

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Board of Selectmen established the Human Rights Commission in 2004 to advance issues related to the fair and equal treatment of individuals in Belmont and to create a mechanism for addressing incidents arising from these issues. The September 2004 charge to the commission was to address the full range of discrimination in the areas of commerce, education, public accommodation, housing, employment, and access to municipal services; serve as a resource to the citizenry, the business community, and public agencies on issues regarding diversity and discrimination; give visibility to and increase awareness of issues related to diversity and discrimination through educational activities; assist the citizenry and town agencies in informally resolving disputes on issues relating to discrimination; and to receive and investigate allegations of discrimination against individuals protected under the Massachusetts Human Rights Law and related legislation, issue findings, and refer matters to relevant Town, State, and Federal agencies for disposition of matters within their jurisdiction.

The Human Rights Commission met monthly and focused on a number of priorities this year, including:

- publicizing the commission and its charge in the community;
 - reaching out to other organizations in the community;
 - developing a protocol for the reporting of incidents of discrimination by community members;
 - educating ourselves about issues of interest or concern to commission and community members; and
 - planning programs that increase awareness and address issues regarding diversity and discrimination.
- Four subcommittees were formed to help galvanize the energy of the Commission towards its goals: Outreach and Publicity; Fair Housing; Fundraising and Budget; and Programs.

The Human Rights Commission co-sponsored a number of events in Town this year, including the 13th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Community Breakfast in January and an evening program on Bullying and Cyber-bullying held at the Chenery Middle School in November. In addition, we were represented at the annual Town Day in Belmont Center in May and at the Belmont Neighbors' Network "Meet Belmont" event in August. We published a number of articles in the Belmont Citizen Herald, including one by Superintendent Holland about the METCO Program, and one about Fair Housing issues. In June, we publicized our becoming one of 60 official No Place for Hate ® communities in Massachusetts in the local press. This program is affiliated with the Anti-defamation League. Signage to this effect was posted at the public library and on Concord Avenue. We recognize the need to do continued outreach to make the community more aware of our presence.

In addition to these co-sponsorship efforts, liaisons to the commission continued to be an important link to the community and contributed greatly to our conversations. Liaisons were expanded to include a representative from the Chenery Middle School and from the mental health community. Liaisons from the Belmont Public Library, the Belmont Police Department, Belmont against Racism, Belmont High School, and the Council on Aging were regular participants at our meetings. Lt. Peter Hoerr, our Belmont Police Department liaison, kept us informed about racial and other pertinent incidents. We all continued to discuss the community's response to hate literature distributed in Belmont, as had occurred in December of 2005. We developed a protocol and an Incident Report Form for recording incidents reported to us by individuals using our telephone line.

A number of speakers presented at our meetings, including liaisons to the Commission:

- Maurice Wright, Coordinator of the Boston METCO Program at Belmont High School, spoke about both successful aspects of the METCO Program and concerns. Mr. Wright remarked on the support of Superintendent Holland and the success of graduating METCO students from the high school. The lack of minority teachers at the high school, however, was a continuing concern. The Commission discussed ways to integrate METCO students into Belmont life, including providing transportation to younger students who might like to participate in out-of-school youth activities in town.
- Lt. Peter Hoerr presented information from a recent report entitled, "Understanding Race Data from Vehicle Stops: A Stakeholder's Guide," which included information about the different kinds of traffic stops made by police. It was recommended that this report be made available to the public. While data indicates more traffic citations were written for minorities who drive through a community than for those who live in it, the accuracy of the number sample is in question, according to Lt. Hoerr. Money has been allocated for police training concerning racial profiling.

- David Harris, Managing Director for the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute on Race and Justice at the Harvard Law School and former director of the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston, and Aviva Rothman-Shore, Outreach and Policy Coordinator at the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston, addressed the commission at the November meeting about fair housing initiatives and issues, including education and outreach, enforcement, public policy, and research. We obtained the November 2002 report, "An Analysis to Impediments to Fair Housing Choice" in Belmont. This report was made available on the Town's website.

This presentation about fair housing, in particular, increased our awareness and interest in fair housing concerns in Belmont. The Commission grappled with the issue of housing discrimination at the Uplands Development which limited housing to 1- and 2- bedroom units, presumably to limit the number of families with children moving into the development. The commission voted to write a letter to the Zoning Board of Appeals to encourage the inclusion of 3-bedroom units.

The Chair of the Commission continued to attend the monthly Massachusetts Association of Human Rights Commissions (MaHRC) to network with other Human Rights Commissions in the region. In October, Commission members participated in a panel presentation of local Human Rights Commissions in Newton to familiarize others with what these commissions do and how they work.

The impact of the death of a Belmont High School Choice student, Herman Taylor III of Boston, was discussed as well as the follow-up actions to be taken by the high school, community groups and members.

Sadly, one long-term Commission member, Bill Rudman, passed away in September. Three other Commission members resigned and were replaced this year.

Respectfully submitted,
Fran Yuan, Chairperson