



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

Meeting Minutes
Somerville City Hall
May 18, 2006

Present: Martha Costa (Police Dept. Liaison), Ben Echevarria, Susan Goldstein, Mike Koehler, Nathan Lemmon, Kevin O'Malley, Cesar Urrunaga, Yvette Verdieu and Eileen Feldman (Commission for Persons with Disabilities).

The meeting started at 6:45. At 7pm the meeting was paused so the commissioners could attend the BOA meeting where Kevin was given a commendation for his service with the HRC.

Administrative

Vote on February, March and April minutes.

- Accepted unanimously.

Eileen Feldman from the Commission for Persons with Disabilities introduced herself and told everyone that she felt that it was a good idea for her to come to the HRC meeting because we have a lot of issues in common. Eileen hopes to come to future meetings and we hope to collaborate more in the future.

Review director's report

- Know-your-rights forums – Herby was going to talk to a lawyer that will be able to help with a forum for the Haitian community. Herby was not present, but Yvette let us know that he had talked to the lawyer that would be great for the forum. We will get an update at the next meeting for Herby.
- Immigrants' Rights Resolution – There were a lot of questions as to whether or not the HRC should formally endorse the resolution. What is the language of the resolution? Is it an issue of wording? Nathan and Ben will try to find out more information and report back at the next meeting.
- Haitian Flag Day - Yvette let everyone know that it was a great day with 300 to 400 people attending.
- Meeting with police and immigrant community leaders – Ben said that community leaders from the immigrant community are hesitant to meet with the police to discuss issues. They feel that it may not be the right time for such a meeting. This distrust is due to the perception that the Somerville police was involved in the recent raid by ICE officers in Somerville. Commissioners discussed how we let the community know that the Somerville police were not involved. Susan suggested that maybe we should meet with community leaders to act as a liaison between them and the police. Is there a way that we can lower the distrust between these two groups? Ben feels that the meeting that has been set up to talk about recent incidents will not be well attended due to this distrust.
- GLBT Issues – Kevin encouraged all commissioners to attend the flag-raising in June.

- White supremacist flyers – Martha passed around copies of the flyers. She said that a hate crime incident code has been established for this. This will make it easy to get a report of hate incidents at the end of the year. Commissioners are urged to attend the meeting on May 30th to discuss this and other related topics.

Commissioner updates

- Ben informed everyone that he has been sworn in.

Election of new chair

- Both Cesar and Ben showed interest, but everyone agreed that we should see if Herby would like to be the chair. It was decided that we will vote for the chair at the June meeting.

Communications and Outreach

- Yvette will call Bill White to encourage him to be a liaison to the HRC.
- The new commissioner application was reviewed and the consensus was that it is okay for now, but it is open for change.
- Susan is working hard to get a liaison form the School Committee. She has spoken to Mark Niedergang, but he is too busy to take on the task. She has also spoken with Paul Bockelman and will give a definitive answer by next meeting.

Program planning

- Hate response - white supremacist flyers in Winter Hill – Mike said that since the incident happened in his neighborhood, he dropped HRC flyers in the area. This would be a very good idea as a first response to future incidents like this.
- Rapid response network – Susan suggested that we use the previous rapid response network that was successfully used in the past. We talked about how it worked and what was expected of the people and organizations in the network. There was an incident report form that was filled out anytime an incident was filed. Susan and Kevin will search their old files to see if they can find any materials they may still have. We will revisit the issue at our next meeting, take a look at old materials that have been found, and use them as a starting point for creating a new rapid response network.
- Conversations Project – Kevin explained the project, where it began and how it worked in the past. The project requires about 3 facilitators and would involve about 30 people per event. Cesar and Susan would like to get more involved. Eileen informed the commission that the disabilities commission is thinking about having an event that will look a lot like the conversations project. She will keep the HRC informed and we will help however we can.
- Upcoming events:
- Wednesday, June 7 No Place For Hate conference – Ben will try to be there for the 1 to 3pm and Cesar will try to be there for the whole event.

Next Meeting – June 15, 2006.

Minutes recorded by Cesar Urrunaga