

Human Rights Commission Meeting
Thursday, March 16, 2017
5:45pm, Room 101, Bangs Community Center

Members Present: Matthew Charity, Sid Ferreira, Carol Ross, Emily Boutilier, Ingrid Askew
Absent: Sovann-Malis Loeung, Brenda Mutai, Greg Bascomb, Jessica Maposa
Others Present: Deborah Radway, Director of Human Rights, Elizabeth Cahn, Rafael Lopez Sanchez
Caroline Murray, Russ Vernon Jones Karen Levine from the Amherst Sanctuary Commission,
Amber Cano Martin, Rafael Lopez Sanchez

Meeting called to order at 5:53 pm
Agenda Additions: none

5:57 pm chair welcomes guests and commissioners. After one question, the commission unanimously adopts the February minutes as presented.

Old Business:

Sanctuary Community Bylaw:

Matthew Charity says he's shared the sanctuary document with all commissioners and says the one question is: can we support the sanctuary community bylaw? He notes that we're not a city and that the bylaw would define what a "sanctuary community" means in Amherst. It tries to define how Amherst would cooperate with ICE, for example, and it would sever existing language that turns out to be ineffective. The intent of the new bylaw is that it would not violate federal law. He hoped the Town Counsel would have time to review it, but that has not yet been possible. The commission could choose to support it "pending legal opinion."

Sid Ferreira: Sid notes that he is also part of the Sanctuary Community Committee. He says this is a human rights issue and we cannot fall into the politics of fear to say we can't support this proposed bylaw. If Town Counsel decides it's a problem, we could deal with that as it happens.

Matthew notes that the Select Board meets on March 20. He says the Human Rights Commission should make sure human rights are viewed expansively. He thinks this bylaw does that, although he wanted to make clear that he has not reviewed it from a legal perspective.

Carol Ross: Carol agrees with the purpose of the bylaw and wants to make sure it has teeth.

Caroline Murray: she notes that Attorney General Healey has said that she will stand up for sanctuary communities if the federal government tries to withhold funds from them. She notes that the Amherst bylaw was put together using a template from the ACLU. She adds that there were 1,150 signatures on the group's petition, and that the Grace Episcopal Church event showed solidarity.

Russ Vernon Jones confirms that.

Deborah Radway notes that Amherst's town counsel is aiming to review sanctuary community bylaw wording from several of its client communities as a group.

Sid Ferreira: Makes a motion in support of the community bylaw.

Carol Ross: seconds the motion. Motion is approved unanimously.

New Business:

1. Matthew Charity discussed a potential event recognizing passage of the 13th amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Martin Jones approached him and said he was organizing it. The committee should be aware of this event.
2. Commission discussed the Human Rights Heroes Awards, to be held on June 17 at 11 am at Mill River Pavilion. (booked). Initial planning will begin with a mid-April call for nominations. (done). Commission members need to be active. Ask Ed Cage to grill.
3. Upcoming Commission vacancies- There is some discussion about the seats that will come up in FY18, when terms are up for Greg, Carol, Malis and Ingrid. There is discussion about how to get the word out that the commission will be looking for members. Deb Radway suggests a balance of college students and high school students on the commission, as high school students have historically been more active.
4. Guest Rafael Lopez Sanchez: He suggests paying attention to cities such as Holyoke, only a short distance away that could benefit from the work of the HRC. He would like to talk more about this at the next meeting. One idea is a mentorship program.
5. Collaboration- Commissioners discussed the idea of having commissioners serve as point people to other town committees and groups.
6. Ingrid Askew floated the idea of reprising the Frederick Douglass speech as a theatrical community reading event on the Common around the 4th of July in collaboration with Mass Humanities. There will be further discussion of that. D. Radway tasked with looking at July 1 availability of the Common (done).

Meeting adjourned 7:55pm

Emily Boutilier

Notetaker