

COMMUNITY AND RACE RELATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

OCTOBER 3, 2001

PRESENT: Ms. Betty Thomas, Chair  
Mr. Tom Rissesco  
Mr. David Khokhar  
Mr. Shawn Lahey  
Ms. Sylvia Parris  
Mr. Haji Amari  
Mr. Juan Carlos Canales-Leyton  
Councillor Sloane  
Councillor Colwell

ALSO PRESENT: Cst. Cedric Upshaw  
Ms. Charla Williams, Diversity Program Coordinator  
Ms. Lynne Le Boutillier, Assistant Municipal Clerk

REGRETS: Mr. Massicotte, Ms. Lui and Mr. Chedrawe

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The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 4:50 p.m., Conference Room 1, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Duke Tower.

In her opening remarks the Chair apologized for not having been able to make the August meeting due to illness. She thanked Mr. Lahey for filling in for her. Unfortunately there was no quorum, so the meeting could not proceed.

#### 1.0 **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

The agenda was approved, as circulated, on motion of Mr. Rissesco and Mr. Lahey.

#### 2.0 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Previously circulated had been the minutes of the June 6, 2001 meeting and notes of the July 4, 2001 meeting. The June 6, 2001 minutes were adopted, as circulated, on motion of Mr. Rissesco and Ms. Parris.

#### 3.0 **BUSINESS ARISING FROM MINUTES**

##### 3.1 **COMMUNITY AND RACE RELATIONS POLICY**

Circulated at the meeting were copies of an e-mail exchange between Mr. Lahey and Ms. Cale regarding endorsement for the Policy Statement of the Community and Race Relations Advisory Committee.

Mr. Lahey advised the Committee that he has spoken to Paul Connors, Chair of the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities. He understands that their Committee is not looking for changes but a way to adopt what the Committee already has.

During discussion of this item, it was recalled that the Committee had once discussed whether this would be a good time to review the Policy, in general, and make any needed changes to wording for clarity purposes. Mr. Lahey did not feeling the wording was unclear. Similarly, Mr. Canales-Leyton did not feel there was a need for change. Referring to the e-mail, it was noted that Ms. Cale, in the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph, states "it is not meant to change, alter, or revise the statement", which confirmed Mr. Lahey's interpretation.

In conclusion, Mr. Lahey offered to attend the Monday, October 15 meeting of the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities. The Chair requested that Mr. Lahey report back to the next meeting the outcome of the meeting. In the interim, Mr. Lahey indicated he would e-mail the Chair of any changes they may require prior to the November meeting.

#### 4.0 **COMMUNITY AND RACE RELATIONS POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

## **COMMITTEE UPDATE**

Ms. Williams reported on the second annual HRM Workplace Diversity Week which was held September 16 to 22, 2001. While there had been some discussion of cancelling Diversity Week, scheduled so soon after September 11<sup>th</sup>, the event was held and it was felt to have been an good decision, as it focused in a positive way on diversity.

Particular reference was made to the following highlights:

- C Week proclaimed at Council.
- C Kick-Off, sponsored by Tourism, Culture and Heritage - Involved a large map of HRM touring to various work sites and staff being invited to identify on the map where they reside and write a comment. This initiative was very well received. The map is to be displayed in the entrance way of the HRM Training Room, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Duke Tower.
- C Number of pot lucks held through HRM. More pot lucks were held this year and there were more participants. It is felt that the pot lucks should be scheduled for Thursday rather than Friday in future years so more people can participate.

A photo album of some of the events was circulated to the members.

Ms. Williams referred to a Human Resources Workshop she attended yesterday out of which a number of recommendations were developed to increase diversity within the HRM workforce. Hopefully these will be well received by management.

The Chair reflected that a number of employees indicated to her how pleased they were with the events associated with Diversity Week.

Councillor Sloane indicated she had also received good feedback. She advised that she had mentioned at Council the map and encouraged the Councillors to add their messages.

Ms. Williams was asked to pass along to the Community and Race Relations Policy Committee compliments from the Community and Race Relations Advisory Committee.

### **5.0 CHAIR'S REPORT**

The Chair referred to an e-mail she sent the members today regarding the fact that there had not been a quorum for a couple of meetings. She emphasized the need for members to advise the Secretary if they can't attend a meeting. If they are going to be absent for a period of time, there is also a need to know, as it affects the business of the Committee. The Chair referred to an earlier discussion with Councillor Colwell on how to address the problems with quorums. It was suggested that perhaps the quorum number, in the terms of the reference, be reduced. It was concluded that rather than changing the rules, a change

in membership may be required. The Chair emphasized that she recognized that everyone was a volunteer and it can be difficult at times to attend meetings. In theory, after three consecutive meetings are missed, one is no longer a member.

Reference was made to the HRM advertisement for volunteers. While the initial deadline was September 26<sup>th</sup>, the Secretary advised that it has been extended to October 19. The Chair asked the members to actively recruit individuals they know to apply to not only this Committee but HRM committees in general. The Committee has previously addressed the subject of diverse representation on all HRM committees.

### **BROCHURES**

Copies of the brochure were distributed to the members by Ms. Williams. The members were encouraged to alert staff of events where it would be useful to have the brochures available.

For the present, the Chair asked that they be distributed to the various HRM storefronts and HRM libraries. She will provide a contact name for the libraries to Ms. Williams and pass along any other locations to her as they come to mind. Ms. Williams will be working with Kelly Marney to add the brochure to the HRM Web site.

### **6.0 WORKPLAN**

Referring to the 2001-2002 Workplan, the Chair proposed the establishment of committee(s) to accomplish various activities and to establish communications. The Chair solicited ideas from the members on how to get people involved and engaged in helping to accomplish the tasks outlined in the work plan.

Councillor Sloane suggested the following:

- C The compilation of media reports related to multicultural/diversity issues, both positive and negative. A small report would be given monthly to basically inform members of what is taking place.
- C Once information is gathered and verified, the Committee consider what it can do to implement change, i.e. develop an action plan.
- C Utilize the media or HRM Web site to communicate with the public on how the Committee feels about various issues.
- C Hold a forum(s) re September 11<sup>th</sup>.
- C Identify events the diverse communities hold in the community and promote them. A

member attend and critique the experience. Ms. Williams cautioned against the promotion of events, until the Committee is sure their information is accurate.

- C On the HRM Web site identify holidays associated with the various cultures. Ms. Parris suggested making a link to the Multicultural Society. Ms. Williams felt the HRM could handle, staff only needs the information to load. Kelly Marney, Webmaster, Shared Services is interested in doing more.

Ms. Parris emphasized the need to connect activities with the work plan. She observed that some of the activities lend themselves to committee work. She felt there was a need to operationalize the workplan. She felt that everything the Committee talks about should be in some way attached to the work plan and if it is not, it should not be discussed. A Task/Function Committee was proposed.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- C There may be a need to modify the work plan as a result of September 11.
- C The work plan should be seen as a guideline, not a bible. The need for flexibility.
- C Ms. Williams is attending a round table in Ottawa October 16<sup>th</sup> sponsored by the FCM. There is a tie in with the Metropolis Conference. She noted the desire to open an Atlantic Centre for Metropolis. There may be things resulting from this roundtable that the Committee may wish to incorporate in the workplan.
- C Referring to Activity 1, bullet 2 - Develop a feedback mechanism on the HRM web site to receive input from the community, Mr. Canales-Leyton indicated he'd like to participate in such an endeavour. If the Committee wanted to put a question on the Website, it should be done on a monthly basis rather than weekly given the Committee's schedule. Clarification was sought as to whether the discussions involved the HRM website or just the Committee's page. Reference was made to links being established, with perhaps another icon at the bottom of the HRM page.

There was considerable discussion of the above noted idea. It was concluded that a Working Group, to deal with diversity on the HRM Web site and the media as it relates to diversity, be established. Councillor Sloane, Mr. Canales-Leyton, Sylvia Parris, Ms. Williams, Ms. Thomas and Mr. Rissesco expressed interest in participating. Others were invited to join, if they so desired. If not actually part of the committee, other members were encouraged to throw out ideas to the working group. It is the working group's intention to utilize e-mail to communicate rather than hold meetings.

## 7.0 **ISSUES AFFECTING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES**

Referring to the September 11, 2001 event, Mr. Canales-Leyton outlined to the members situations Muslims in the community have faced. Particular reference was made to HRP, RCMP and plainclothes officers' surveillance of the Centre of Islamic Development Head Office on Robie Street, which houses a multi-purpose centre and rents rooms to mostly students from various countries. Following September 11<sup>TH</sup>, the centre received four visits from various policing services questioning the residents who were scared and distraught.

Reference was made to a spokesperson for the Halifax Regional Police Service indicating there were "no other reports of anything happening" in the community following the incident in Bedford. Mr. Canales-Leyton knew personally of two complaints filed with the Police Department associated with September 11<sup>th</sup>. He questioned how the Police spokesperson could say there had been no other complaints. He concluded that everything is not as rosy, as the above mentioned statement makes it sound. The Coast publication was commended on its reporting, particularly of an incident involving a man praying and being asked for identification. He noted that he thought of calling the Chair or the HRP about these incidents.

Reference was also made to the incident in Bedford which the Police contend was not hate related. It was noted that no one in the Muslim community believes this.

Also related to the Committee, by Mr. Amari were problems Muslim women encounter traveling on Metro Transit. It was emphasized that these problems don't relate to the bus drivers but fellow passengers. They ranged from passengers not allowing the women to sit beside them, by putting articles of vacant seats, to actually elbowing a woman who was seated. Mr. Canales-Leyton was pleased to report that in this instance, the bus driver gave the offending individual an ultimatum, either behave or get off the bus.

Mr. Khokhar related his personal experience of being a Christian in Pakistan in the 1940s. He sympathized with the Muslims, noting that it is his experience that all minorities are treated similarly. The Chair thanked Mr. Khokhar for sharing his experiences, especially in light of what happened September 11<sup>th</sup>. It helps the members understand.

Reflecting on the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the Chair noted that each one of the members is affected in various degrees and lives will be forever changed.

Referring to a suggestion made earlier in the meeting regarding using the Web page to promote festivals, Mr. Lahey noted that is likely to make these groups potentially more vulnerable to hate crimes and attacks. It has been reported that in the United States information is being taken off web sites for this reason. He cautioned that the Committee's honest intention could be used against the very principles the Committee wishes to promote. Care will have to be taken when putting information on the Web site.

Anger was expressed by Ms. Williams that it appears individuals are using September 11<sup>th</sup> to conduct a lot of racist activities and the Muslim and Arabic communities are becoming victims of hate crimes.

It was felt that the Centre for Islamic Development is owed an apology and the Committee should go on record. It was also felt that municipal staff, particularly Police and Transit, need to educate themselves.

Several suggestions were put forward to address the situation. They were as follows:

- C **The Committee address Council to raise awareness of what is taking place in this community. It was felt that it would only be safe to have staff or the councillors give such a presentation to protect people's privacy. (Step 3)**
- C Pass along the comments to policing services and transit. It was noted that the drivers probably don't know what to do in certain situations.
- C A presentation be given to representatives of various business units, with an opportunity for them to ask questions.
- C It was felt it would not be useful to make a presentation to the Implementation Committee as there are no senior staff on it.
- C **An in depth information session with Senior Staff. The RCMP would be included, as they police a portion of HRM. The intent was to have the information passed on to the various business units. (Step 2)**
- C An audio tape of individuals affected directly, telling the story of what they experienced. Testimony of the community both good and bad would be included.
- C The Committee do a press release. The Committee should make a statement. It would be within its mandate. Mr. O'Brien and Ms. Patterson would have to be contacted.
- C **Have a private meeting with the Mayor, Acting CAO and Deputy CAO. The purpose would to educate and to alert the Municipality on an issue that they have to be prepared to deal with effectively and appropriately. Problems could be explained and some examples of instances given. There were several advantages it was felt to this approach. (Step 1)**

It was decided to act upon this suggestion immediately. The Chair will try to arrange an appointment as soon as possible. She will try for Friday.

- C Discuss with Police Services and other business units the situation in a manner which gives them an opportunity to learn.

**\*It was decided to pursue the items in bold.** The intent is to do in quick succession. The Chair encouraged all the members to make themselves available for these meetings. As she was going on vacation, a lot of organization would have to be done by Mr. Canales-Leyton. Members were encouraged to pass along experiences recounted to them to Ms. Williams. Mr. Canales-Leyton proposed doing up an incident sheet for people to fill out.

Several comments were made that in fact the media is doing a relatively good job of education. It was noted that the letters to the editor have been very positive.

Ms. Parris reiterated that a lot of time had been spent discussing the media's role, both positive and negative, related to September 11<sup>th</sup> and subsequent events. She felt it would be a significant omission if the Committee did not provide the media with a statement regarding the situation. Ms. Williams suggested this be mentioned at the meeting with the Mayor, CAO and Deputy CAO. It might be desirable for the HRM and the Committee to make a joint press release denouncing hate crime activities which are a backlash to the events of September 11th.

In closing, the Chair thanked everyone for participating in the above noted discussions. She asked everyone to try to arrive at some workable suggestions for what the Committee can do. In the interim, she and Mr. Canales-Leyton will endeavour to make the things which came out of this evening's deliberations happen.

## 8.0 **NEW BUSINESS**

### 8.1 **COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM 2002 - 2003**

Circulated in the agenda package was a memo from Peta-Jane Temple, Coordinator, Grants Program dated September 9, 2001. The memo had been accompanied by a Grant Application Form and the Community Grants Guidebook for 2002-2003. The application deadline has been moved to January 31, 2001, it was noted.

It was requested that Ms. Temple be provided with the mailing list for the members and asked to send out the form and guidebook to the individuals.

### 8.2 **INTERNATIONAL FOOD DAY AND INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF POVERTY**

Mr. Canales-Leyton advised the Committee that October 16 is International Food Day and

October 17 is the International Day for the Elimination of Poverty.

**MOVED BY Mr. Canales-Leyton and seconded by Mr. Shawn Lahey that the Mayor and Council be requested to acknowledge International Food Day and International Day for the Elimination of Poverty and encourage members of the community to assist by donating to the food bank etc. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Canales-Leyton will prepare a proclamation as soon as possible, so the item can go on next week's Council agenda.

9.0 **NEXT MEETING DATE**

The next regularly scheduled meeting is Wednesday, November 7, 2001.

10.0 **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Lynne Le Boutillier  
Assistant Municipal Clerk