

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

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

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

ABSENT: Commissioner Sita Fey
Commissioner Jeffrey Pegram
Commissioner Fida Mohammad
Council Member Larry Malone

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

Chair Miller welcomed Mayor Miller and she said he would talk about the commission.

Mayor Miller stated this was a group that has added value. He said the group had never really known exactly what it was supposed to do and could have a lot more and he was interested in adding a lot more. He said there had been a historic push and pull inside the commission to have some authority to act. He said there had been pushback from the City Attorney regarding the judicial system and not being confused with those entities that exist with legal responsibilities to deal with issues of law incidents as appropriate. He said with that said the commission had been a sounding board from time to time on matters of controversy and has conducted events such as the Trailblazer Award, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration. He said the city did provide some resources to the commission in the budget and thought it would provide more if the commission was to present ideas that required additional funds that the Council could agree made sense. He said he did not think the commission should feel constrained in ideas. He said he also thought the commission could look at ways to continue to keep the issue of diversity at a higher level of community consciousness throughout the year. He said he did not think that there was a black employee in the city's workforce and was concerned about that. He said the city was close to hiring 4-6 new Police Officers and there were several well-qualified black candidates and some of Hispanic background. He said it goes beyond the black community and it goes beyond the Police Department and he did not think the government itself was a good example of an organization with a group which reflects an interracial society. He said he did not know what the role of this commission might be in that area but he viewed this commission as a group that holds the community accountable to deal with people of different backgrounds in a respectful way and hold city government accountable for that. He said he encourages the commission to look for ways that it thought it could discharge that mission. He said if there was a crisis of some sort the commission should be assured he would try to assist and try to find funds for them. He said he would like to have the commission be more effective and feel better about itself. He asked that the commission discuss that and get back to him with ideas.

The commission held a brief discussion with the Mayor on some issues, past incidents and events in the city and the commission's involvement.

Chair Miller stated that a decision had been made by the commission that in certain instances was to refer it to the NAACP because they had the mechanism for dealing with them and looking into situations in detail.

Mayor Miller stated his sense was that the relationship of the commission with Regina Betts and Lee Fisher of the NAACP was constructive.

Chair Miller stated that the commission did upgrade its page on the city website saying what the commission was about. She said lately the commission has struggled because quite often has not had a quorum at regular meetings.

Mayor Miller spoke briefly about diversity in the city in general and the colleges.

Chair Miller stated that when the commission was in the midst of following up on the racial incident the commission talked about training and she also approached the presidents of both SUCO and

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PG. 2

(Discussion with the Mayor) continued

Hartwick College. She said she had good discussions with them and found out that they had more to offer us than they could offer them, particularly at Hartwick with the wellness program and diversity trainers and at SUCO they had the cultural center. She said the colleges had resources on some of the issues the commission was concerned about that maybe the commission could plug into.

Commissioner Sivers stated that the commission had talked in the past about perhaps doing newspaper articles periodically about some of the diversity issues and maybe highlighting different populations.

Mayor Miller stated in regard to the recent Thanksgiving service held in Oneonta he said that was very diverse and the person who organized it knew who to bring to the table because it was really effective. He said he would leave discussion to the commission at this time.

Chair Miller stated prior to her becoming Chair of the commission Harry Bradshaw Matthews served in the position. She said he was a professor at Hartwick and he was an event person and he would get the commission all excited about an event and the plans. She said the commission has had its events in recent years and has talked about different ideas such as Commissioner Sivers idea of a periodic newspaper article on diversity, or a block party, and indicated the commission could continue with them or other ideas.

ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE YEAR 2012

Chair Miller stated that Election of Chair would be deferred to the February meeting when there was a full commission.

CORRESPONDENCE

The Chair indicated there was no correspondence.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Chair indicated Approval of Minutes of the regular meeting held May 25, 2011 would be deferred to the February meeting when there was a full commission.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Women's Trailblazer Award
2. Evaluation of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration

Women's Trailblazer Award

Chair Miller stated copies of the 2011 forms for Trailblazer nominations were distributed. She said the commission had presented the award for the past 5 years and she spoke briefly about past recipients and the categories they were voted in for recognition.

The commission held a brief discussion on deadlines for the receipt of the formal nomination forms and letters and agreed that the 6th annual award nominations needed to be received by February 17th and because March was Women's History Month the award will be presented at a March Common Council meeting, depending on the availability of the candidate.

Chair Miller stated that the commission would review the nominations at the February 23rd commission meeting and select a recipient.

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(Old Business) continue

Chair Miller stated she would get the information to City Clerk Koury who would put the updated information on the website and send out the press release.

Commissioner Kelly questioned if the commission would get all the nominations before the February 23rd meeting to review them.

Chair Miller responded yes and that the nominations are usually sent in the packets or e-mailed. She said she would inquire about having those that may come in the mail late scanned and e-mailed to the commission.

Evaluation of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration

Chair Miller stated that Commissioner Heegan and she had attended the event and she asked her to share her feelings about it with the commission.

Commissioner Heegan stated that the event was held at the Baptist Church on Chestnut Street and it was fabulous. She said she was very impressed and it was very touching. She said the speakers were phenomenal. She said toward the end of the event they all gathered in a circle and sang and she thought the vibes in the room were very positive.

Chair Miller stated she agreed and she spoke briefly on some of the speakers who talked about school children in poverty, the housing issue and homelessness and bullying.

Commissioner Sivars questioned if affordable housing issues would fall under the commission's attention. She said the city's Housing Forum was scheduled for February 4th and invitations were sent out.

Chair Miller responded that the NAACP has at times had some issues along this line but the economic and community relations part may be that of the commission.

Commissioner Kelly questioned if the "community relations" part in the commission's title meant community relations in general and was there a difference between community relations and human rights.

Chair Miller stated the commission was defined in the Charter as fostering relations among all persons of the community.

The commission held a brief discussion on the matter.

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

JAMES R. KOURY, City Clerk

JRK/pab