

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

Special Meeting

Thursday, November 5, 2009

Notes and Minutes

- MEMBERS PRESENT:** Commission Chair Gladys Walker, Vice Chair Georgia Warnke, Parliamentarian Beth Skinner, and Commissioners Diane Lang, Lorraine Saint, Maria Scott, Pamela Brown, Raj Singh, Viet Tran, and Youth Council representative Temi Akinyemi.
- EXCUSED ABSENCES:** Commissioners A.J. Wilson, John Krick, Omar Zaki, Rabbi Suzanne Singer, Yami Bazan, and Youth Council representative Liz Arreola.
- STAFF PRESENT:** Lalit Acharya
- GUESTS PRESENT:** Jeffrey Arnold, Nicole Burdette, Harry Hood, June O'Connor, Chris Contreras (RPD Intern), Estella Acuna, Chani Beeman, Javier Rosales, Damon Castillo, Burma Lee Mannj, Michael Dunn, Linda Dunn, Dan Hantman, Mary Shelton, David Holguin, Che Holguin, Kevin Akin, Christina Duran, and Brian Levin (Director, Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at Cal State San Bernardino)

Chair Walker announced at 6:02 pm that despite the lack of a quorum, she would call for an informal non-actionable discussion of the sole agenda item—the Neo Nazi demonstration—since many guests were present, including Cal State San Bernardino expert on hate movements, Brian Levin.

Notes

Chair Walker asked for a minute of silence to honor the soldiers who died or were injured in the Ft. Hood shootings earlier that day, followed by self-introductions from Commissioners and guests present.

Chair Walker then asked Vice Chair Warnke to explain the reason for the special meeting.

Vice Chair Warnke said that one idea was a peace or inclusivity festival in which local community groups would participate and that the forum had

recommended inviting hate groups expert, Brian Levin, to help frame the discussion.

HRC would invite key community leaders to a special meeting and deliberate on short-range and long-range steps that could be taken without giving the Neo Nazi groups, such as the National Socialist Movement (NSM), the publicity and victimhood it was seeking through confrontations like the ones that occurred in Riverside. The Commission would invite hate groups expert Brian Levin to help them frame the discussion and also to learn about successful strategies and responses from other communities. The Commission would also focus on ways of communicating the City's "Inclusive Community" statement as part of its overall strategy.

A quorum was achieved at 6:22 pm.

Minutes

Chair Walker asked Mr. Levin to frame the discussion with a special focus on how other communities are responding.

Mr. Levin praised RPD for the professionalism it displayed during the demonstrations prior to making his comments.

The following is a summary of Mr. Levin's comments:

- NSM is a small group—there are no more than about 75 members across California.
- Their strategy is to provoke confrontations, then paint themselves as victims of an unprovoked assault.
- Immigration is a straw horse that they use to pull in mainstream sympathizers. They also use this issue to attract recruits.
- Other factors groups like the NSM are using to spread their message and attract recruits: anti-Latino bigotry, Islamophobia, and the election of President Obama.
- Hate is also being mainstreamed by radio talk shows.

He also suggested the following responses:

- Ignore NSM demonstrations as much as possible.
- Encourage counterdemonstration groups not to show up.
- Separate the counterdemonstration from the NSM demonstration by having it at an alternate site and on another day.
- Constantly monitor all of the groups.
- Do not ignore racist actions by the mainstream community.
- Let it be known that hate is not welcome in the Riverside community.

Chair Walker then invited comments from Commissioners and guests. The following is a summary of their comments:

Counterdemonstrations

- Ignore the NSM—having counterdemonstrations only brings the media and gives the Neo Nazi groups the visibility they are seeking. It also allows such groups to provoke counterdemonstrators, then play the role of victims.
- Organizers said that counterdemonstration is not needed. Counterdemonstration monitors reported being in as much danger from the counterdemonstrators as they did from the NSM—a lot of hateful comments were hurled by the counterdemonstrators, and the actions of the Brown Berets aggravated and escalated the situation.
- Some present at the demonstrations reported that the NSM had hidden weapons and intended violence. The consequences, had they been able to get to the weapons, would have been terrible.
- The demonstration and counterdemonstration proved be expensive. RPD costs were estimated at \$50,000 to \$60,000, or the cost of hiring one police officer. This cost included the presence of a police helicopter for several hours.

NSM demonstrations at Temple Beth El

- The unfurling of swastika flags outside Temple Beth El (following the first NSM demonstration in September) was intensely disturbing to the congregation, some of whom are survivors of the Holocaust.

RPD conduct

All agreed that the RPD responded swiftly and responsibly, and deserved the praise of the community.

Possible responses by Riverside community

- Have a peace festival to reinforce the message of tolerance.
- Not have a peace festival because it does nothing to address the root causes of NSM-type demonstrations.
- Have a tolerance conference to empower the message of peace and tolerance.
- Stand by the day laborers who are being threatened with physical violence by groups such as the NSM.

- Have the City look into a day laborer center where they would be sheltered to a greater extent.
- Learn from groups like the Western Inland Empire Coalition Against Hate (WIECAH), who utilize the following strategies to counter the NSM:
 - Set up a youth social network.
 - Set up training program learning modules to educate K-12 students about peace and tolerance.
- Bring the faith community to show solidarity as was done on 9-11.
- Bring the business community together to condemn the message of hate.
- Engage the student community to work for peace and tolerance.
- Engage children and teenagers who are being exposed to NSM messages of hate over the Internet.
- Training for community groups in nonviolent conflict resolution such as the one offered by the Fellowship for Reconciliation.

Ad Hoc Committee

Following comments by Commissioners and guests, Chair Walker called for the following *ad hoc* committee to further investigate the issue and develop a response.

Commissioner Warnke (Chair)
Commissioner Lang
Commissioner Saint

Chair Walker adjourned the meeting at 7:30 pm.