

Human Rights Commission of Newburyport  
Meeting Notes  
May 4, 2017  
Senior Community Center  
Meeting 7:00 pm

**Attendance:** Rabbi Ben Resnick, Rose Robinson, Shawn Flaherty, Chairwoman Kat Preftes, Peter Blaiwas, Ahmer Ibrahim, Tom Getz, Kathleen Shaw, Caroline Walsh, Sheila Trieff, and Hannah Wilson

**Guests:** Steven Chanin, Nancy Peace, Margo Springer (prospective representative from Whittier Technical High School), Eileen Springer and John Springer (Margo's parents)

### **Call to Meeting 7:05 pm**

As the meeting had a limited number of Commissioners present, the agenda item discussing a potential new date and time for meetings during the follow year was moved to June.

Minutes from the April meeting were approved.

### **Sanctuary City Resolution**

K. Preftes explained that the Sanctuary Cities Resolution was passed at the recent city council meeting, and that the city council had decided to create a subcommittee to discuss how to proceed.

The commission added that initiating the resolution as an amendment to Newburyport's Human Rights Resolution or as an ordinance were potential next steps that the subcommittee could consider.

S. Flaherty, T. Getz, and partially K. Preftes will represent the Commission on the new subcommittee.

Ahmer shared that he was present at the city council meeting. He explained that he spoke on behalf of sanctuary cities at the meeting, emphasizing how it "really resonated that the community was behind [immigrants]."

K. Preftes suggested that we discuss further how the Commission shall proceed and if we can take a further, more definite stand on the sanctuary cities issue.

Ahmer and T. Getz, in response to K. Preftes question, suggested that having representatives on the subcommittee may be the most positive way to remain involved at the moment.

K. Shaw suggested that Attorney General Maura Healey could possibly answer the commission's further questions on current statistics regarding possible police missteps.

## **Student Representatives and Student Involvement**

S. Flaherty shared information about his selection process for finding another Rupert A. Nock Middle School student representative as student representatives T. Furlong and H. Wilson will not be returning for the 2017-2018 year. He explained that he, with the help of student representative C. Walsh, has conducted interviews with many current seventh grade students interested in joining.

K. Preftes explained that there are no limitations on the number of student representatives allowed on the commission.

Rose suggested that a representative from the Immaculate Conception School and the Charter school may be beneficial to the commission.

K. Shaw suggested that Andy Willemsen as a possible resource for identifying student representatives outside the Newburyport public school system.

T. Getz added that Rose could possibly chair a subcommittee of students helping the commission to further student involvement. S. Flaherty agreed.

## **Policing**

Nancy Peace joined the Commission to discuss public perception of police officers. Peace is a member of the Justice Ministry of the First Religious Society Church.

Peace suggested that police are often viewed negatively today and that the community needs to find a more positive way to discuss policing. Peace shared her belief that public view of 'bad' policing is the result of poor federal government laws rather than the hiring of 'bad' local police.

Peace elaborated on the issues in the Massachusetts police department, calling it a "broken system." She discussed how police funding has been limited under Governor Baker and therefore has made access to fair training difficult.

Peace also clarified that she believes discussing police rights is not "white washing" other issues, such as the use of force continuum by police.

Peace, in conclusion, shared her own understanding of the Amesbury police department. She spoke with Lieutenant Kevin Donovan about talking about policing without "attacking" local police. Peace explained the officers in Amesbury aren't working with the ICE unless there's a detainer listed. She also spoke with Marshall Murray who, more vaguely, suggested that the police department doesn't profile people.

K. Shaw suggested that she sees possible injustice by police in the number of people of color she notices pulled over while she is driving to work. She was also told by a client that when he was pulled over an officer stated "we don't have many Spanish people here," indicating a possible

racial bias that resulted in the policeman pulling him over. Shaw further explained that the client felt uncomfortable reporting the incident.

Guest E. Springer questioned whether police are alerted when drug enforcement comes to the area.

N. Peace was unsure, but stated that there are likely certain standards drug enforcement is held to.

Ahmer emphasized that importance of ensuring that people feel safe reporting instances of possible police missteps. He also shared that his belief that they cannot be fully blamed and that the community needs to engage in more discussions with them.

T. Getz and S. Flaherty were advised to request information on measures to ensure those reporting feel safe at the following sanctuary cities subcommittee meeting.

### **Liaisons**

K. Preftes questioned how to get more community stakeholders involved with the commission.

K. Shaw shared that the police liaison had been very helpful in the past. She also discussed the previous relationship the commission had with the Anti Defamation League (ADL), taking members to ADL conferences, prior to the ADL's refusal to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide.

