



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

Thursday, June 21, 2007, 6:30 p.m.
167 Holland Street, Tufts Administration Building
Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Susan Goldstein, Ify Mora, Barry Rafkind, Cesar Urrunaga, Yvette Verdieu
Others Present: Martha Costa (Police Liaison), Ashraf Hegazy, Mary Lu Mendonca (Executive Director)
Members Absent: Ralph Hergert, Chris Hope

1. Student Project

Ify told the commissioners that we are eligible to apply for an intern from the Tufts Scholar program for the 2007-2008 school year. The deadline to submit a project proposal is Monday, and then students choose from the pool of proposals. Members brainstormed ideas for a project. Some ideas were: conducting a general outreach campaign; organizing a rapid-response network; surveying the need for translations in city services; and putting together a report on human rights in Somerville. It was pointed out that since we are being restructured under the Health Department, this might require approval by Mary Lu's supervisors.

Commissioners felt there is a need to offer trainings about human rights issues affecting local businesses and in the provision of city services. One initial idea was to train members of the public in their rights and responsibilities when dealing with businesses. Susan said that many of our complaints come from customers, but she felt that we should address this through outreach rather than training.

Ify said that we should focus the proposal narrowly while still keeping it broad enough for a student to help shape it. Members wanted to focus on both local businesses and city services, and thought we should begin by assessing the kinds of training needed. There were some suggestions to concentrate on disability issues or immigrants.

The Commissioners finally voted to submit a proposal reflecting the following, subject to approval by the Health Department if necessary: "an outreach campaign and needs assessment of the educational needs of immigrants and minorities regarding access to businesses and other public accommodations in Somerville, free of discrimination and human rights violations." Barry made the motion; Yvette seconded; motion passed unanimously.

2. Anti-Violence work

Ify told the commissioners about the Multicultural Immigrant Coalition Against Violence, a relatively new coalition primarily made up of organizations that work with immigrants dealing with domestic violence. This seemed particularly relevant since we decided at our recent retreat to focus on violence prevention. Commissioners were interested but felt we should attend a meeting before joining the coalition, so we will try to send someone to the meeting on June 26.

Martha noted that the Somerville Commission for Women also runs a local network of anti-violence providers, and Mary Lu said she would find out more.

3. Immigrants' issues

The Somerville Community Corporation recently held a summit in which working groups recommended action steps for improving East Somerville. The groups identified the HRC as a potential lead organization on several initiatives, including a Sanctuary City campaign and a plan to deal with at-risk populations in the event of an emergency. Commissioners revisited the issue of whether immigrants can access services without fear of repercussions based on undocumented status. Martha said that Somerville police rarely deal with ICE, although agents were here about a month ago picking up some MS-13 members. The Sanctuary City question is controversial, and it seems that Centro Presente will be taking this up as a priority. Mary Lu has been in contact with Wil Renderos, who would like to attend an HRC meeting and talk about some of these issues. Commissioners agreed to have this on the agenda for July.

4. HRC Retreat

We held our annual retreat on June 16 and Mary Lu distributed minutes. Among other topics discussed, members suggested several revisions to our by-laws – which, under current rules, are required to be distributed to all members at least thirty days before a vote. The following was a revision suggested at the retreat:

- (Motion by Cesar) To strike the language of Art. V Sec. 1(a) and replace it with the following proposed language: “Art. V Sec. 1(a): The Commissioners shall serve terms as allowed by the city’s Human Rights Ordinance (Sec. 2-237). No Commissioner shall serve for more than four (4) terms consecutively.”

In this meeting, commissioners made the following additional suggestions for revising the by-laws:

- (Motion by Barry) To strike Art. V Sec. 1(a) in its entirety, and to reorder subsequent sections as follows: Sec. (b) shall be renumbered as (a) and Sec. (c) shall be renumbered as (b).
- (Motion by Ify) To amend Art. VI Sec. 2 by adding the following statement “In the event that a commissioner’s term expires and he or she is not resworn in for a subsequent term, the commissioner shall serve at the pleasure of the Mayor and may be removed by the Mayor at any time, with or without cause.”

At the Retreat, commissioners also discussed reviving the Advisory Committee. Members agreed that this warrants additional discussion and should be put on the agenda for our next meeting.

5. New Members

Ashraf introduced himself as a candidate for membership in the Commission. He is a resident with extensive experience working with Arab and Muslim communities. Cesar motioned that we endorse him to the Mayor for appointment; Barry seconded, and members voted unanimously in favor. Ashraf will contact Mary Lu with his resume and begin the appointment process.

6. Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on July 19.