

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Minutes of Meeting May 19, 2005

Present: Steve Shestakofsky (Chair), Cynthia Bannon, Cheryl Morrissey, Bill Rudman, Bev Witten, Fran Yuan

Liaisons: Lt Hoerr, (BPD) Mike Collins, (BAR) Selectman Solomon.

- April 14 minutes approved
- Survey Forms – Have been distributed & need to be finished by next meeting – June 2
- Town Day – Table for free per coordinator Don Gentile 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. Set up by Fran. Group appreciates her efforts.
- Organizational Liaisons: Selectmen, BPD, BAR, Nava Niv-Vogel, head of Senior Center, Rabbi Jonathan Kraus – liaison for Belmont Religious Council. Cynthia Bannon has approached Chamber of Commerce – who recommended Regis Professor. We will include liaisons on our e-mail and approved minutes.

Selectman Solomon stated that a measure of the HRC's success is its credibility and that it needs a plan. This need not be a long list of issues, examples might be events in cooperation with the Police or any other entity regarding areas that need addressing. An example is the good rapport between Brookline's Police and HRC. Shestakofsky asked for volunteers to come up with a quick response. Yuan and Rudman volunteered and Barry was volunteered in absentia. Examples: Social events, speakers, and fora. We will also follow up on the ADL's "NO PLACE TO HATE" and look at what other communities are doing. Lt. Hoerr suggested doing something with the Belmont Center pedestrian tunnel. One sponsor may be Mr. Atinizian of Vast Capital with respect to a possible concert. The Chair should express our gratitude to him for his offer of help. Only general plans needed at this time, supplemented and targeted by means of the survey.

Rudman indicated that Selectman Solomon was asking us to come up with a plan without us considering the survey results. Selectman Solomon stated that we need to include actions in the plan as it relates to issues in Belmont. He affirmed that we know what some of these issues are even without the survey results. Rudman said that there are

'philosophical issues' that we the Commission do not agree on and have not discussed in this group. Witten asked him to elaborate on what this might be and could he please give us an example of such an issue? Rudman proceeded to state that the issue of homosexuals was problematic for him and that we might not, as a group, agree on this issue. Yuan then mentioned that we might have been asked to support the celebration of the first anniversary of gay marriage in the town on May 17. She would like to believe that this is the kind of event that could be co-sponsored by the commission with other groups to be supportive of gay and lesbian individuals in this town. Rudman said that he disagreed and certainly could not support the celebration of gay marriage as he personally does not agree with it. Witten stated she finds this to be totally unacceptable.

The group was given a draft of the BHA's Civil Rights Protection Plan. We will invite them to a future meeting.

Possible changes in membership were discussed regarding reappointments of terms expiring next month and members who do not regularly attend meetings. A difference of opinion was expressed as to whether "diversity" should be factored in to the search for new members.

Please add the following:

Witten said that she would like to request that future nominations to the HRC reflect diversity and minority groups in this town, so that we can ensure that all voices are represented at this table. Morrissey, supported by Rudman disagreed on this and Morrissey stated: 'we have enough problems getting this group to come to meetings and to be committed. What about these other people?' Selectman Solomon gave examples of how he deals with finding people with the best experience and qualifications to be on other town committees. He stated that sometimes specific people were approached who were seen to have the skills and experience.

Meetings will begin at 7 p.m. from here on in and the next two will be June 2 and June 13, 2005. Rudman will make arrangements with Sandra Curro.

. Witten expressed her disapproval to the op-ed piece that Lt. Hoerr authored. She stated that on reading this article she had a need to seriously reflect on the work and charge of this commission and that she has serious doubts about the progress and direction of this commission. She stated that she has been concerned about the fact that the Commission has never able to engage in a constructive dialogue about the Belmont police without members jumping to the defense of the police, despite the fact that we all know that there are issues of discrimination that involve the police.

She quoted the typical phrases that have been used by commission members during meetings; 'don't single out the police, lets not just talk to the police, lets put the police in a bubble with the fire department instead of putting the police in a bubble on their own?' Who are we trying to kid here, she asked? She stated that she wanted to be clear about what the role of Lt. Hoerr is on this commission, and how he understands his role in terms of collaborating and supporting the work that we do in order to move this town forward? She asked why he would find it necessary to write about a member of this

commission in such a negative, attacking, non-conciliatory way and not think about the impact that this would have for the entire commission's work and credibility in a time when we are trying to build our credibility and support in this community? Why would he want to deliberately detract from this by writing such an article as opposed to opening a dialogue with us at this table, where he continues to sit, about his concerns?

Lt. Hoerr explained that he wrote this article in the context of his position as president of the Belmont Police Superior Offices Association. He also explained that the article was more about the Selectman, their boss, being in a position to question people who view him to be their boss and that this was a conflict for them. And that he was not intending any harm. He also stated that he was not able to communicate with the member about this as there were procedures and details that he was legally bound to. Witten insisted that she was not wanting to discuss the details of the selectman's position or this case, and that she understood that despite the fact that town council had given their opinion for him to go ahead, that Lt Hoerr would still see the necessity to write something so scathing and attacking.

Respectfully submitted by
Bill Rudman, Scribe du jour