K. Shaw suggested Officer Tierney, the Newburyport High School's School Resource Officer, as a potential police liaison.

Ahmer suggested that changing the meeting structure to allow liaisons to speak first may make it easier for them to participate.

K. Preftes will reach out to Susan Viccaro to discuss a possible new school liaison. She explained that Viccaro initially shared that she was hesitant to assign administrators additional responsibilities. Preftes will work with the writing subcommittee to draft a message to Viccaro.

Rose and M. Springer emphasized the importance of student involvement on the commission.

B. Resnick suggested that in the following year the commission could possibly rotate his position as Clergy Liaison among other clergy members as well.

### **Peace Prize Follow Up**

K. Preftes felt the event was very well done. She shared that having different members contact a few schools and a few winners was helpful.

T. Getz shared that more information in the paper would have been helpful for publicity.

K. Preftes, in response to T. Getz, explained that she had contacted the editor and that, in the past, the commission has had some difficulty publishing information in the paper, referencing the commission's previous statement in support of legislation to help transgender people.

K. Preftes will work with the writing subcommittee to draft a statement thanking the banks and other companies that worked with the commission for the peace prize.

S. Trieff explained that the commission was pushed to scramble to find winners as the event neared and that maybe introducing it to teachers earlier in the year would be beneficial.

K. Preftes explained her belief that the date in April was better than in February, suggesting that it made the event more accessible.

### **Community Involvement/ Event Planning**

K. Preftes suggested a multicultural understanding information sheet included in Molin and Bresnahan School take home Tuesdays in September.

T. Getz presented the Pike School Community Focus Year as an example of further community involvement.

K. Shaw suggested the commission could become more involved in preschools through a world of difference source. Shaw will contact the YWCA and Youth Services.

S. Trieff suggested that a commission poster contest with the help of Youth Services, the PTO and other groups could inspire community involvement.

Ahmer suggested a Ramadan time event, including fast breaking, with volunteers from the mosque to discuss what Ramadan is and break down Muslim stereotypes. He possibly would include a video called Nadia's Ramadan to introduce it. B. Resnick offered to mention the event at the following Clergy Association Meeting. K. Preftes suggested the event could possibly be held at the Greek Church or at Newburyport City Hall.

K. Preftes shared that the Yankee Homecoming Puppet show will likely be cancelled. She will contact Commissioner J. Lacroix for further discussion.

H. Wilson and P. Blaiwas will continue to work on the display for Pride month at the Newburyport Public Library.

### **New Commission Roles/ Chair**

The discussion of the new commission roles had previously been tabled at the April meeting. K. Preftes reminded the commission that she will be stepping down as chair on June 30<sup>th</sup>. She suggested that a number of co- chairs with different responsibilities could possibly lead the commission.

P. Blaiwas suggested that each person on the commission define responsibilities they are interested in at the June meeting.

K. Preftes will send out an email elaborating on her current duties for the commissioners to select.

Commission decided to create an ad-hoc committee consisting of K Preftes, T Getz, S Trieff and K Shaw to discuss HRC organization and how to delegate some of chair's responsibilities and present findings at June meeting.

### **Meeting Time**

The meeting time discussion was tabled until the June meeting. However, the following suggestions were made:

K. Preftes suggested the second Thursday of the month or the first Wednesday of the month. There was a general consensus that the meeting time would remain 7:00 pm.

### **Diversity and Tolerance Check- In**

T. Getz mentioned the Rooting Actions to Cultivate Equality weekend training about where racism comes from and how to undo it on June 9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup>.

P. Blaiwas discussed how to expand resources and plans to follow up with what the commission is allowed to post on the website.

K. Preftes will go to the Indivisibles group meeting and speak about what the commission does. She was instructed to remain non-partisan and to encourage people to report incidents of discrimination.

S. Flaherty announced that he recently became the Legacy Partner for Holocaust Survivor Sonia Schreiber Weitz. In this role, he will be speaking about on behalf of holocaust survivors and travelling to schools to discuss Schreiber Weitz legacy. He also acknowledged that H. Wilson received the Sonia Schreiber Weitz Upstander Award the previous week on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

K. Shaw discussed fundraising for Youth Services' July trip to Kenya. She explained that volunteers will work in a rescue center to build a library for female victims of genital mutilation. On May 21<sup>st</sup>, a day long yoga program was held to fundraise for the trip.

### **Meeting Adjourned 9:00pm**