

NEWTON YOUTH COMMISSION Meeting

October 7, 2009 MINUTES

Location: Newton City Hall Cafeteria

Present: Joe De Vito (Chair), Donna Gordon, Robert Staulo; Tony Bibbo, Peter Harrington, Ofc. Jeff Mace, Ellen Manning, Steph Pelkowsky, John Staulo
Students: Zachary Eagle, Gerry Lueng

Regrets: Richard Dyer, Terance Sack; Marianne Cook, Chris Fortunato, Matt Green, Stephan Ross, Kirsten Tuohy
Students: Tamara Matama, Kyle Olson, Zoe Pepper-Cunningham, Adam Sangiolo, Ariana Tabatabaie

Staff: Beverly Droz, Director, Human and Volunteer Services

Guests: none

The meeting was opened at 7:10 PM and chaired by Joe De Vito.

Introductions were made and the agenda was reviewed. Condolences were offered to Stephanie on the death of her mother.

A motion to accept the minutes of June 22, 2009 was made by Steph and seconded by Peter.
The motion to accept the minutes passed.

There was no new activity for a Treasurer's report.

Nominations

Bev explained there has recently been an updating of the City's software for tracking all commission members. Bev has been working with the Mayor's office and Clerk's office to learn what they have for dates of expiration for members and which members need re-appointments. Bev noted that Terry Sack has served the maximum terms in a row that is allowed for a Commissioner but was told that we can nominate him to the Advisory Board.

A motion was made by Peter and seconded by Donna to nominate Terry Sack as an Advisory Board member and the motion passed unanimously.

Joe invited members to think about other potential members for the Youth Commission.

New or Old Business

There was discussion about changing our meeting location for meetings, perhaps on February 3 and April 7, 2010. Members made various suggested locations including: the West Newton Police community room, various buildings that are operated by Parks & Recreation, NSHS, NNHS, the new Upper Falls Youth Center and the West Newton Youth Centers.

Coffee House Event Planning

At the last meeting, we tentatively planned a new Coffee House benefit event for Friday, Dec. 4. Bev noted that recently emailed members when she learned a formal kickoff opening is planned for evening of Dec. 3 for the NCSC Teen Center in Newton Upper Falls. The new teen director for that location is also sponsoring an AIDS awareness benefit on Saturday, December 5.

Bev also read the email feedback comments from Kirsten and Terry, who could not be present this evening. Kirsten has spoken with several students who are interested in performing if the event takes place in December, and that the preference among students is for a Friday night rather than Saturday night event. Terry suggested that the two events could feed off one another and that cross-promotion may do well for both events.

Tony Bibbo stated that he felt there was no longer community awareness of the existence of the Youth Commission.

Bev stated that he brought this issue to Joe and Bev after the September meeting and we sent Tony a letter detailing the Youth Commission's "behind the scenes" involvement that has emerged since 2005 when Health & Human Services merged. While this outreach doesn't extend to the "whole community", it has helped many sub-communities recognize the Youth Commission. She noted several points:

1. In 2005, Bev founded the city's Youth Interagency Task Force (YITF) which still meets quarterly. All non-profit agencies and city departments (including school administration) dealing with youth issues come to the table to share information and resources. This has resulted in other agencies knowing about our Youth Commission work, and each agency knowing about all the other agencies! Along with Bev -- Joe, Stephanie, Marianne and Officer Mace attend meetings. Bev is also the administrator of the YITF list-serve which has 90 representatives – and information is share by email with them.
2. Over a year ago, the Newton Public Schools won the \$6 million grant "Safe Schools/Healthy Students". Bev is the Human Services & Youth Commission representative to these meetings and is on their list-serve, receiving all their information and being back in touch with them regarding the Youth Commission, youth issues, resources, etc. Marianne Cook also represents Youth Commission issues whenever needed. This is now called "The Newton Partnership".
3. Our Youth Commission is the co-sponsor of 2 highly prized resources that Bev has published over the past 2 years, "Youth Services in Newton" and "Drug & Alcohol Prevention". These are available in hard copy and on-line. They are distributed in school offices, at the non-profit agencies, and to parents who request them. Bev expects to continue to keep updating and publishing them because she noted it is such a resource to parents.
4. We've added new Youth Commission members in the past several years like Marianne Cook from Riverside, Ellen Manning from NCSC, Kirsten Tuohy and John Staulo from NNHS, and Chris Fortunato whom we had worked with for years when he was at NCSC. All have been active and helpful, promoting the Youth Commission as do our longer-term members. Bev noted that when she starting staffing the Youth Commission, there were always 5 teen representatives. She has been encouraging more. This 2009-10 year we have 7 so far. Last year we had a total of 15.
5. The Board of Alderman is aware of our Commission as much as they are aware of the many other commissions. They review our budget every year. They receive our publications, as does the Mayor. With a new Mayor, there'll be an opportunity to re-visit these issues and we will take a leadership role in doing so.

