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Belmont Human Rights Commission

Meeting Minutes
Thursday, December 4, 2014
Belmont Town Hall
Conference Room 1

The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:07 pm.

The following were in attendance:

Members: Carl Brauer, Nan Donald, Jirair Hovsepian, Paul Solomon, Edie Stringfellow, Daniel Vernick, Barbara Watson, Fran Yuan

Liaisons: Belmont Against Racism: Kathryn Bonfiglio

Police Department: Captain Peter Hoerr

1. **Meeting minutes:** The November 6th meeting minutes were accepted unanimously with two minor corrections.
2. **BGSAC Potluck:** Fran reported that the Belmont Gay Straight Alliance Committee potluck in November was well-attended and enjoyed by all. The attendance of some HRC members was appreciated.
3. **A Path Appears programming:** Carl attended planning meetings for A Path Appears program that will feature a talk by Nicholas Kristof, author of the book of the same name. Members of various houses of worship were represented at the meeting, with Jackie Neel, head of the Unitarian Church Social Action Committee, heading up the organizing. There will be many events happening around the April 16th talk by Kristof. The event will be ticketed but free.
Carl reported that there will be a three-part PBS series on January 26, February 2 and 9 at 10 pm. It will be streamed on other nights with discussions held, some in churches and elsewhere. The Belmont Media Center will do one of these. Carl emailed a trailer about the series. He thinks there will be issues featured such as human trafficking, poverty, and doing things about the problems people face in the world (effective programs and interventions).
Carl also mentioned that Richard Weissbourd of the Kennedy School and Harvard School of Education will be speaking in Belmont on the afternoon of March 7. This will be a family event focused on healthy families. Livingston Taylor may also make an appearance in Belmont. The planning meeting for all these events is to be determined. Carl will let members know when it is scheduled and encouraged people to attend.
4. **Nutcracker controversy:** Jerry discussed the controversy about students from Butler School attending Boston Ballet's The Nutcracker. One or a couple of parents objected to sending their children to an event that featured a Christmas tree and a theme around Christmas. It became a big issue. Jerry saw the event as a cultural thing to help expose children to ballet. It was not a mandatory event. He thought the children paid something to attend, but wasn't totally sure about the funding of it. Carl pointed out that it might be good to hear from dissenting voices.
5. **MLK Breakfast:**
Barbara related that BAR had agreed to continue to coordinate the MLK fundraising so she requested that BAR take the lead with the METCO parents. Kathryn is seeking funds from banks that might provide larger donations. Fundraising issues will be discussed further by BAR at its meeting next

Thursday. To clarify, the door proceeds pay for the cost of putting on the breakfast. Specifically designated donations collected at breakfast go to the METCO fund. More money was spent from the METCO Support fund this past year than ever before. METCO parents want to help with fundraising. The question of raising the price of tickets to the event was discussed, but it was decided to leave the price the same this year and revisit it again next year. It was agreed that if anyone wanted to sell things at the breakfast, about which there had been an inquiry in the past, it should be by students who made items themselves with 100% of proceeds going to the fund. The idea of selling tickets to the breakfast beforehand was discussed, with the benefit being that people could contribute to the event whether they attended or not.

A vote was taken to allow Barbara to make an executive decision before the next meeting about ticket prices and any other logistical changes that might still be under consideration.

Barbara confirmed that Phillip Martin said he would be speaking about the impact of the death of Michael Brown, an African-American boy, in Ferguson, MO and on the Boston community. Edie felt it was important to address the 'underbelly' that is at issue in race relations, systemic racism, not just Ferguson. Paul remarked that Ferguson has underscored the huge differences between white and black views of the event and of experiences around race in America. Jerry suggested that having a panel might be a better way to encourage dialog as the breakfast will not really provide an opportunity for anything too in-depth. Carl felt that these issues would come up in the Kristof events. Kathryn suggested it might be a good idea to have a facilitator in the room during Mr. Martin's talk as it can be a very divisive and charged topic. She suggested asking Diane Wiltshire about this.

6. **Ferguson and other events:** It was acknowledged that this was a particularly difficult time in the Boston community. Some students have also asked why there is only one person of color at Belmont High School, the METCO director.
7. **Liaison Report:** Captain Hoerr noted that there was a local incident in which 13 people were arrested for civil disobedience (trespassing) at the Silver Maple forest. He discussed some of the views of the police about the Ferguson event and recounted what he had read about the evidence given at the grand jury hearing.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Submitted by recorder: Fran Yuan