

**ONEONTA, NEW YORK - MARCH 29, 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 (vacant)  
Commissioner Jeffrey Pegram  
Commissioner Fida Mohammad  
Council Member Russ Southard

**ABSENT:** Commissioner Teressa Sivers  
Commissioner Tom Kelly

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

**PETITIONERS**

Chair Miller welcomed guests Crystal Tandle and Jeremy Redlein.

Ms. Tandle stated she was an apprentice for a media course she was taking.

Mr. Redlein announced that PFLAG was now meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Church's Olympia Brown House on Ford Avenue and that has been helping with attendance.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

The Chair indicated that there was no correspondence.

**OLD BUSINESS**

1. 2012 Women's Trailblazer Award – Selection of recipient and schedule a Common Council meeting for presentation of the award
2. Newspaper articles
3. A grandmother's phone request about a Job Corps student
4. A concern about the possible closing of Center Street School
5. The graffiti on the Gelbsman building that can be seen from Market Street

*2012 Women's Trailblazer Award – Selection of recipient and schedule a Common Council meeting for presentation of the award*

Chair Miller stated that this meeting's main concern was the choosing of the 2012 Women's Trailblazer Award. She said all the nominations were e-mailed to the commissioners for review. She said placed on the table was information on what the award was about and the criteria for nominations. She said last year the commission decided to contact persons who had nominated people in years past to see if they wanted to resubmit any of the names. She said in doing that this year some of them did. She said there were six completed applications for nominees for recognition in two out of the seven award categories, Human/Community Resources and Career Achiever. She said it was possible to choose more than one recipient for the award but the commission had been leaning toward choosing just one in most recent years.

The commission reviewed and discussed the applications for nominations.

Chair Miller stated it was a tough decision to choose among the nominees submitted but after a thorough review the commission unanimously chose one recipient, Margery K. Merzig in the category of Career Achiever. She said she would contact Ms. Merzig and notify those who nominated the other persons by letter.

Chair Miller stated that those not chosen would stay in the pool for next year as well as any new applications that would come in. She said this recipient would be recognized with a reception in the lobby of City Hall at 6:30 p.m. and present the award at the April 17<sup>th</sup> Common Council meeting if the recipient is available that day, if not another Common Council meeting date would be arranged for the presentation.

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Chair Miller returned to the approval of the minutes.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The commission approves the minutes of the regular meetings held May 25, 2011 and January 26, 2012, as written, without benefit of a motion.

The Chair returned to items of Old Business.

*A grandmother's phone request about a Job Corps student*

Chair Miller stated she received a phone call from a grandmother in New York City regarding her grandson who was attending Oneonta Job Corps and had gotten into an incident and was in jail. She said the grandmother said because she lived in New York City distance was a problem and she was looking for support and someone who could go to the jail and talk with the grandson and the lawyer to find out what was going on. She said the grandmother was calling it a bullying incident that ended up in Job Corps. She said she then called Lee Fisher, head of the Oneonta NAACP knowing that they had the means to investigate these kinds of things. She said Lee Fisher contacted the grandmother and then an NAACP representative contacted her. She said the last time she talked with the grandmother she was pleased with the way the NAACP was handling the situation. She said after all of the commission's discussions in the past on how to handle such reports and the decision being to refer such things to the NAACP, she said the system worked.

*A concern about the possible closing of Center Street School*

Chair Miller recognized Commissioner Heegan because she had expressed concern about the possible closing of Center Street School which was still a high priority.

Commissioner Heegan stated she did not know if anything had been finalized and if it was definitely closing. She said the concern at this point from a community relations standpoint was if the school should close that there has not been any open communication out there as far where the children would go to school and what determines that. She said she thought that was important to know. She questioned if there was something the commission could do to be proactive.

The commission held a brief discussion on the matter and the following items were agreed upon to address long range concerns:

- That the School Board be more open about process and there be better community input from the start into the process of what happens.
- The commission to send an official letter to the Oneonta City School District School Board and Superintendent asking for open communication about possible solutions. (Commissioner Heegan will draft the letter and e-mail it to Chair Miller to review and ask the Mayor to review it before sending it)

*The graffiti on the Gelbsman building that can be seen from Market Street*

Chair Miller stated another issue of concern was the graffiti on the Gelbsman building that could be seen from Market Street.

Commissioner Heegan stated she had done more research and found they were other parts in the city where there was graffiti. She said she looked into how New York City tackled graffiti and they had a graffiti free program that was run through the city. She said if Oneonta took this as a citywide approach and asked Council Member Southard to take a recommendation from the commission to the Common Council asking if there was a grant available to have this program where there could be volunteers from "Alternatives to Incarceration" through the court system. She said she called Catholic Charities and asked about the program and there were other community sponsored programs through a service club with volunteers to do a community

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PG. 3

(Old Business – Graffiti, etc) continued

service project of removing the graffiti. She said it could be sustainable by making it public that people could apply for this program through the city to have the graffiti removed from their building without cost. She said as for the liability issues related to this program through Alternatives to Incarceration, the organization was covered by liability insurance as long as there was somebody to supervise them while they were doing that type of work. She said depending on the type of graffiti on the building there could be the need to use a high-power pressure washer, chemicals, etc. She said cost-wise she did not see it as being a very costly project if it was something that would sustain the beautification of the city and Main Street. She said the commission would need to know if the Council would be willing to explore this and to see if there was grant money to support it.

The commission held a brief discussion on the matter.

Chair Miller questioned how the part of the problem would be solved if it was removed and it keeps reappearing.

Commissioner Heegan suggested making a statement that there was “0” tolerance for graffiti and if someone was found doing that they would be prosecuted and to work with the Police Department and suggest they have a more heightened awareness of that.

Commissioner Heegan asked if Council Member Southard could ask the Council if this would be something they would be willing to explore in a citywide program.

Council Member Southard stated if the commission was looking for grant money and saying there would be volunteers he questioned how money would be involved.

Commissioner Heegan responded the money would be for the cost of the supplies of the graffiti removal process. She said there would be the need to tap into some people that understood the type of graffiti and how it would be removed. She said she could inquire about that. She said she spoke with Public Service Supervisor Harrison and he said that the city did have power-washers if need be.

Chair Miller questioned if the commission should take more time on this and look into the possibility of involving the city’s Youth Program and when the spaces were cleaned would there be people to do murals like they did downtown.

The commission held a brief discussion on spaces in the city that graffiti was an expression of art or tradition such as the Chinese Wall. She stated that the commission did have to take into consideration that the city was expressive and a community of culture and art.

Chair Miller stated that this graffiti issue needed to be discussed further in terms of the mural project, graffiti-welcome spaces, etc and she would have it placed on the commission’s April agenda for further exploration.

Newspaper articles

Chair Miller stated the commission had discussed submitting articles to the newspaper letting the community know the commission existed and what it did and how people could refer to it. She said she thought getting into these other initiatives would take care of that.

There being no further business to come before the commission, Chair Miller adjourned the regular meeting at 8:20 p.m.

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JAMES R. KOURY, City Clerk

JRK/pab