Bev also noted that our Dept. of Health & Human Services:

- Administers, along with the School Dept., the Youth Behavior Risk Survey to Newton youth every 2 years
- Contracts with Riverside and other agencies for various youth services including of course, mental health outreach

- Staffs all of the public schools with our department nurses, bringing another networking circle into our pool of knowledge about youth issues

While this is not directly related to the Youth Commission, it is very helpful that this information and these resources are at our fingertips, and therefore we as the Youth Commission can immediately be back in touch with them when anything comes up.

In summary, Bev stated there is now much more coordination of youth issues, there is an ongoing inventory of youth services, and our Youth Commission is an active part of it.

Discussion followed:

- Bob Staulo stated that he doesn't think that the coffeehouse is part of the mission of the Youth Commission. He said that information needs to circulate in the community about issues that help teens and youth, such as our publications about Youth Services and drug and alcohol prevention. We could do more with other issues as well.
- Peter stated that the ordinance says to coordinate with Youth Services. Perhaps with the new mayor, we will be able to refocus.
- Donna said that there is a new initiative at NSHS, the **Restorative Justice** (RJ) Circle. Bev, Ellen and Donna explained it to the group. The idea behind Restorative Circles and Programs are to confront criminal activity with a healing approach, bringing together the offender, the victim and the community in ways to restore trust, and ultimately, to reduce the likelihood of recidivism. In Newton, the goal is for the schools to build a coalition with the courts and law enforcement to implement the RJ program in the schools. Bev noted that the Safe Schools/Healthy Schools grant is partially geared toward implementing the RJ program, and that the RJ leaders presented what they are doing in Newton to the Human Rights Commission this past June. They are looking to involved community members. Donna said it would be helpful to have them present to the Youth Commission.
- John Staulo suggested that the kids should help plan things that interest them.
- Tony stated that we could invite the experts from other organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club.
- Stephanie suggested that something that brings kids together regularly, like the coffeehouse, but in different locations, would be good.
- Peter said rotation of the coffeehouse could involve other groups such as the JCC, Brigham House, Boys and Girls Club, YMCA and local churches and temples, and teens could help organize it.
- Zach Eagle said that we need kids to talk to kids about the Youth Commission. He happened to learn about it from his father who knows a Youth Commission member.
- Gerry Leung said that he joined the Commission to help his resume for college.
- Officer Jeff Mace suggested that we have Youth Commission awareness at middle school dances.
- Peter suggested coordinating with the PTO's.
- Ellen and Stephanie mentioned selling candy bars at events but Donna said it is no longer permitted by the high schools.
- Tony stated that there was a Halloween dance in the past that was successful. He suggested that if we could get agencies together and plan for next year, we could plan a citywide dance. Donna added that perhaps it could be for 9th graders.
- Ellen stated that she's seeing an increase in youth crime and asked the group for suggestions as to what we can do. Donna stated that drug and alcohol use, not theft appears to be increasing.
- Jeff added that cyber bullying, texting and indecent assaults are a problem and that kids are watching things at a younger age. He suggested we sponsor a cyber-bulling seminar this spring instead of drug and alcohol abuse.
- Zach said that the students take a wellness class that addresses many issues. Ellen noted that in our technological society, kids are desensitized at an early age to many things.
- Joe suggested the Youth Commission put out a letter to parents identifying resources and how to get information. Stephanie suggested we circulate a monthly newsletter or flyer.

- Jeff noted that parents think it is wrong to check their kids' cell phones. Peter added that there are parents who don't have a clue as to what is appropriate for their kids. Donna said Project Alliance is working on that.

Donna would like Rich Catrambone to present on Restorative Justice at our next meeting.

Members agreed about approaching Chris Fortunato for possible seminars in the spring.

Members agreed to hold 2 to 4 meetings, between February through April at different locations, particularly at NSHS and NNHS, to help the goal of outreaching to new students. Tony is willing to contact other non-profits like the Boys & Girls Club to "get them to the table".

Joe thanked everyone for their time and input. At this point, unless all Youth Commission student members can be active in the planning of an event like a coffeehouse, we would table it for now.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.

The next meeting will be Wednesday, November 4 at 7 PM

Respectfully submitted by Beverly Droz