

ONEONTA, NEW YORK - MAY 24, 2012 - 7:00 P.M.

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE COMMISSION ON COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND
HUMAN RIGHTS** **PG. 1**

PRESENT: Commissioner Barbara Ann Heegan
Commissioner Jeremy Redlien
Commissioner Teresa Sivers
Commissioner Tom Kelly
Council Member Russ Southard

ABSENT: Chair Joyce Miller
Commissioner Jeffrey Pegram
Commissioner Fida Mohammad

Council Member Southard called the regular meeting to order and called the roll.

ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE YEAR 2012

Council Member Southard suggested deferring election of chair to the June meeting when current Chair, Chair Miller was present.

PETITIONERS

Council Member Southard stated there were no petitioners.

CORRESPONDENCE

Council Member Southard stated there was no correspondence.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Council Member Southard indicated there were no announcements.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Sivers suggested that approval of the minutes of the regular meeting held April 26, 2012 be deferred until the June meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Closing of Center Street School
2. Further exploration of the graffiti issue

Closing of Center Street School

Commissioner Sivers stated that at the commission's April meeting there was uncertainty about the closing of the Center Street School but that was no longer the case. The voters in the recent school budget vote voted to close the school.

Further exploration of the graffiti issue

Commissioner Kelly stated Commissioner Heegan and he met with the Community Improvement Committee and at the meeting Council Member Brzozowski offered to take the proposal on removing graffiti to Main Street Oneonta to see if the process needed to be within the government or with outside groups. He said he may have gotten back to Commissioner Heegan about that.

Mayor Miller stated there were another series of events with graffiti at Bill Youngs' building and the tower in the parking garage. He said he was informed that there were a series of events last fall and an arrest was made of a SUNY student. He said he was not aware that there had been a continuing problem or a new rash of problems since then but then he heard about the most recent activity.

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PG. 2

(Old Business) continued

Police Chief Naylor stated the SUNY student was arrested for about 5 or 6 cases of graffiti throughout the city back in the fall but since then they have had some random reviews, nothing widespread.

Mayor Miller asked Commissioner Kelly if there was a specific program being proposed.

Commissioner Kelly replied Commissioner Heegan did a lot research on a New York City graffiti program on their website. He said that program was very impressive and it was combination with NYPD to be very aggressive with arrests and supplying paint and power-washers to businesses to remove graffiti. He said Commissioner Heegan was taking a piece out of that and try to at least offer manpower, paint and services to remove graffiti but he had not seen an actual proposal.

NEW BUSINESS

Council Member Southard recognized Mayor Miller.

Mayor Miller stated over the last three weeks there had been 2 or 3 incidents of particular concern to him. He said it was not so much because there was a racial component to them with people of color involved and he thought the city was working its way through those components. He said the concerns he had were for the fact in at least 2 of these cases there were aggressive crowds on the offense behavior interfering with and confronting police in a physical and verbal way. He said the numbers were such, at least in the case of one, with 2 or 3 police officers and a crowd of 30+ aggressive individuals that were threatening and threatening to climb on police cars and rocking police cars. He said his concern with it was that at that level it did not take much to have a tragedy occur. He said the tragedy could be an injury or fatality of a police officer, a student or whoever was involved. He said his concern was not related to whatever the racial component may or may not have been. He said based on that Police Chief Naylor and he met on the 23rd with SUNY President Kleniewski, Steve Perry and their new interim Police Chief. He said he talked with them about what his idea was of approaching this. He said he knew Hartwick College had orientation and ongoing programs about the use of alcohol, the unacceptable behavior downtown and in the city's neighborhoods. He said SUNY had similar programs. He said OPD participates in those programs and had some of its own freestanding programs. He said whatever was being done was not working. He said a small margin may be working but it certainly was not working if there were behavioral issues that get to the point of confrontation with police that could be of very high risk in nature. He said his thinking was that, and had already talked with SUNY people, that SUNY would appoint somebody from Student Life and their police group, Hartwick would appoint somebody from Student Life and their security group, Police Chief Naylor or Lieutenant Brenner and a representative from the NAACP form a group. He said this group would have a very limited project over the next 10 weeks to look at what other like communities were doing. He said there were college towns very much like Oneonta's across New York State. He said the group needed to see if there were things being done effectively in those communities that the city could pick up quickly and model here as soon as the beginning of the academic year. He said some of the issues discussed with SUNY was their campus code and behavior, nuisance ordinances and holding landlords more accountable for the behavior of students who reside on their properties. He said they talked about potentially moving the bar closing hour forward an hour. He said continuation of this kind of crowd behavior was really high risk and if anyone gets hurt it was a plight on Oneonta. He said he wanted to bring that subject to the commission for some discussion, some additional perspective and whether the commission thinks this was the right course. He said he did not want to downplay what issues were related to race in this incidents but he also knew those issues were under discussion already. He said he did not want to inhibit that discussion and also did not want to paint this problem with a racial brush because he did not think it was a racial problem. He said he thought it was a mass behavior problem of people regardless of ethnic backgrounds. He said it was very dangerous and thought a

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PG. 3

(New Business) continued

concentrated effort on it over an 8-10 week period of a small group of people would be beneficial. He said the group may go through the process and find that there was nothing different from what the city was doing but he doubted that would be the case and would learn one or two things. He said he would like to see if the city could do something to change this dynamic before the city had something really troublesome happen.

