

Michael V. O'Brien
City Manager



**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Summary
November 7th, 2011 6:00 PM
Esther Howland Chamber**

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

Members Absent: Edward Kwiypup.

Staff: Abby McCabe, City Manager's Office and Ines Beron, Housing Intake Coordinator

Others Present: Gordon Davis, Dr. Ravi Perry, Paris Prince, Virginia Swain, Herb Cremer (Commission on Disabilities Liaison).

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

The Chair reviewed the meeting agenda for the members of the public and introduced Dr. Ravi Perry the guest speaker.

Dr. Ravi Perry introduced himself as the President of Worcester's branch of the NAACP. He explained that he is organizing a march and rally on December 10th that will take place downtown at City Hall. Dr. Perry requested financial support from the Commission to help pay for the permits, police detail and equipment for speakers. The goal is to have several hundred people participate on December 10th for Human Rights Day.

Mr. Gordon a member of the public emphasized the importance of the event.

The Commission discussed sponsoring the event. The Commission was unsure of how much money they had in their budget but the consensus was to help support and sponsor the event.

On a motion made by Ms. Berg-Powers, seconded by Mr. Robinson, the Commission voted to support the event in the amount of up to \$105 from the Human Rights Commission budget by a vote of 6-0-0.

Minutes:

On a motion made by Ms. Berg-Powers, seconded by Mr. Robinson, the Commission approved the minutes from the October 3rd meeting as written. Vote of 5-0-1 (Mr. Danso abstained).

Old Business:

Know Your Rights Campaign – The Chair will work with Ms. McCabe on securing the locations, times and speakers to hold the events. January is the target date for the events.

HRC Brochures – Brochures distributed to the Commission members.

Booklet – An Old Know Your Rights When Stopped by the Police booklet was distributed.

Assignment for the next meeting is to review and bring updates and suggested changes to the next meeting.



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WPD Response to Worcester Immigration Coalition's (WIC) Questions – The Police Chief does not have any further comments than what was provided to City Council and to the Human Rights Commission at the last meeting. The Commission has concerns and would like to meet with the WIC to discuss the possible impacts at the next meeting in December.

Discussion on Worcester's Housing Authority (WHA) New Program – The Chair reviewed the October 3rd meeting minutes relative to the WHA Executive Director's description of the proposed new program. The penalties to the housing residents were a concern of the Commission. The Chair asked Ms. Beron if she could draft a letter to WHA asking for monthly updates on the new program. The Commission asked Ms. McCabe to check with the City Solicitor on the legality of WHA's program and how many Human Rights Commission members are needed to hold a public hearing. Ms. Berg Powers noted that a public hearing should be held as soon as possible.

On a motion made by Ms. Berg Powers, and seconded by Ms. Gervais, the Commission approved Ms. Berg Powers' proposal to prepare a letter to send to City Council and for newspaper publication regarding the WHA's program to be reviewed and approved at the next meeting in December. Vote: all in favor.

Public Comment:

Mr. Cremer discussed a situation that occurred in May where a complex with elderly residents was without air conditioning. This was brought before City Council over the summer. The Commission asked Ms. McCabe to report on what the outcome of this was and to investigate the situation and report back to the Commission at the next meeting in December.

New Business:

Sanctuary Cities – Ms. McCabe gave a brief history and background relative to the Sanctuary City movement and designation. The Commission would like to review this after the meeting with the WIC. The Human Rights Commission, the City Council and the Police Department discussed Sanctuary Cities a few years ago. Ms. McCabe will review the minutes from the past Sanctuary City discussions and will report back to the Commission.

National Drop the I Word Campaign - Ms. McCabe and Ms. Berg Power summarized the public education campaign launched by the Applied Research Center in California.

The Commission discussed asking the City Council to vote for the City to pledge to "drop the I-word," replacing the word "illegal" when referring to any human being's immigration status with the word "undocumented" in any official city documents, including but not limited to press releases, informational material, meeting agendas and minutes. Ms. Berg Powers will submit the request for the next City Council meeting.

On a motion made by Ms. Berg Powers, seconded by Mr. Robinson, the Commission voted to sign on to the national "Drop the I-Word" campaign. Vote of 6-0-0.

Meeting Locations – The next meeting will be held at the Worcester Youth Center if available while the City Hall parking garage is under construction. Ms. McCabe will confirm the meeting location.

Overview of Worcester's Shelter Situation – Ms. Beron reported on her findings and experiences with people looking for housing/shelters in Worcester. Many issues have arisen from individuals not able to provide proof of residency.

Public Comments – Comments from the public centered on young women and teenagers as well as updating the City’s Plan to End Homelessness.

On a motion made by Ms. Berg Powers, seconded by Ms. Gervais, the Human Rights Commission, voted to submit a petition to City Council requesting that the City Council and City Manager establish a new plan to end homelessness in the City. Vote of 6-0-0.

Discussion: The 2007 three year plan's window has closed and many Worcester residents are falling through the cracks. The Human Rights Commission would like the City Council to direct the City Manager to compile a task-force made up of community residents, homeless or previously homeless individuals and families, and those working on the front lines of this epidemic in our city to produce a comprehensive and systems-based ten-year plan that addresses not only "housing-first" but also the root causes of homelessness- economic development, education, and community sustainability.

Staff Liaison Report:

The City will begin interviewing for the Human Rights & Disabilities Coordinator position in the upcoming weeks.

The City Manager’s Coalition Against Bias & Hate will host a forum on November 29th at 8:00 AM at the Library. The forum will focus on the changing demographics of Worcester based on the most recent census data.

Public Comment:

Dr. Perry explained a study he is working on entitled “The Changing Face of Worcester” that has been submitted for a grant with the Greater Worcester Community Foundation.

On a motion made by Ms. Millner, seconded by Mr. Danso, the Commission voted to submit a letter of support for Dr. Perry’s study and grant submission. Vote: 6-0-0.

On a motion made by Ms. Berg Powers, seconded by Mr. Danso, the meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM. Vote 6-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Abby McCabe

Next Meeting
Monday, December 7, 2011
Location: Tentatively set for the Worcester Youth Center
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM