



**Cambridge Human Rights Commission
Thursday, April 7, 2011**

Present: Commissioners Bevin Croft, Marla Erlie, Mercedes S. Evans, Melissa Gonzalez-Brenes, Susan Ostrander, and Randa Shedid; staff members Carmen S. Negrón, Colleen Johnston and Mariah Freark; Guest: Superintendent Christopher Burke, Cambridge Police Department.

Documents and Exhibits Used: Acting Executive Director's Report.

Chair Gonzalez-Brenes called the meeting to order at 6:18 p.m.

1. Recording of Meeting

Chair Gonzalez-Brenes asked if anyone was recording the meeting and no one responded in the affirmative.

2. Public Participation

Joan Keating of Second Street spoke to the Commission about her concerns around the achievement gap in Cambridge Public Schools, particularly as it affects middle school African American students with learning disabilities. The Commissioners responded that they would take her comments under advisement and look into the matter. Ms. Keating suggested the Commissioners discuss this matter with Councilor Reeves.

3. Discussion of Minutes

The Commissioners discussed stylistic concerns about the meeting minutes. January, February and March minutes were unanimously approved with a correction to the February minutes to change the word "chair" to "convene" in item number 7, pertaining to sub-committee work.

4. Acting Executive Director's Report

Acting Executive Director Johnston reported that the Commission currently has 13 open cases and had closed 4 cases since the last meeting. Chair Gonzalez-Brenes, Acting Executive Director Johnston and Superintendent Burke spoke about their meeting with Commissioner Haas, Centro Presente and the Somerville Police Chief to discuss the Secure Communities Program. Carmen spoke about planning for Fair Housing Month. Chair Gonzalez-Brenes asked Commissioners to commit to attending the Fair Housing Month Event on April 27, Commissioners Shedid, Gonzalez-Brenes and Hope will attend.

5. Reports about ongoing work

Shelter Survey-- Commissioner Croft gave an update on the shelter survey progress. After a unanimous vote by the Commissioners, it was decided that Commissioner Croft and Acting Executive Director will meet with a group of women from Transcend to hear about their experiences in Cambridge.

Secure Communities –Chair Gonzalez-Brenes spoke to the Commissioners about ongoing organizing work around the Secure Communities Program. Commissioners discussed how the Massachusetts Association of Human Rights Commissions might assist with these efforts. Chair Gonzalez-Brenes said she would follow up with Diane from MAHRC.

Bullying –Commissioner Erlie reported that she had no new information.

Letter to the City Manager – Chair Gonzalez-Brenes stated that she would draft the letter and that what she would be writing was that the Commission would like to participate in the Commissioner Application process in a positive way, reflecting on the past.

6. New Commissioner Orientation

Acting Executive Director Johnston reported that it is budget season so new appointments would likely come in May. Chair Gonzalez-Brenes spoke about the orientation she and Commissioner Croft participated in. Acting Executive Director Johnston explained that she reviewed the Commission's most recent work, the rules and the ordinances with Commissioners Croft and Gonzalez-Brenes when they started. It was suggested that it would be helpful to add the most recent work plan, director reports, summaries of committees/initiatives and bios of Commissioners to future orientation packets.

7. Affirmative Action Advisory Committee

Acting Executive Director Johnston will try and get the information about the date of the next meeting for Commissioner Evans.

8. Police Exam Application Fee

Superintendent Burke informed the Commissioners that there is a fee waiver available for the exam and that the information for the fee waiver was available wherever exam applications were available. Superintendent Burke explained that CPD had doubled its recruitment efforts and that early returns indicated that 49% of exam applicants are minority applicants and 28% are female.

9. New business

Commissioner Hope spoke about the Kingdom Concert series he is working on. The Cambridge Arts Council is co-sponsoring and getting permits and covering some of the fees for the event. Commissioner Hope asked if the CHRC could co-sponsor the event with financial support. Commissioners were interested in conducting outreach at the three concerts. Commissioner Hope is going to meet with Acting Executive Director Johnston to discuss sponsorship opportunities for the event and they will report back at the next meeting.

Commissioner Croft asked if the Commission could provide snacks or stipends for the focus group with Transcend. Acting Executive Director Johnston stated that she thought they might be able to supply refreshments.

Commissioner Gonzalez-Brenes spoke with the Commissioners about evening meetings for the Secure Communities coalition; she will try to attend the next one, but can't go regularly.

Commissioner Erlie raised the selection of new Commissioners. Some Commissioners related this to the language of the ordinance. A discussion was had about the language of the ordinance, the role of the Commission and power of Commissioners. It was suggested that the Commission review the ordinance. The Commissioners could not come to consensus about this. There was a request for concrete proposals from those Commissioners who felt that they could not do the work that they want to do. There was disagreement over whether the Commission had been ever told that it could not do certain work. Some Commissioners expressed that they are doing the work that they wish to be doing and that other Commissioners who wish to be doing work should come forth with proposals for said work. It was suggested that perhaps a discussion of the ordinance be an agenda item for a future CHRC meeting. Additionally, it was suggested that the Commissioners be able to suggest budget items that would increase outreach opportunities. No consensus was reached on these items.

Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

The next Commission meeting will be held on Thursday, May 5, 2011, 6 p.m.