Commissioner Heegan arrived at this time.

Mayor Miller stated he would like input and endorsement from this commission as to whether this process made sense and should move this forward and then the group would do the inventory of what other communities were doing.

Commissioner Kelly stated he thought it was an excellent idea. He said he was part of the group meeting at SUNY that the Mayor talked about some of the issues that occurred over the last three weekends and he found out that the city handles off-campus matters a little differently than SUNY did. He said the fact was that the city did not address their conduct the same as SUNY and he felt getting on the same page with SUNY would let all the students know that their behavior was not only going to result in an arrest but also have to answer to the campus.

Commissioner Sivers asked if these incidents were toward the end of the year or were there occurrences throughout the semester.

Mayor Miller replied they tend to build and there was the peak of the end of the year. He said the sense of the group he recently met with was that a lot of the activities were focused on the incoming freshmen who live on campus and it was the outgoing seniors who did not live on campus that seem to have forgotten some of the orientation they received when they were incoming freshmen. He said that may imply that perhaps there was a need to have some ongoing communication with upper classmen. He said it was not exactly the same at Hartwick because most of the seniors live on campus.

Ms. Regina Betts, NAACP, stated she thought it was good that the Mayor wanted to handle this. She said she thought this was a very complex problem. She said she thought one of the issues they have encountered was that there was an attitude of 'us vs. them,' which the students feel and resent. She said that was worse for students of color and they feel an antagonism in town as they walk down the street. She said many of them were from inner cities and were urged to come to these colleges for an education and great opportunities and it sort of evaporates as soon as they walk downtown. She said even white students complained about that.

Commissioner Kelly asked if the Mayor was going to convene a similar meeting with Hartwick College.

Mayor Miller replied he would be contacting Hartwick President Margaret Drugovich and tell her about the meeting with SUNY's President Kleniewski.

Commissioner Sivers stated she thought what the Mayor was doing was a great idea but even further than that she wondered if this commission should be doing some active research on the way other towns and campuses find ways to create friendly relationships between the towns and campuses.

The commission held a brief discussion with the Mayor on the matter.

Mr. Lee Fisher, NAACP, spoke briefly about neighborhoods with student housing, relationships and responsibilities and that there were big problems. He said there was a need to get together to try to bring matters under control.

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PG. 4

(New Business) continued

Mayor Miller stated there was a code of conduct at SUNY and Hartwick and when one goes there they sign a code of conduct. He said maybe the code of conducts ought to involve the community as well in that if a student was a member of the college they were a member of the community as well.

Mayor Miller stated when he gets reports from Police Chief Naylor of on-tour events he mails them to the college presidents because he wants them to know and for every student that gets arrested their parents got a letter from him explaining the incident. He said he gets practically no pushback from parents. He said the city probably needed to do something more comprehensive but in the meantime they needed to find out what other people were doing.

Ms. Betts stated everybody had a vested interest in maintaining the alcohol consumption while it seems a lot of students come to Oneonta for party time and the buses bringing the kids down to the bars.

Mayor Miller stated that the city closed three bars this year. He spoke briefly about illegal consumption or over consumption of alcohol and questioned the validity of the community if its economic dependency was on an illegal or unhealthy principle. He said he was sure if the city changed the hour of bar closings there would be a pushback but the city had to decide what was in the best interest of the community and there would be a debate.

Commissioner Redlien wondered if it would be effective if there was a group of students who could handle cases of student misconduct.

Police Chief Naylor stated for the last four years all the arrests get forwarded to the colleges to make that aware and what they could do was based on the campus' rules and regulations. He said most of the time there was no remorse on the part of the student for their arrest.

Mayor Miller stated in Oneonta one level of the problem was downtown mainly Water Street and Main Street at 2:00 p.m. and the other was the neighborhoods and the students who live there and/or pass through there.

The commission held a brief discussion on the issues mentioned.

Mayor Miller stated he would move forward on this.

Council Member Southard asked Commissioner Heegan to update the commission on the issue of graffiti.

Commissioner Heegan spoke briefly on what Commissioner Kelly had reported. She said additionally she was still looking into the court system to see what funding may be available for the Alternatives to Incarceration program.

There being no further business to come before the commission, Council Member Southard adjourned the regular meeting at approximately 8:00 P.M.

JAMES R. KOURY, City Clerk

JRK/pab