



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

March 16, 2006, 6:30 p.m.
Tufts Administration Building, 167 Holland Street, Somerville
Meeting Minutes

Present: Herby Duverne, Susan Goldstein, Nathan Lemmon, Mary Lu Mendonca, Cesar Urrunaga

I. Administrative

The meeting began with the point that not enough members were present for a quorum. There was a brief discussion of liaison representatives. Nate is still trying to get in touch with Tom Taylor. Susan has spoken with a number of people on the School Committee with little success. Mary Lu suggested that commissioners think about recruiting new people because our active membership is down now that several members are taking leaves. Others noted that it can be difficult to get people to join or even show up at meetings because everyone is so busy. Mary Lu reported that Ben Echevarria is scheduled to meet with the mayor on Monday. We expect him to be appointed to the Commission soon.

Mary Lu showed us a certificate we received from the Somerville Commission for Women. We were one of several organizations that received votes for providing exceptional services to Somerville women over the past year.

II. Martin Luther King Day

We talked about what went right and wrong at the Martin Luther King Day event. Our high school student speaker did not show up, and everyone agreed that we would have to come up with a strategy to avoid a similar situation next year. Everyone also agreed that we might want to remind all speakers to limit their time to a reasonable amount. Susan and Herby pointed out that at least one school did not distribute the flyers, and we discussed various ways to ensure that they are distributed next year. Some people raised the possibility of having a larger forum next year to accommodate the increasing number of attendees. Cesar and Mary Lu felt that we should wait until we have had two years in a row of full capacity before expanding the venue. Some commissioners thought we should look for new performers to keep the event fresh and boost the level of professionalism in the program (i.e. perhaps not so many children's acts.)

Mary Lu reported that there had been a meeting with members of the Early Childhood Advisory Council to recap and review the MLK event. Martha was the only other commission representative who attended. Suggestions made at that meeting included recruiting more young speakers or performers. People at that meeting felt we should make more of an effort to gear the event towards young adults – specifically high school students – with the aim of getting younger people more involved in the community. Commissioners proposed featuring a performance by high school students, perhaps a short play that would stress the theme of the day. We would have to begin planning this early, probably before the start of the school year.

There were not a lot of negatives. Some of the things that came up were procedural. The awards section seemed to go a little long. There were some comments about not having enough direct discussion of race and race issues, and too few speakers of color. People felt generally that we should start planning earlier and get more community organizations involved, including arts groups. Food was a point of contention; people felt that we should either have more available or provide only beverages. Someone suggested that we could have more miniature food items instead of fewer larger items. Most everyone agreed that keeping the food until the end made it less disruptive, since food is not allowed in the auditorium.

III. Immigration issues/ Spring HRC activities

There was a discussion of the March 12, 2006 immigration forum organized by several organizations. Cesar reported that people were attentive and asked for information. At our last meeting, we had decided to use this event as a model for our plans to put on a similar, larger-scale event in the future. Cesar thought that it having a larger event would provide a good opportunity for people from the community to share their personal. Others pointed out that this might not work because some people – particularly undocumented immigrants - might not want to open up in a public forum sponsored by a city agency. Mary Lu thought it would be better to organize a couple of smaller events in collaboration with community groups. Ideas for these included housing, police stop-and-search procedure (for Brazilian community), housing (in collaboration with Fair Housing Commission), and domestic abuse issues (for Haitian community). We should work with immigrant community leaders to see what topics are relevant. Mary Lu and others felt that we should also organize a big meeting, but one aimed at following up on the anti-hate meeting we held last October.

We talked about allegations that police are stopping disproportionate numbers of Brazilian men. Alice said that police are now working from their parked squad cars by “running” plates of passing cars; this is a departure from when you used to have to pull cars over before running their information through the database system. Susan expressed concern that this practice allows for less accountability for racial profiling. Martha pointed out that police are stationed in different areas, so you also have to take into account the demographics of the particular neighborhoods.

We discussed proposing a resolution or ordinance that would declare support for immigrants. There are several options for what this could say, including a reaffirmation of the Human Rights Ordinance’s pledge not to discriminate on citizenship status. Mary Lu will look into this. The idea of a resolution also came up at the October hate meeting, so we could bring it up again at our follow-up meeting. We could also revisit the recertification process for No Place for Hate, which requires passing a resolution with template text from the ADL. Herby brought up the idea of introducing the No Place for Hate curriculum into the schools at an earlier grade level. This was also mentioned at the October meeting, and Mary Lu will follow up to find out who is working on it

IV. CORI reform

We revisited the topic introduced by Cesar at our last meeting: how Somerville can support reform of CORI laws. Cesar passed around an example of an ordinance recently passed by the City of Boston, as well as copies of a proposal for the “Public Safety Act of 2006: CORI Reform in the Service of Public Safety, Fiscal Responsibility, Common Sense, and Human Decency.” We talked about the possible effects of various aspects of the proposal, and how we might go about having something similar passed in Somerville. Cesar will check with Fred Berman, who is working on this also, and tell us more at our next meeting.

Next meeting: April 20, 2006