

Belmont Human Rights Commission

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 6, 2017

Belmont Town Hall, Room 1

2017 MAY 12 AM 9:05

The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:10 pm.

The following were in attendance:

HRC Members: Carl Brauer, Nan Donald, Seneca Hart, Jirair Hovsepian, Anthony Moroso, Barbara Watson, and Fran Yuan

Belmont High School Liaison: Jia Zhang

Belmont Police Department Liaison: Captain J. Peter Hoerr

1. Minutes from the Thursday, February 2, 2017 meeting were approved. Fran will submit the minutes to the Town Clerk's Office. Paul reported that there were no calls to the phone line and there were no e-mails.
2. The phone line/e-mail assignments and minute takers for the upcoming meetings are as follows:
 - April- Fran
 - May – Carl
 - June – Nan
 - July – Mirela
 - August- Seneca
3. Helen Bakeman, of the Housing Trust, attended the meeting. The Trust is working on a housing plan: Royal Belmont where 3.7% will be for assisted housing. There is an April 27th meeting to talk about the plan and the executive summary of housing needs in Belmont. Three groups experience housing troubles: 1) seniors, 2) new families, 3) low-income people. Waverly Woods Rental received CPA funding to provide housing assistance to 3 new owners- not enough money was available; income limits stayed the same and the gap grew.
4. The handling of complaints from residents to the HRC was discussed. It was reiterated that our main function was to make appropriate referrals to other agencies. The HRC has a form for recording calls made to our phone line. Barbara Watson distributed the form used by Arlington's HRC. She mentioned that their HRC had paid staff on the commission.

Capt. Hoerr clarified the use of Executive Sessions, which are closed to the public, to discuss sensitive matters about which notes would be taken, but not made public in the usual minutes. On an intake form, there are certain categories of records, such as medical or other personal information, that would never be required to be made public. There is training from Town Council on public records. The Attorney General also has guidelines available.
5. Barbara brought up that, given our experience last month of holding an event instead of our monthly meeting, we should not substitute events for our regular meetings in the future.

We could also call an emergency meeting with 48-hour notice if incidents, such as a hate crime vs. a synagogue or graffiti on churches, demanded a quick response.

6. The Welcoming Community Town Petition was discussed. A number of individuals, including Carl Brauer and Capt. Hoerr, were present at a meeting earlier in the day between the Police Chief and the petitioner, Anne Mahon, to discuss the wording of the petition. This meeting resulted in changes to the original petition that were satisfactory to all parties. A copy of this was provided to HRC members for approval. The HRC voted unanimously to support the Welcoming Town designation resolution to be voted on at the Town Meeting in May. Barbara Watson will send a letter to the Town Clerk with our recommendation that this resolution be passed at Town Meeting.

7. Donna Ruvolo made a request that we ask the Mr. Paolillo and the Board of Selectmen to read the Proclamation, issued in conjunction with the Stand-Up Campaign's December 7, 2016 Hands Around the Pond community gathering, at the opening of the May Town Meeting. Barbara Watson said she would ask them. The HRC voted to act on this request.

8. It was announced that on Wednesday, April 12th at 7 pm in the Board of Selectmen's meeting room, the Belmont Police will be presenting their role in immigration matters to the public.

9. Fran Yuan reported that she attended a panel earlier in the day that was part of Belmont High School's Diversity Week. Three panelists did a presentation about homelessness and the LGBT community. Seneca recounted her positive experience of the talk. Fran Yuan reported that she plans to bring the same panel to the larger Belmont community at a date in May instead of the original April 27th date.

10. Barbara reported on the Criminal Justice program at which Senator Brownsberger and Representative Rogers spoke. One point made at the talk was the importance of raising the age of a juvenile to 21 from 18, which would allow more people to stay in the youth system.

11. Barbara brought up the need for someone to step forward to become the new chair. With no one responding that they would, she proposed a rotating chair. Jerry mentioned that his term is up this year and that he intended to step down. We discussed the need to bring new people onto the commission. Anthony agreed to draft a letter for the Belmont Citizen Herald, featuring the work of the commission, to generate interest.

12. The HRC will share a table with Belmont against Racism at Town Day on May 20th. Fran Yuan said she would take charge of seeing who could sign up for 2 hour blocks at the table. She said she would be bringing yard signs to distribute. These signs have already been posted on people's lawns. They say, "No matter where you're from, we're glad that you're our neighbor" in four different languages in addition to English.

13. A recent racial incident at the high school was discussed and clarified by Barbara Watson, who attended a recent meeting with the Superintendent, Principal of the high school, and other

community leaders. In brief, a METCO student's picture with an offensive racial comment on it was shared by a White student with other students via social media. The student who produced the picture was given a day's suspension. Mediation took place between the students involved. Barbara felt that the administration acted aggressively to address the situation. The METCO students communicated through discussion with the student who instigated the incident that Black students experience these kinds of things every day. The Principal will be holding a larger meeting with all of the Black students.

Barbara reported that Donna Ruvolo had made the suggestion at the meeting that a letter be sent out to the school community right away to keep the rumor mill from starting. Barbara Watson reported that she felt the Superintendent was very proactive.

14. Jerry thanked everyone for supporting the Armenian Genocide Proclamation.

15. Next meeting: Thursday, May 4, 2017

16. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Fran Yuan

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