

Minutes – Commission on Disabilities – March 11, 2009, Nock School

1. Present – Flaherty, Holaday, Lyons, Nutter, Trodella; Garcia and Donovan absent
2. Jan Desantis, Co Chair of the Newburyport Commission for Diversity and Tolerance, was our guest and she described her Commission’s origins and role in our city. Here is the information on their website with some comments inserted from Jan’s presentation.

### **Who Are We ?**

**We** are a city-appointed commission, which works to promote and support a sense of welcome and inclusion for all residents within greater Newburyport.

**We** are students, school administrators, police, religious leaders, social service professionals and representatives from various businesses and organizations.

**We** collaborate with other groups and organizations to promote our mission.

### **Our History**

In 2005, the City of Newburyport established a municipal board to be known as the Commission for Diversity and Tolerance. [In 2005 there was a disagreement with the ADL over the use of the term “genocide” used by the Armenian community to describe the killing of Armenians by the Turks in 1915. As a result the NBPT’s “No Place for Hate”, affiliated with the ADL, withdrew and reorganized as the Commission for Diversity and Tolerance. Lt. Rick Siemasko, of the NBPT Police, a lawyer as well as a police officer, is the liaison with the Police Department.] The Commission cannot exceed nine members, who serve for a three-year term. Members are appointed by the Mayor, subject to confirmation by the City Council. Each Commission member must live in Newburyport.

Members are selected to represent various fields including, but not limited to education [Dr. Kevin Lyons, Superintendent of Schools – his Five Year Plan has a major component on “inclusion”], religion, law enforcement [Lt. Siemasko], social services, industry, commerce and labor.

### **What Do We Do?**

- Cooperate with racial, religious, ethnic, civic, fraternal, benevolent, and private and public agencies in eliminating discrimination and intolerance;
- Provide resources and referral information to any person or group seeking support or information about discriminatory acts;
- Issue publications and pronouncements and confer prizes and awards to promote goodwill and to minimize or eliminate discrimination and intolerance;
- Award mini-grants to support area organizations in their projects to support tolerance [The Commission makes grants to people who have activities that oppose discrimination and work for inclusion. The Commission raises funds, especially from its work with the Friends for Peace when they volunteer to help the “artists” in any way they can during their work days from October 18-19. In turn the “Friends” donate \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year to the Commission for its mini-grants.];
- Support municipal departments and agencies in their response to discriminatory or intolerant acts;
- Organize the annual Peace Month (May), a series of lectures[[understanding different religions with speakers at the Library](#)], presentations [The Commission supported faculty advisor Alison Linqvist and made a stipend available at the NBPT High School to show the film “Laramie Project” about the brutal murder of a gay man in Wyoming in 1998. The 2002 [film](#), written and directed by [Moisés Kaufman](#), is based on [The Laramie Project](#), a play by Kaufman. The film tells the story of the aftermath of the [1998 murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming](#). It [premiered at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival](#) and was first broadcast on television in March 2002], exhibits and awards to heighten awareness of Newburyport as a diverse and tolerant community.

### How You Can Help?

- Tell us about any anti-bias or peace programs at your organization
- Apply to our mini-grant RFP
- Make a donation to help support our city-wide programs [[such as funding the YWCA's Martin Luther King, Jr. annual Breakfast; fund the schools “Conflict Resolution program; similar programs at the Charter School; etc.](#)]

- Sponsor a program [The Commission has sponsored a day-long meeting on mediation with school principals, staff, and students.
- Attend our open-forum meetings [Meet First Tuesday of each month rotate from police station to city hall to library. Next public meeting – April 7 at 3:00 PM]
- Suggest an activity for Peace Month [proclaim May as Peace Month with a luncheon at City Hall with “Peace Awards” to one boy and one girl student from each school, plus two adults. This year’s luncheon will be on May 7]
- Nominate someone for the Annual Peace Awards
- Attend the Peace Month events
- Read our e-newsletters

### **Our Mission**

It is the policy of the City of Newburyport to promote and support a sense of welcome, inclusion and worth for all and the elimination of prejudice, intolerance, discrimination, and acts of hate in our community.

### **Commission Members**

Jan DeSantis, Co Chair  
 Beth Horne, Co-Chair  
 Art Currier - ad hoc\*  
 Donna Devlin  
 Margot Petler  
 Mary Ryan  
 Kathleen Shaw – ad hoc\*  
 Sam Szabo  
 Ross Varney – ad hoc\*  
 Kim Wilkinson

\* not live in NBPT

### **Liaisons**

Lois Honneger, Mayor’s Office  
 Dr. Kevin Lyons, Schools  
 Lt. Rick Siemasko, Police

### **Contact Us**

#### **To report a hate incident:**

*Lt. Rick Siemasko*

**911 or 978-462-4411 ext. 1**

#### **Info on the Commission:**

*Beth Horne*

978-465-1871

**School involvement/ info:**

*Dr. Kevin Lyons*

978-465-4456

**Mailing address:**

P.O. Box 1283

Newburyport, MA 01950

Jan strongly recommended the DVD “Movie Within, the story of the ADA.

Thank you for coming, Jan. I hope I didn’t make too many errors or gross misstatements.

3. Jane Holaday said she would be our “communicator” with local media, such as The Daily News, The Current, the community radio and TV and we will all assist her as called on.
4. The next meeting will be on May 8 at the Nock School at 6:00 PM and we will have Jane Harris of Opportunity Works to discuss ADA’s Title I on Employment and the disabled and the Massachusetts Employment Act of 1983.

Tom Lyons, Secretary