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City Manager



CITY OF WORCESTER

**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Summary
October 3rd, 2011 6:00 PM
Esther Howland Chamber**

Members Present: Chairmen Eduardo Rivera, Edward Robinson, Edward Kwiyup, Cara Berg Powers, Kathleen Gervais, and Mable Millner.

Members Absent: Harry Danso.

Guests: Mr. Raymond Mariano, Executive Director of the Worcester Housing Authority, Anna de la Cruz of Loyola Drive, Lynn Norris (Neighbor to Neighbor),
Staff: Abby McCabe and Ines Beron.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM but stated that the Commission will move to New Business item # 4 on the agenda since the Commission did not yet have a quorum.

New Business:

The Executive Director of Worcester Public Housing Authority (WHA), Mr. Mariano, was present to summarize the WHA's new program which will apply to residents living in WHA properties. Mr. Mariano explained that the proposed "A Better Life" program is aimed at ending dependence and instilling confidence in the residents. The program will be implemented in a phased approach. The program will require people to go to school or work in order to receive benefits. The WHA will work with individuals and families on a case by case basis by providing full assessments for health, literacy, life skills training and full case management services. There are some instances that allow exemptions from participating in the program but those that do not meet the exemption requirements will have their rents raised over time so that it will eventually reach market value if they do not participate in the program.

Ms. Powers expressed concerned about what qualifies as a legitimate effort in terms of finding a job or in school and wanted to be sure everyone had a fair chance when being evaluated. Mr. Robinson noted that the program's goal of providing inspiration and empowerment was important. A couple members expressed concern that this would be a lot of work and were unsure if WHA could provide all of the services that were described. Mr. Mariano responded that additional case management staff will be added and many of the services would be provided by other agencies such as the Kennedy Community Health Center, some local banks and the Worcester Community Action Council. The WHA has also applied for a pilot grant from HUD and will first implement the program on a pilot basis and therefore the program will not be fully implemented for several more years.

Ms. Millner noted that given the current economy it is difficult for anyone to find a job and asked if WHA has worked with employers and local businesses to provide job opportunities. Mr. Mariano responded that he expects most people to enroll in educational programs and that they will need to focus on job training in the job fields where there is opportunity. Mr. Rivera asked if



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the residents have been involved in the program's development. Mr. Mariano responded that the WHA has had tenant association meetings and that a resident is a member of the steering committee.

Public Comment:

A member of the public was concerned about language challenges that make finding a job difficult or impossible even for qualified applicants with education. Another member of the public spoke about issues surrounding victims of domestic violence. Mr. Mariano explained that the program will offer English as a second language programs as well as life planning skills. He also noted that disabled people and people over 55 years of age are exempt. Another member of the public asked what kind of outreach would be provided to the children. Ms. Beron also had some concerns about the program. The Chair asked Ms. Beron to continue to follow WHA's proposed program.

Minutes:

On a motion by Ms. Powers, seconded by Mr. Robinson, the minutes were approved as amended by a vote of 6-0-0.

Old Business:

- Know Your Rights Campaign – The Chair informed the Commission that the Know Your Rights Campaign will be held on October 26th the location is still TBD.
- Human Rights Commission and City Districts Update – Mr. Robinson reported on the recent subcommittee meeting. Districts 1 and 3 still need to be covered and it would be helpful to have a volunteer from District 3 to distribute the brochures. Ms. McCabe will get more brochures in Spanish, Vietnamese and English.
- Informal Communication from Worcester Police Department – The Commission discussed the recent memo from the Police Chief about the sharing of fingerprint data of criminal arrestees with federal law enforcement agencies. The Commission was concerned that the police practices may not be fair and that an arrest does not necessarily mean an individual is guilty or will even be convicted.

On a motion by Ms. Powers, seconded by Mr. Robinson, the Commission asked that staff research how to become a Sanctuary City and to look into Cambridge's policies for the next meeting.

Ms. Powers also recommended that the Commission research California's "Drop the I-Word Campaign" to be discussed and considered at the next meeting.

Staff Liaison Report:

The City Hall parking garage will be closed for the next meeting. Staff will look into alternative meeting locations.

Meeting adjourned at 7:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Abby McCabe

Next Meeting
Monday, November 7, 2011
Location: TBD
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM