

**ONEONTA, NEW YORK - APRIL 26, 2012 - 7:00 P.M.**

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

**PRESENT:** Chair Joyce Miller  
Commissioner Barbara Ann Heegan  
Commissioner Jeremy Redlien  
Commissioner Teressa Sivers  
Commissioner Tom Kelly

**ABSENT:** Commissioner Jeffrey Pegram  
Commissioner Fida Mohammad  
Council Member Russ Southard

Chair Miller called the regular meeting to order and called the roll.

**PETITIONERS**

Chair Miller recognized visitor Ms. Kristin Antin from the Human Rights Center for Victims of Torture.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

Chair Miller read the following “thank you” from 2012 Trailblazer Award winner Margery Merzig:

*“Dear Commission Members,*

*Thank you for the honor of being named the 2012 Trailblazer. I have been touched by the recognition. Although I believe many women in Oneonta deserve this honor, I have been pleased by the opportunity to highlight a non-traditional path. I stand on many shoulders!*

*Thank you again,”*

Chair Miller stated there was a very nice reception in the lobby before the April 17<sup>th</sup> Common Council meeting to present the award to Ms. Merzig. She said basically Ms. Merzig’s family, friends and support group were from the Main Street Baptist where she attends to watch her receive the honor. She said it was a joyous occasion.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no new announcements.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The commission approves the minutes of the regular meeting held March 29, 2012, as written, without benefit of a motion.

**OLD BUSINESS**

1. Follow-up on the presentation of the 2012 Women’s Trailblazer Award to Margery K. Merzig on April 17<sup>th</sup>
2. Concern about the possible closing of Center Street School
3. Further exploration of the graffiti issue

**Follow-up on the presentation of the 2012 Women’s Trailblazer Award to Margery K. Merzig on April 17<sup>th</sup>**

Commissioner Heegan stated she liked the commission’s process for the Trailblazer Award and she thought it was very well done. She said she thought the commission made the right choice and it was very nice to see Margery Merzig win the award who was very humble about it. She said the reception was nice and it gave people time to talk with Margery, such as her daughter did.

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**Concern about the possible closing of Center Street School**

Chair Miller stated that Commissioner Heegan did draft a nice letter to the president of the School Board and School Superintendent Shea expressing concern about the process and making sure the people were informed as the process went along. She said the Mayor reviewed and approved the letter. She said she would be sending out the letter shortly.

Commissioner Heegan stated the School District did send out letters to parents about a choice on where to send their children should Center Street School close, Greater Plains, Valleyview or Riverside Schools. She said the School District will compile the information when returned by the parents and they would let the parents know the outcome. She said it was giving the parents the choice but not all parents know anything about those schools and will have to learn what each school had to offer.

The commission held a brief discussion on the matter.

Chair Miller stated that the commission would request an explanation of the other 3 school choices and the number of available spaces.

**Further exploration of the graffiti issue**

Chair Miller stated Commissioner Heegan brought up the subject of graffiti at the April meeting and she had good publicity on the matter since then.

Commissioner Heegan stated that Ian Austin, a photographer for the Hometown Oneonta newspaper has been on the Arts Mural project and he was passionate about that. She said he and others in the community were concerned about graffiti and getting it cleaned up and were happy to hear that the matter was being discussed by the commission. She said it was hoped that the story in the newspaper would be sort of a catalyst to move things forward for a program on cleaning up graffiti. She said the idea of a program still needed to be presented to go to the Common Council and she questioned what the process was for that and what would the Council need to see or hear about it such as the "New York City Graffiti-free" information she got.

Chair Miller stated she would have to check on that. She questioned what the commission needed from the Common Council on this.

Commissioner Heegan responded the first step was if the city actually had a law that says it was graffiti free and had zero tolerance for graffiti. She said the commission would need the support of the Council and to say for the commission to move forward with it as a community relations service project, whether it was housed through the commission or where did it lie in the city to a formal program that perhaps people come and apply to it such as business owners or private residences that have graffiti on their buildings. It should be at minimal cost to them to have it removed and to get a volunteer base to have the equipment of a power-washer, chemicals, or some other option. She said step 2 was where would it be appropriate for public displays of public art in the city.

Commissioner Kelly spoke briefly about the Chinese wall that the sororities and fraternities usually paint things on it, not graffiti per se, but usually use it for advertising their group. He said if there was going to be a graffiti-free city ordinance he wondered what would happen with that wall as for being a crime and what the police would think about that in regard to arrests. He said he thought there had to be conversation on that. He said he would check the information on the New York City Graffiti-free website and then talk to Police Chief Naylor about it and report back to the commission.

Chair Miller stated Commissioner Heegan had mentioned the Youth Center being in on discussion on this somewhere and she asked her to expand on how they felt they might be involved.

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**PG. 3**

**(Old Business)** continued

Commissioner Heegan stated she thought having community organizations wanting to pitch in and help and the other program she had mentioned with the Alternatives to Incarceration to do a community service under supervision.

Chair Miller questioned where Commissioner Heegan would see the administration of this program if it was put into effect.

Commissioner Heegan responded she thought it did need to be housed somewhere and once the program was structured and there were applications that could be accepted by the city for clean-up of graffiti on a building, etc. She said the commission could review the applications, make decisions on them and assign a volunteer group such as the various service organizations that could alternate each month.

Chair Miller questioned if the commissioner was saying the commission would be the coordinator of this program and accepts and reviews applications sent to the commission through the City Clerk's Office.

Commissioner Heegan responded she visions it that way. She said the program in New York City was run through their Community Relations Commission. She said basically this program was for the beautification of the city.

Chair Miller questioned if the commission would work with the Youth Center if doing a mural in some of the areas that had formerly been graffiti-ed would be appropriate.

Commissioner Heegan responded correct.

Commissioner Redlein stated he had taken some pictures of places that had graffiti.

Chair Miller asked that the commissioners keep the commission updated by e-mails on any progress made on the matter. She said she would check on the process for Council presentation and if that was something liaison Council Member Southard may do.

**ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE YEAR 2012**

Chair Miller stated the floor was open for nominations for chair of the commission.

Some commission members expressed an interest in nominating Commissioner Mohammad but felt it only fair that he be present to accept or decline.

Chair Miller stated she could contact Commissioner Mohammad and ask him about it.

Chair Miller stated that another issue was that Commissioner Pegram was only going to be on the commission until he moves in June.

The commission held a brief discussion on possible candidates to fill the upcoming vacancy and suggestions were made of Ibram Rogers if he lived in the city and to ask Commissioner Pegram if he knew of anyone.

Chair Miller stated she would check on both of those suggestions.

**NEW BUSINESS**

Commissioner Sivers stated she had a long conversation recently with Joseph Stillman, a local film

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**(New Business)** continued

director and who was very active in the Skate Park, the Teen Center and others activities in the city. She said Mr. Stillman received permission from the director of the film "I Am" to do a premier of the film, possibly at Foothills and afterwards have a forum for conversation with community leaders and others about how the community could be connected and work together. She said she told him she would inform the commission about this. She said the film promotes community connection. She said she did not know if it involved the commission but if she gets more information about it she would let the commission know.

There being no further business to come before the commission, Chair Miller adjourned the regular meeting at approximately 8:00 p.m.

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JAMES R. KOURY, City Clerk

JRK/pab