

Newburyport Human Rights Commission  
November 8, 2018  
Minutes

**Attendance:** Kat Preftes; Margaret McQuillan; Peter Blaiwas; Ahmer Ibrahim; Sheila Trieff; Tom Getz; Jen Groskin; Camille Gimbre're, Lisa Furlong, Nock Middle School Principal; Sean Gallagher, Superintendent of Schools; Kathleen Shaw; Katie Nye; Karen Garlan (Jeanie Geiger Center); Shawn Flaherty

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

**NEW BUSINESS**

Moment of Silence for recent violence and killings at Pittsburgh synagogue.

Commissioners welcomed student representative: Camille Gimbre're

Kat circulated letter from HRC to Daily News after approval from mayor about hate crimes and civil discourse.

**Information and Discussion about Anti-Semitic Incident at Middle School**

Kat, Principal Furlong and Superintendent Gallagher informed the commission about the procedures and protocols initiated after verbal hate speech used by some 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at the Nock. Follow up procedures (discipline; education; student meetings; faculty involvement; community notification etc. were also discussed, with the need to maintain student's privacy rights.

*Discussion summary:*

The Commission complimented the Principal, Superintendent and student who came forward to report the incident for their immediate and comprehensive response.

Protocols established were followed (which has not always been the case in the past), including informing the mayor; police chief and Commission.

*Discussion highlights:*

Superintendent Gallagher stressed the importance of response by all involved in an "all hands on deck" approach. He was gratified that the HRC exists and praised its mission. He talked about the importance of dealing firmly and clearly with such provocative language from an educational standpoint, from the system's policies about bullying, threats and hate speech, as well as the use of such language having consequences. He spoke about using trained mediators to assist with such incidents and referenced the World of Difference program he had used in Beverly. He talked about "equity enforcers"; the benefit of having "layers of counseling", involvement of students and families; and the negative effects such incidents have on the entire school culture and climate.

Lisa Furlong outlined and articulated all the protocols used and steps taken to work with the students involved; the student who was an "upstander"; the entire 8<sup>th</sup> grade community; and how to re-integrate the disciplined students into the school mainstream. Parents were also informed. She indicated this was still on-going. She referenced using *Facing History and Ourselves*; ADL materials, civil rights laws, and shared a booklet with the commissioners.

Shawn Flaherty, the retired social studies teacher who taught a month- long unit on the Holocaust to all 7<sup>th</sup> graders, was dismayed that students would use this language after explicitly being taught about anti-Semitism, etc. Participants wondered why these students would say this, given they had knowledge of why this was wrong.

Throughout the discussion, several participants referenced the current political climate. "Kids reflect the climate." "Students see adults struggling with these issues." "Words and actions that used to be unacceptable are now being 'normalized'." "If adults and political leaders can say these things, why can't we"? How do we shift the culture to make student voices become the majority so that if one speaks out, others willingly and actively agree and support so this becomes the norm?

Kat suggested forming a sub-committee that identified and disseminated multi-cultural issues, materials, etc. to schools and others.

**Minutes from October 11, 2018 were approved.**

### **Transgender Protection Ballot Question and Resolution Update**

Ahmer commented that #3 passed 70-30 percent of voters supported it. He discussed the resolution passed by the city council and the discussion by council members as to their role. The council was reminded of the ordinance that established the commission's role. He also credited Lucas Phipps for his leadership in moving this forward.

*Know Your Neighbor* Follow up on Meeting with Newburyport Documentary Film Festival  
Peter shared the discussion with the director of the festival, Joanne Morris and two of the festival judges.

Topics included: rough footage: what do we want to say and how do we want to say it; reinforcing a simple statement through visuals; interviews; editing footage emphasizing themes so that "interview pieces" tell a story. It was suggested we halt filming to discuss the above.

Names of possible filmmakers were suggested as was the possibility of a small grant for creating the film.

For future filming suggestions included interviewing people in work places, finding ways to include music, performers, theatre, arts, etc. so that the film is not repetitious and boring to viewers.

Margaret updated on filming at library, which we can do but not indoors. **November 29 from 6-7:30** was set as a date to review film and engage in discussion. Margaret will call to schedule room.

### ***Community Updates:***

Karen shared the work of the *Jeanne Gieger Center*. This is a very busy time for them given the approaching holidays. Programs and outreach include: Adopt a Family, providing gift cards, knit wear, help from businesses, etc. She also spoke about transitional housing; men's group; *high risk program* team and training; how they empower women in abusive, violent situations.

Kat summarized her meeting with Mayor Holladay. She is very supportive of our work and particularly appreciates being sent articles in advance of publication; she was excited by the idea of a "*Pride*" festival, which could include a parade, picnic, performances, etc.

Kat spoke in schools about hate language.

Tom commented on the vigil at the synagogue as a profound moment, estimating about 100-200 people attended, both inside and outside. He also commented on the dramatic power of the recent video: *Cracking the Code* on racial inequity and suggested it could be shown the high school. It is also on u-tube.

### **Diversity and Tolerance Check In:**

Sheila spoke to the most recent shooting that happened today (November 8) which led to a discussion among members about “*What do we do?*” Our letters are sadly seeming to feel redundant. Peter suggested a banner with numbers of shooting victims; Margaret suggested meeting with the Mayor at our meetings to discuss what else the commission can do, both words and actions to that still fulfill our role as a city commission; can that role be expanded; members talked about “crossing the red line” as hate speech, anti-Semitic incidents (more in this year than ever before) violence and killings are increasing.

Ahmer described another bus incident of children using hate speech, which was again dealt with promptly and expertly by administrators. He also talked about how other students were supportive.

Sheila described a situation 25 years ago when the “N” word had been painted on the Brown School playground and it was not seen as important or hateful. There has been a marked shift in how seriously these incidents are taken, and that is a great sign of progress.

Margaret shared her work with *Facing History and Ourselves*, the German International School and the Jewish Community Day School in Boston, and how the German school students had much more empathy for what the Jewish students were feeling after Pittsburgh because they knew them. This is another theme/outcome of “KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR.”

**Meeting Adjourned.** Respectfully Submitted,  
Margaret McQuillan