



Somerville Human Rights Commission  
Monthly Meeting Notes  
March 19, 2009

**Meeting Details**

Public Meeting  
Thurs, March 19, 2009  
6:30-8:30pm  
2nd Floor Meeting Room, Tufts Admin Bldg  
167 Holland Street, Somerville

**Meeting Notes**

**Commissioners in Attendance**

Barry Rafkind (co-chair)  
Ify Mora (co-chair)  
Cesar Urrunaga  
John Robinson

**Commissioners not in Attendance**

Ashraf Hegazy

**Other Attendees**

Yvette Verdieu, HRC Alumnus  
Sonja Darai, Acting Director of Somerville Commissions  
Courtney Hillebrecht, PoliSci Doctoral Candidate, Specializing in Human Rights  
Mark Stern, Civil Rights Attorney  
Ellen Frith, Somerville Disabilities Commissioner

**Director's Update** (Sonja)

- Announced the mayor's appointment of Paulette Renault-Caragianes [[link to city press release](#)] as the city's new Health Director.
- There has been only one applicant for the role of human rights investigator. The candidate is Spanish-English bilingual, but unfortunately has no investigative experience. Courtney suggests asking around in neighboring communities for names of potential candidates
- Ify suggests that Sonja should receive briefings from the mayor's office about human rights issues

**Immigrant-Somerville Police Dialogs** (Ify)

- Ify and Cesar invited four representatives from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) attending the March dialog.
- Somerville Police Chief Holloway had initially suggested the visit by ICE to Ify at the 2009 MLK Event.
- The ICE representatives included the regional director of operations and the head of the office of investigations.
- Now some community members of ISPD are upset that, in their opinion, there was little push-back against the ICE representatives at the meeting. Part of their frustration was due to the lack of a planned agenda for that meeting.

### **Immigrant Support Network (Ify)**

- ISN is scaling down its ambitions due to limited capacity because of budget-related staffing reductions at Centro Presente which have forced it (CP) to withdraw from the ISN network. Therefore, instead of building a network, ISN is focusing on putting together an online database of references to help in the event of an ICE raid/abduction.
- Ellen suggests that ISN hold a meeting about the New Bedford raid. Ify pointed out that a documentary film about that was screened by ISN last summer.

### **Advisory Council Discussion**

#### Basics

- The Advisory Council is discussed in the [HRC ordinance](#) :
  - Sec. 2-245. Human rights commission advisory council.
    - (a) The commission shall establish an advisory council which shall provide general advice and counsel to the commission, as well as assistance in carrying out the policies of the commission.
- The council is also discussed in the [HRC by-laws](#):
  - ARTICLE X – ADVISORY COUNCIL
    - The Commission shall establish an Advisory Council which shall provide general advice and counsel to the Commission, as well as assistance in carrying out the policies of the Commission. The Advisory Council shall be appointed by the members of the Commission and shall consist of no fewer than nine (9) and no more than twenty-one (21) persons, in accordance with Ordinance 1993-1 Section 2-245.
- No advisory council for the HRC currently exists
- Yvette is interested in joining and helping to start this council
- Advisors could be a resource for history about Somerville and the HRC, as well as liaisons and contacts to other agencies

## Logistics brainstorming

- annual potluck dinner
- annual/quarterly meetings, or at least on a schedule less frequent than every month
- better to have formal invitations to recruit new members to Advisory Council
- Barry will send out an email to start an online discussion to talk further about the council

## **Snow Removal (John+Sonja)**

- Sonja says that snow removal is an issue that is not being worked on by other groups in the city, so a new group should be formed around the issue
- This is an issue that John has personally been challenged by and is passionate about
- Snow and ice on the sidewalks presents a hazard to everyone, not just the disabled and the elderly
- Everyone deserves to be able to travel safely as a pedestrian on the sidewalks
- Sonja suggested that the city can use reverse 311 calls to remind residents of how and when to shovel the sidewalks properly
- Barry will set up an email group for this topic

## **Miscellaneous**

- Ellen mentioned a proposed MA State House bill to require transparency of university campus police
- Ellen invited everyone to attend the next meeting of the Disabilities Commission
- Cesar mentioned the recent SJ article on immigrant youth arrested at a fight : [SHS students say Somerville police officer hit them, falsely accused them of being gang ringleaders](#)
- John mentioned that he called Steve Winslow, a planner for Somerville's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, to talk about creating a pedestrian path for Somerville residents to cross to Assembly Square. According to John, Steve is hoping for federal stimulus money to be used for this purpose.

The next HRC meeting will be on Thurs, April 16th, 2009. Same time, same place.