Somerville Human Rights Commission
Monthly Meeting Minutes
September 18, 2008

Meeting Details:
Public Meeting Notes
Somerville Human Rights Commission
6:30pm-8:30pm, September 18, 2008

Commissioners in attendance

- Barry Rafkind (co-chair)
- Ify Mora (co-chair)
- Yvette Verdieu
- Cesar Urrunaga
- Ashraf Hegazy

Martin Luther King Day Planning

- Theme: Action Focused – the talk should address the foundations of community building
    - Potential Speakers:
        1. Marshall Ganz
        2. Gloria White-Hammond
        3. Ellen Lutz

- Nomination Process
    - Use survey monkey online form – have it out there for a couple of weeks to about a month
    - Have them voted on by November
    - Make sure it reaches out to people with disabilities, other languages, etc.
    - Ensure online survey meets accessibility criteria
    - Put nomination notice in newspapers (Eileen can read the newspaper on SCAT)
    - Send forms through the schools
- Service Project
    - Kwanis/Rotary – could be a potential partner
    - CAAS – could be a potential partner
    - Focus on oil/heat/food drive
- Set up MLK Day Committee membership
    - Cesar , Yvette, Sonja, Barry, John, Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), Representative from the Somerville Public Schools Library

Review of Complaints

- There are 4 open issues that happened July, August and September
    - Involves a building inspector: A write-in from an individual who communicated to the HRC and the state department. A woman who said that she is being singled out by an inspector and now the inspector is being especially nice and she found the entire behavior suspect. And now, the development is being delayed and now she feels that it is because of her ethnicity.
    - Involves the police: A person believes that the police singled them out and then when they came to arrest their adult son, they acted forcefully by shoving her out of her way. She felt this was because of her ethnicity or because she is a woman. Possible unwarranted search and seizure. (July 8)
    - Involves a water and sewer department employee who was trying to pay a bill and in a short time, the people told her to leave and that they will escort her out. She had limited English when she is not calm.
    - Involves the MBTA: She was hurt by the MBTA in Jan. In July, she got off the bus with her grandson and felt that the bus hit her which threw her knee out and she landed on her knee. Her grandson calls four people. The bus driver accused her of throwing herself under the bus. The bus driver never asked if she was ok. The ambulance is called and she said she is fine. Two days later, she happens to get on the bus with the same driver. She jokingly says to not throw her under the bus. The driver responds by kicking her off.
- There needs to be an investigator for these complaints.
- The investigatory document needs to be reviewed and the HRC need to be very familiar with it.
- The technical piece of figuring out how long the money will last and how to hire the investigator needs to be resolved.
- Who will review? Naming the investigatory committee members.
- MC: Follow up with the investigatory or complaint process of the organizations
- Eileen: How the HRC supports the rest of the community to advocate for their own rights
- Is reviewing the investigation process
    - Developing a pre-approved list of people who have been certified by MCAD and who could be an investigator.
        - Going rate is $1500-3000 for an investigator
        - No one can be given more than $5000 or it needs to be bid out
    - Held 2 spaces during MCAD training in May for the 2 Commission staff

HRC Membership

- John Robinson was nominated by Barry and seconded by Yvette followed by a unanimous vote to endorse. Next steps: Sonja will help John to arrange a meeting with the Mayor before the approval gets sent to the Alderman.

Police-Immigrant Dialogue update

- Chief Holloway will reconsider policy of volunteering information to ICE
- A sense that Chief Holloway has had a positive impact on police-community relations in Somerville.
- Consuelo: recognize SPD at the MLK

Lack of Accessibility, ADA Compliance at the Polling Places

- Issue was raised by Eileen Feldman
- Everyone was in agreement with the initiative to support ensuring that the voting be more accessible to all with disabilities and with translation needs
- HRC will help Eileen with communicating with the City, Barry agreed to follow up with Eileen
- Depending on response, we will decide on future steps

Hiring process:

- Sonja recommended that the Commissions be more involved with the process especially since the Personnel director is gone for 3 weeks
- Barry and Ashraf volunteered to follow up with Jessie Baker in the mayor's office.