

Michael V. O'Brien
City Manager



CITY OF WORCESTER

**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Summary
Monday, February 6th, 6:00 PM
Francis Perkins Library, 470 West Boylston Street, Worcester**

Members Present: Chairmen Eduardo Rivera, Edward Robinson, Kathleen Gervais, Mable Millner, Udeme Ukpong, Harry Danso and Edward Kwiyp

Members Absent: Cara Berg Powers and Jeffrey Miller.

Staff: Abby McCabe, City Manager's Office.

Others Present: Jaqueline Norton, Herb Cremer, Vicki Fagan, Raquel Benitez, Karen Benitez, Mildred Collins, Grace Ross, Martha Assefa.

There being a quorum the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

The Commission members and members of the public in the audience introduced themselves. The Chair reviewed the agenda and introduced the guest from Worcester Anti Foreclosure Team (WAFT).

Guests:

Ms. Ross and Ms. Assefa introduced WAFT (Worcester Anti Foreclosure Team) as a grassroots organization that strives to stop evictions and foreclosures to help individuals and families that are struggling. WAFT provides assistance and support to homeowners at various stages of the foreclosure process. WAFT helps by educating people of their rights and options, participating in protests against auctions, and directing them to resources that may help. They also gave an overview of the foreclosure situation in Worcester and further explained the steps of the foreclosure process. Ms. Collins and Ms. Fagan were present for the meeting and told their story of and how they became associated with WAFT.

Public Comment:

Questions and comments from the public centered on what the City's laws were and if the City was enforcing them. A vacant and foreclosed property ordinance was adopted by the City a few years ago but is still in the process of being fully implemented. Theft is a common problem in vacant properties. Ms. Ross explained that Springfield has a similar ordinance but also hires mediators to work with the banks and the property owners. Mr. Cremer noted that the HRC has subpoena powers within its authority. Ms. McCabe will further investigate and work with the City Solicitor to learn more about this.

Commission Member Comments:

The Chair suggested that the Commission consider holding public hearings in each of the City's five districts regarding the foreclosure situation. The Commission will further discuss and consider this at the next meeting in March.

Given the time the Commission moved the discussion on the Worcester Housing Authority Update, Drop the I-Word and Youth and Human Rights to the next meeting.



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Website Updates:

The Commission suggested adding the mission statement to the webpage, an external link on how to become a legal citizen, specify what the HRC does and does not do and add to the list of resources. The Commission will continue to make suggestions on how to improve the webpage and Ms. McCabe will look into the capabilities of the webpage.

Summary of Fitchburg's Human Rights Commission Meeting

The Chair and Vice Chair attended the January meeting of Fitchburg's Human Rights Commission. The Chair briefly summarized the meeting of this Commission that is fairly new and trying to get organized.

Summary of HRC Goals and Accomplishments

The Chair reviewed with the Commission a 1999 report that outlined goals for the HRC. Many of the goals have been accomplished but there are still goals that are pending and new ones that can be added such as expanding and improving the HRC webpage and outreach to youth.

Public Comment:

Ms. Norton and Mr. Cremer noted that City's youth are underrepresented and are often bullied particularly for having disabilities that are not always visible or obvious.

Commissioners District Reports

Ms. Gervais, Mr. Robinson and Mr. Rivera recently attending various neighborhood and community meetings. Ms. McCabe will email the Commission the link to the City's meeting calendar where many community meetings are posted.

On a motion that was duly made and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 8:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Abby McCabe

Next Meeting
Monday, March 5th, 2012
Location: Pleasant Street Neighborhood Network Center
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM