

MINUTES
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
CITY OF AUSTIN MINNESOTA
April 24, 2003

Members present: Nancy Clark, Pat MacLean, John Hagen, Susan Wagner, Liliana Silvestry-Neilon, Masuka Magambo, Jeanne Poppe, Anu Kasturi

Members absent: Gabe Garcia

City Liaison: Tricia Wiechmann

Media: Austin Daily Herald (Matt M), Austin Post Bulletin (Roxanna O)

Nancy called the meeting to order at 6:10 pm. Minutes were approved and seconded (Hagen, MacLean).

Jeanne talked about the successful dialogue that took place at the public library regarding terrorism. She felt people got a chance to listen and talk about concerns.

Nancy had us all do “A World of Difference” exercise to help us to see how we identify ourselves in the world. She also gave information from Mechelle Rugg Severson (community diversity consultant) regarding 10 steps toward unlearning racism. She also read a poem – One Person about Rosa Parks (author unknown) which stressed how one person’s acts can change the world in John Hagen’s words “which started an avalanche.”

Jeanne mentioned the League of Women Voters distributed (10,000) copies of a synopsis of the immigration study in the Mower County Shopper. One side was English version, one side in Spanish. It was mentioned that Jim Peck is starting to get a group together (Chamber of Commerce, clergy, human rights commission, organizations) to talk about diversity and what can be done about the “anti-immigration” talk that is happening in our city. John mentioned we need to deal with reliable feedback – really what are people unhappy about with immigrants – lets find out and then we can better address the issues. That is different from inflammatory information going back and forth. We need to be familiar with what the complaints are so they can be addressed. We can encourage people to articulate what they see as issues.

Liliana said she is going to view the video “Immigration by the Numbers” and asked if others wanted to view it. We decided to have her go and get it and those who could stay would watch it. The video stirred up some emotions in our group because it was slanted with some bias about how we will be better off not having so many immigrants in the US. One comment in the video was if we want to help the 3rd World immigration is not the answer we need to help with family planning assistance. It was an interesting video and can certainly lead people to be more protective of the good life they have here in the US.

We concluded that there are economic reasons immigrants come here and there are reasons why we need to have them come here. What we can do is to help our community be more inclusive. If we don’t have

immigrants come to our community we will not have a meat packing industry in town and our worlds would change. We talked about coming up with grant money to nurture and train community leaders. We need to continue to get facts and develop understanding.

The May meeting will be brainstorming for ideas the June meeting with community representatives. Please come with ideas.

Meeting adjourned (Hagen, Wagner).