



Belmont Human Rights Commission
Belmont Town Hall
August 5, 2010
Meeting Notes

Members Present: Lisa Bernt, Carl Brauer, Julie Cicalese, Chuck Laverty, Fran Yuan , Paul Solomon, Connie Williams

Members Absent: Nan Donald

BAR Members Present: Kathryn Bonfiglio, Jonathan Jacoby, Charlene O'Connor, June Roberts, John Robotham

Meeting convened at 7:14 p.m.

This was a combined BAR and HRC Meeting

- Kathryn Bonfiglio from BAR gave overview of history:
BAR started after Rodney King situation in 1992 – wanted to do something locally, there were former iterations in past, associated with Unitarian church initially, now 501c3. Responded to incidents in past, educational programs or varying sorts over the years. Started MLK breakfast – in Churches initially and when got too big, moved to school and then school co-sponsored. Programs often in response to racial incidents that have occurred. Work connected to METCO and long history of working with them. Biggest push currently around school issues, also the recent death of a young black man so they have involved in peace marches and attended the trial. Have tried to have Boston connection to get Belmont into Boston. Have had dialects as well. At MLK every year, fundraise for after school transportation so METCO students are able to participate in after school programs and have a ride to their door step. Raise 10-15K per year. Have supported Gay Straight Alliance and it is sub-committee of BAR. Once HRC existed- some responsibility shifted so will refer to HRC. Not a town committee so not as constrained, represent own views rather than the town.

- HRC members shared some history about past views on HRC, different perspectives and members of HRC and some past members didn't think HRC should exist. Seems baseline requirement to be on HRC should be that member is supportive of the basic purpose of HRC. HRC originated from recommendation by former president of BAR. BAR has been sensitive to politic issue in past as well with MLK breakfast when one speaker was a bit political with speech.
- 2 We should discuss what we each should do, HRC and BAR. We are town body and BAR is not so how do we -- without stepping on each other's toes -- realize how we can work together and what each should do.
- Fran suggested one of HRC's priorities should be outreach. Also should do programs although no funding – have open fund if we want to raise money, received \$1000 in the past – perhaps go to BAR for funding or co-sponsorship. We have invited speakers to our meetings in the past and with publishing agendas, might be one way to bring others in the community. In the last couple of years meetings have been very peaceful, prior they were much more charged, people with very different views and it was challenging. Have had 25-30 members in the last six years, a lot of revolving door problems, a contingent that didn't agree with what we are doing left, others left for other commitments. We struggle with what the community needs and how do we plan something that will be of interest. Would like to see us look more at existing resources and how we can use them. Libraries, Beech Street Center, and we are looking at other venues. Programs in past, ADL was successful, Chenery program in fair housing, followed by diversity week program at High School, and feel we have struggled in the past few years.
 - Connie suggested every calendar year we have at least one educational program in partnership not only with BAR but perhaps multiple partners; churches, religious council etc. Question would be what program should be. Others would need to contribute resources unless we raise money – we wouldn't be able to contribute funds.
- 6 How do we decide what to focus on and come to some agreement on what would be of interest to the town.
- 3 BAR response is good idea, past has been in response so more of a scramble. Fran will go to next ONE Book, One Belmont – now considering three books – one is “Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks” – might be of interest to our group.
- Could be some issues that could be controversial and get people hot under the collar, like immigration law or 40b. On 40b Chuck brought up to the

housing commission – they have taken a formal position that they are opposed to it. The law is controversial so would be good if held program to have speakers who are for and against. Would need committee to plan and would need a moderator. 40B cuts across so many political issues, environment, developers etc. so the complexity of it all is important to air. Goes on ballot in November so would need to do soon, by October. Usually on hot topics people want to be involved so shouldn't be difficult to get interested participants, speakers etc. Would need to be clear discussion is ballot issue and not Belmont's development. Need to be clear about how it ties into mission and into program and be clear that we as a commission are not taking a position.

- d Human resources have been a struggle, not a lot of people and stretched thin. Unless someone takes it on, hard to get it done. Need to have support.
 - e Need to justify why HRC is doing a program like this. There will be people who want to know why HRC doing, there is a good answer but we need to convey it. Would like to better understand the issues around 40b – think it is worth discussion.
- 7 Immigration issue has come up as a topic for BAR on occasion so would like to consider. BAR stretched thin so good if people around this table able to help. The immigration issue is causing problems and how people are talking about race and Mexicans. Would like more justification about why we would do something on this issue. As much as 40b resonates here, immigration is a national issue. Could be a fascinating discussion but how do we gauge interest in the community. 40b seems to be of great interest in the community here currently.
- 8 So, who are some possible people to be involved?
- 3 May be worthwhile to have Will Brownsberger speak, factually to talk about the amendment. Title could be “40B, best way to accomplish fair housing?”
 - Jonathan will talk to Judy Feins and see who might be potential speakers – looking at October for event. Second Thursday is October 14th – if that date works BAR can change their meeting date.
- 9 Jonathan will get back to Fran after discussion with Judy Feins.
- g** Title suggested might be problematic – critically important that the title is right. 40b is intended to accomplish affordable housing.

- 6 The people who speak might be able to address the issues. Maybe title should just state that it's informational like "Looking at 40b" or "Informational Forum on November 2nd. 40b question".
- j Will wait for discussion with Judy Feins and Will Brownsberger. If date works he may be willing to speak in a public forum such as this. Many sides to this issue – important to hear it all.
- e Misinformation has a very negative impact. Discussed the recent reaction to firing of African American woman and the knee jerk reactions of the administration and several officials and organizations. There is also the issue of Gates and the Cambridge police. Ogletree has just written a book. Potentially have a program on what happens when racial issues come into play, different perspectives would be interesting.
- So we may have some concrete things to do together, may be useful to meet again together. Good to get word out about our existence.
 - Haven't had any one come forward to become member. Have one opening. BAR has discussed reaching out to Asian community in the past.
 - Immigration issue raised again. BAR interested and have discussed in past several times. Some on HRC interested – Connie raised the importance of it and feels the impact on children is an important piece. Raised that a series could be one approach; impact on children, constitutional issues. Maybe after 40b we could discuss and break it down and have it be informational. May have a visceral reaction but what does it really say and how are the police being trained. What it says or not, creates fears and anxiety. Sounds like there may be interest but for now we will focus on 40b.
 - Will continue connection throughout the year – will find other opportunities to meet.

Meeting adjourned at 8:53 p.m.