

To: Arlington Town Meeting
From: Kristen Bauer, Sharon Grossman - Co-Chairs Arlington Human Rights Commission
Date: 11/12/2020

Attached please find our 2019 Annual Report. During 2020, there was continued discussion within the Town about diversity, racial equity and inclusion. The Black Lives Matter movement encouraged deeper reflection and examination of systemic racism within our Town. Continuing incidents of racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and others demonstrated the continued need for us all to address these issues.

In response to this, the AHRC has, among other actions, this year:

- Celebrated Black History Month in February 2020 by sponsoring a series of events including hanging banners along Massachusetts Avenue highlighting Black Massachusetts citizens and a film series
- Co-Sponsored a series of Community Conversations in 2020 related to racial equity, housing, and policing
- Co-Sponsored virtual Black Lives Matter Vigil and Juneteenth Celebration
- Issued statements on the following:
 - Protecting Human Rights During the Covid-19 Pandemic
 - Standing Against Police Brutality and Racial Violence
 - Vandalism of the Black Lives Matter Banner at Arlington High School
 - Social Media Misuse
 - Black Lives Matter Sign Vandalism
 - Ongoing Repression of the Muslim Community in India
 - Back the Blue Rally
 - Upcoming Town Meeting Articles
- Proposed a proclamation in support of Black Lives Matter that included the hanging of a Black Lives Matter banner at Town Hall, which the Select Board adopted
- Hosted a forum on Native Imagery and reached out to the community to encourage celebration of Indigenous People's Day
- Joined the town's effort to encourage businesses to be inclusive and welcoming

We will provide a full 2020 Annual Report at the start of 2021.

AHRC Annual Report 2019

The Arlington Human Rights Commission (AHRC) was created by Town Meeting in 1993 to advance issues related to the fair and equal treatment of individuals and to create a mechanism for addressing complaints arising out of these issues. The mission of the AHRC is to work individually and collaboratively with other groups in our community to celebrate the ever changing tapestry of our Town, and to emphasize, through educational outreach, the danger of intolerance at every level. The Town Manager, School Committee, Select Board, and the Town Moderator have appointing authority for thirteen members of the Commission.

The AHRC met monthly throughout the year. New co-chairs, Sharon Grossman and Kristen Bauer, were elected in August 2019.

The AHRC collaborated with, co-sponsored events with or publicized events for many Town government and community groups, including: Arlington Public Schools (APS), Arlington Health and Human Services (AHHS), Arlington Police Department (APD), ACMi, True Story Theater, Mystic LGBTQ+ Youth Support Network, Communities for Restorative Justice (C4RJ),, Arlington Rainbow Commission, Anti-Defamation League of New England and human rights organizations in several neighboring towns, Diversity Inclusion Groups through the APS, and the MLK Birthday Celebration Committee.

Education and Trainings

- Training of Commission members related to Open Meeting Laws, by-laws conducted by Douglas Heim, Town Counsel
- Held a retreat for AHRC Commissioners to address issues including continuing to develop consistency and protocols related to investigation of increasing response and communication, team building, and develop working groups to maximize the Commission's impact

Community Outreach

- Continued to offer a citizen's forum during each monthly meeting to give residents the opportunity to address the Commission on matters relating to equality and fairness. This year, at least several dozen citizens took advantage of this opportunity. Citizens attended the Commission's 12 meetings.
- Began a new monthly agenda item to enable Commissioners to discuss issues raised by community members at the previous month's meeting.

- Instituted a new monthly Commissioners' Coffee Chat to enable members of the community to informally meet and share ideas on human rights issues with two Commissioners each month.
- Regularly attended and participated in Massachusetts Association of Human Rights Commission (MAHRC) meetings and ADL's Northeast Regional Advisory Committee.
- Continued cosponsorship of the Town's Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration.
- Hosted the second Double Take event in Town Hall in February and over 100 people attended in person while others viewed it on ACMi.
- Hosted popular booths at Town Day and Feast of the East. Distributed approximately 360 more Hate Has No Home Here lawn signs, window signs and car magnets in English, Urdu, Korean, Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish. Distributed signs along Lake Street to households that were willing to accept them after the arson fires at the Center for Jewish Life of Arlington/Belmont. Added Love Lives Here lawn and window signs to the original HHNHH signs for distribution.
- Supported a gathering in response to hate graffiti at Magnolia Park in April.
- Cosponsored workshops on Courageous Conversations in elementary schools for parents/guardians in April about race
- Cosponsored a parent program with True Story Theatre in April to share stories related to diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Organized a community gathering at Town Hall in May in response to suspicious fires at the Center for Jewish Life of Arlington/Belmont and the home of Rabbi Avi Bukiet and his family; over 500 people attended.
- Crafted and released public statements in response to incidents.
- Co-sponsored a gathering in Lexington in response to the Christchurch Mosque shootings.
- Sent several e-correspondence via MailChimp to our list of over 400 subscribers.
- Posted 70 times on Facebook, reaching about 39,000 people.
- Continued sending an AHRC commissioner to the regular meetings of the Superintendent's Diversity Advisory Committee.
- Clarified and agreed to a liaison program between the AHRC and APS.
- Continued to send an AHRC commissioner to serve on the Town's Surveillance Study Committee.
- Began working with two Arlington High School students who are serving as Interns.
- Co-sponsored and financially supported events with the APS DIGs (Diversity and Inclusion Groups that are connected to each school and led by parents/guardians)

Incidents and Complaint Response

- Hate incidents continued, with increasing complaints of tagging/graffiti of hate messages and other forms of hate speech in schools.
- Collected information regarding hate incidents occurring in Arlington from citizens, schools, and the APD, as follows: 21 Cases, 11 of which involved the APS and 16 of which were also referred from or handled by the APD.
- Continued to work closely with the APD and APS to learn of, track and, where necessary, address incidents involving graffiti, texting, racist speech, anti-Semitic speech and threats, and racial profiling.
- Completed a Memorandum of Agreement that included the APS, AHRC, and APD through a collaborative process that set forward Guidelines for Responding to Hate Incidents in the Arlington Public Schools

AHRC Year and Goals Moving Forward

Our Commission of 13 has 6 new members, increasingly reflecting the growing diversity of our town. Our entire Commission is energized to work together with the community to address the challenging human rights issues facing those who live, work and visit Arlington.

As we move forward, we are ever mindful of the damage to our community that has yet to be repaired. Regrettably, our town has experienced incidents of hate, intolerance, and inflammatory language, stemming from racism, anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and systemic discrimination. Homophobic, anti-Semitic, and racist graffiti has been scrawled in our schools. A house of worship and home of a Rabbi and his family was set on fire twice. Hate speech targeting communities of color, immigrants and refugees, religious minorities and other vulnerable communities has been circulated and heard. Hateful incidents like these have caused widespread fear. Arlington can and must do better.

We recognize that every person in Arlington deserves to be valued, respected, and protected. Thus, we are increasing opportunities to be heard, hosting, sponsoring, and partnering with community programs and events to welcome and celebrate diversity, participating in town programs, including community activities, discussions with police, and outreach to community groups to foster respect, and facilitating training, education and incident reporting with the police, the town and our schools to increase protection for all in Arlington.