



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

Thursday, February 15, 2007, 6:30 p.m.
179 Holland Street, Tufts Administration Building
Minutes

Members Present: Ben Echevarria, Ralph Hergert, Ify Mora, Yvette Verdieu

Members Absent: Martha Costa (Liaison), Susan Goldstein, Christopher Hope, Cesar Urrunaga

Others Present: Siobhan McIntyre (Somerville News), Mary Lu Mendonca (HRC Director), Barry Raffkind

I. Administrative

Ben chaired the meeting.

Minutes: Ralph moved to approve minutes from the February 1 meeting, Yvette seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Commissioner Updates: Barry has submitted his materials for appointment to the HRC, and is scheduled to meet with the mayor next Tuesday. The Commission voted unanimously to endorse Barry's candidacy.

Director's Report:

Mary Lu reviewed the Director's Report, which was short because it only covered the two weeks since we met last.

We received one inquiry from a resident who overheard Library employees making anti-Semitic statements. The complainant alleged that she reported the incident to a supervisor, who confronted the employee accused of making the comments. The employee stated that all he said was that Jews have lots of money, and the supervisor told the complainant that this was not anti-Semitic. The complaint was brought to the attention of the mayor, who referred it to the city's Personnel director (Richard Tranfaglia) for investigation. Mary Lu corresponded with Richard on behalf of the complainant to encourage a thorough investigation, but is dissatisfied at the outcome. Richard spoke with a couple of the people involved, including the employees accused of making the statements. One of them denies being present at the time and the other stated (despite

his earlier admission in front of the supervisor and the complainant) that the conversation had been actually between two patrons. Richard felt that it was a “he said, she said” situation and that the city would take no further action. He also stated that all library employees will undergo mandatory sensitivity training at some point in the future. Complainant is dissatisfied that there seems to be no personal consequences for the particular employees involved, and at the manner in which the complaint was investigated.

Another incident that came up since we last met took place at a SHS basketball game in Arlington last week. Fans from both sides allegedly chanted derogatory comments (racist/homophobic) at one another, as reported by one of the Somerville coaches. This was discussed by the Board of Aldermen and the School Committee. Somerville School Department is conducting an investigation and invited us to review the results. The Arlington Human Rights Commission is conducting a formal investigation, and Mary Lu will work with them to coordinate with parties in Somerville.

Ify questioned whether the adults present who overheard the chanting could have taken appropriate action. Commissioners wanted to review the results of the School Department’s investigation, and Mary Lu agreed to ask Superintendent Pierantozzi to forward us their report. The report will be reviewed by the standing investigatory committee (Susan, Cesar, and Mary Lu with Ben as an alternate.) Barry asked to replace Ben on the Committee and everyone agreed.

Aside from the incidents reported, Mary Lu told the commissioners that she has a new office address: City Hall Annex, 50 Evergreen Avenue, Somerville, MA 02143. Phone number (617-625-6600 x2165) and e-mail address (mmendonca@ci.somerville.ma.us) remain the same. Fax number TBA.

2. Conversations Project

Mary Lu reported on our progress so far in organizing the Conversations Project.

Facilitators:

- There are about 10 facilitators signed up so far and we are busy recruiting more.
- Youth facilitators are the most difficult to recruit, and Mary Lu is contacting youth organizations and working with the schools to make progress on this.
- Our first training, led by Marty Martinez, will be on the 24th. Ben will bring food.
- Ify suggested we have a meeting for facilitators midway through the Conversations.

Financial Update:

- Our summer intern, Lillian O’Donnell, applied for a grant through the Tufts Citizen Engagement Fund. She was awarded \$1000, which will go towards providing stipends for youth facilitators.
- Mary Lu is working with the mayor’s office to see if they will provide refreshments for the group discussions. With all of the other work in putting together the Conversations, we don’t have the capacity to solicit donations from businesses to pay for this.

- Mary Lu has applied for a \$1000 grant from the Anti-Defamation League's No Place For Hate program to pay for food and interpreters at the Congress.

Outreach:

- Mary Lu and Ben distributed flyers around the city.
- We are doing ok with facilitators, but need to start recruiting participants. Mary Lu will send out flyers about this to the commissioners for people to distribute to their contacts. Yvette's e-mail is still down but she can receive materials by fax.
- Information is getting up on the website slowly. Applications are now available online for facilitators and participants. Barry can help with website updates in the future.
- We are getting some good press coverage in the Somerville Journal and in the Boston Globe.

Congress:

- At our last meeting, Susan and Martha agreed to be on a Congress Planning Committee but there has not been much activity yet. Mary Lu will follow up.
- We discussed potential sites for the Congress:
 - Good Times (would appeal to youth)
 - Somerville High School – some areas permit food, such as the room outside the gym
 - Various locations at Tufts – Ify can help look into this
 - City Hall, Aldermen's Chamber
 - Visiting Nurses Association Community Room
 - Youth Center (165 Broadway) has big conference room downstairs
 - Somerville Hospital – nursing building

Ralph said he would look into various church spaces for the discussion groups. One specific suggestion was St. Benedict's, where Conversations groups have met in past years.

Curriculum:

Several commissioners met earlier to go over and edit the draft Curriculum for the Conversations. Ify and Barry received a copy at the beginning of this meeting and had suggestions as well. Some recommendations were:

- Make the language more appropriate for youth.
- Bring in the logic of how many adults only like the kids they know, and are able to relate to the specific age groups of these kids as they grow older.

Meeting adjourned.

NOTE: the March 2007 meeting was cancelled so that members could spend the time working on the Conversations Project.