discussion. Fran would make final edits to the flyer and will submit it for copying.

It was suggested that the flyers be distributed to real estate agents in town and at Town Meeting. Judie Fein agreed to disseminate the flyers at Town Meeting. Laurie Graham agreed to distribute flyers to the houses of worship. It was agreed that the high school would also be notified of the event.

ii. Remaining Tasks

Laurie Graham agreed to arrange for a food waiver for the event, and will try to get the event put on cable TV.

Fran will correspond with the Belmont Citizen-Herald regarding press coverage for the event and publication of articles. Fran will also arrange the program for the event and introduce the guest speakers. A written program will most likely be made available at the event.

The article prepared by Roz Kabrhel was reviewed and agreed to with minor edits. Fran will ask the speaker to look the article over to ensure its accuracy and then submit it to the Belmont Citizen-Herald. It was agreed that a third article about the event was unnecessary. Roz will also prepare an article after the event if press coverage is not provided.

The room for the event is, for the most part, set up properly. AV equipment will be provided and set up just prior to the event. Judie will see to the coordination of the AV equipment and laptop.

B. May Reception

\$500 was donated to be put towards food for an event sponsored by the HRC. An open house was planned for May 24, 2007 at the community room in the library. However, it was suggested that the event would see greater attendance if it were coordinated with another event that would draw people together. It was also pointed out that other events in May would highlight the HRC's activities, and that people might not be drawn to an inside event once the weather started to turn warm.

It was agreed that the May event would be cancelled, and that the \$500 would be combined with another donation of \$1,000, which was to be used for a music event in the fall. Instead, the HRC will sponsor a larger event with both music and food.

It was also agreed that the HRC would participate in Town Day (May 19th) and Meet Belmont. Fran Yuan asked Paul Solomon to see if the Town Day fee of \$75 for a table might be waived since we are without a budget.

HRC members will staff a table at Town Day in 2 hour shifts. Members will attempt to get a contribution from various restaurants for a "free lunch" raffle to draw people to the HRC table.

C. Light Bill Mailing

The revised HRC leaflet will be placed in light bills in early May. Laurie Graham has made the revisions to the leaflet, and has arranged for photocopying and distributing to the light department. Additional photocopies will be made for distribution at the April Fair Housing Event and Town Day. HRC will require assistance folding the leaflets. It was suggested that high school students might be available for this task.

3. Other Items

A. Municipal Budget Initiative

Fran Yuan and Aviva Rothman-Shore from the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston met with Rep. Will Brownsberger to discuss the initiative and its sponsorship and submission to the General Court. Rep. Brownsberger determined that the bill was not ready for submission at this late stage, and with the revisions required. He suggested that more specificity was needed with regard to funding and desires, and that documented support should be obtained from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the Attorney General's Office.

B. Recertification Process (No Place for Hate)

Fran prepared the application for recertification. The HRC needs to set forth its goals for the upcoming year. It was determined that a special meeting should be held in June to discuss the HRC's initiatives and goals for the next term. It was agreed that HRC members would review the application and submit any edits directly to Fran Yuan.

C. Community Read Program

The HRC was invited by the public library along with other community groups to discuss a town-wide book reading program. Three books under consideration will be voted upon at the next meeting: "Three Cups of Tea," "March" by Gwendolyn Books, and "Swimming to Antarctica: Tales of a Long-distance Swimmer". Fran Yuan is representing the HRC at these meetings.

4. Future Meetings and Agenda Items

A. Date/time/place for HRC meetings in next term

It was agreed that the HRC would continue to meet at 7:00 PM on the first Thursday of every month.

It was agreed that a potluck dinner celebrating the end of the HRC term would be held on July 12th at the home of Judie Feins.

B. Agenda for May meeting

Laurie Wolff will be a guest speaker regarding transgender issues, and a proposed bill to add "transgender" to the list of protected classes identified in G.L. c. 151B.

Alane Janulewicz, liaison from the Middle School, may also attend the next meeting.

It was suggested that the HRC review the co-sponsorship criteria list in light of several recent requests of co-sponsorship, including proposed legislation by the Fair Housing Center, the transgender legislation to be discussed at the May meeting, and the upcoming Ice Cream Social (May 17th), which is currently sponsored by Belmont against Racism (BAR), the Belmont Gay Straight Alliance Committee, the High School Gay Straight Alliance, and several Belmont houses of worship.

With regard to the Ice Cream Social, the comment was made that many citizens perceived it to be a conscious omission that the HRC was not identified as a co-sponsor of the event. This is reinforced by the perception that the Town otherwise endorses the event, as the Town Clerk always attends as well as several members of the Belmont Police Department.

With regard to the co-sponsorship criteria, it was suggested that the HRC distinguish between supporting efforts that are sanctioned by law, and those that are only proposed law. This issue will be a topic of discussion at the May meeting, and at future meetings.

5. Liaison Reports

A. Belmont Police Department: Lt. Peter Hoerr, liaison

The Police Department has completed the 1st round of Diversity Training with Sally Ting, which was well received. After the 2nd round is complete, the PD will hold a dialogue session and will consult with the HRC about questions to be addressed and who should be included in the session. This will occur in June, and will not be open to the general public. The goal is to just exchange information and promote understanding among and between the police and the community.

Peter Hoerr will contact the MBTA regarding authority to repaint the tunnel under the train station in Belmont Center. He will attempt to get the fee waived so that students can repaint.

B. Council on Aging: Hildy Dvorak

The Meat Raffle was a success! The COA will next host a legislative breakfast, at which time housing issues will be discussed, with particular attention paid to bills currently before the legislature.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalind Kabrhel