



# CITY OF WORCESTER

## CITIZEN ADVISORY COUNCIL

### MINUTES

### CITIZEN ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

Wednesday, April 17, 2013 6:00 PM

Worcester Public Library, Saxe Room

Present: District 5, Steve Genduso, Chairperson  
District 1, Richard Trifone  
District 2, Katherine Evans  
District 3, Christopher Condon  
District 4, Christopher Roberge  
District 4, Theodore Kostas  
District 5, Douglas Hannam

Absent: District 2, Linda Parham  
District 3, Craig Olson  
District 1, Pedro Figueroa, Vice Chairperson  
At-large, Coreen Gaffney

Staff: Jeannie Michelson, Human Resources  
Pam Callahan, Human Resources

1. Steve called the business portion of the meeting to order at 6:00pm.
2. Steve asked if anyone had questions or comments on the minutes of 4/1/13.
3. Katherine asked if all CAC members replied to the meeting notice.
  - a. The only one that did not respond was Pedro
  - b. Craig responded that he would be here
  - c. Linda and Coreen responded prior to the 48 hour rule with prior commitments
4. It was motioned to accept the minutes from 4/1/13.
5. Chris R. discussed the Spring Forum held at by the Coalition against Hate and Bias.
  - a. Jeannie will calculate stats re: applicants vs. appointments of women/minorities
  - b. *(Update: article from WoMag attached)*
6. Survey update:
  - a. Jeannie is contacting staff liaisons to have board members complete survey
  - b. Parks had 7 returns, not 5 as previously stated
7. Steve welcomed the public and reviewed the procedures for the interview portion of the meeting.
8. Introductions of all members to applicants.
9. Interviews
  - a. **Victor Ortiz:** Elder Affairs: 7yes / 0no
  - b. **Scot Keefe:** Status of Women: 0yes / 7no ; WAC: 5yes / 2no
  - c. **Susan Chapman:** Parks: 7yes / 0no ; Affirmative Action: 7yes / 0no
  - d. **Nicola Dandrea:** Parks: 7yes / 0no ; Cable: 7yes / 0no
  - e. **Jessica Donovan:** Status of Women: 7yes / 0no
  - f. **Julie Feeney:** Human Rights: 7yes / 0no
  - g. **Jeremy Fontaine:** Human Rights: 7yes / 0no ; Parks: 2yes / 5no
  - h. **Matthew Foster:** WAC: 7yes / 0no

- i. **Kent Miller:** WAC: 7yes / 0no
  - j. **Mary Moule:** Cable: 7yes / 0no
  - k. **Meg Mulhern:** Parks: 7yes / 0no
  - l. **John Nah:** Disabilities: 7yes / 0no ; Human Rights: 7yes / 0no
  - m. **Hilda Ramirez:** WAC: 7yes / 0no
  - n. **Adam Rozan:** WAC: 7yes / 0no
  - o. **John Russell:** Elder: 7yes / 0no ; CDAC: 0yes / 7no
  - p. **George Sedares:** Parks: 7yes / 0no ; CDAC: 7yes / 0no
  - q. **John Vigliotti:** Planning: 7yes / 0no
  - r. **Matthew Yalouris:** CDAC: 7yes / 0no ; Human Rights: 4yes / 3no
  - s. **Barbara Zerillo:** Human Rights: 6yes / 0no (Chris R. abstained)
  - t. **Roy Megedus:** Historical (Montvale Dist): 7yes / 0no ; Cable: 2yes / 5no
10. The next meeting will be a business meeting on May 15, 2013 at 6pm in the Banx Room of the Worcester Public Library
11. The meeting was adjourned at 9 PM.

Att: WoMag article re: Spring Forum

/jmm

Approved: 5/22/13

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# 'Different standard' keeps city behind in municipal diversity

*Originally printed at <http://www.worcestermag.com/city-desk/top-news/Different-standard-keeps-city-behind-in-municipal-diversity-203371491.html>*

By Walter Bird Jr. / photos by Walter Bird Jr.  
April 18, 2013

It is hard to dispute the numbers when they stare at you in black and white. When it comes to membership on Worcester's boards and commissions, women lag behind men and minorities are not on the same playing field with whites. Men make up 69 percent of the membership on municipal boards and commissions this year, while women comprise 31 percent. That is down 6 percent from 2007 and slightly behind last year. Of the men, 13 percent are identified as minorities, while 7 percent of the women are minorities. Both represent decreases from last year.

Despite efforts to become more diverse, some observers believe the city has made little progress. That was the general message delivered at a recent forum of the City Manager's Community Coalition Against Bias & Hate, where civic engagement was the topic du jour.

"We are held to a different standard," District 4 City Councilor Sarai Rivera says candidly. She ran for council the first time two years ago and as a Latina, she says her race and gender absolutely played a part in how she campaigned. "It mattered what I looked like, what my hair looked like, that I didn't look too dark. All these little things really mattered a lot. I never walked out of the house with shorts or jeans. A white counterpart could get away with certain things that weren't going to work for me. My education was called into question."

During one door-knocking episode, Rivera says the person she spoke with said, "It would be nice if you had an extensive education." Rivera says she instructed the person to turn the pamphlet over and read the back. A mother, minister and wife, Rivera holds a Master's degree in social work and a Doctorate in urban ministries.

"It was almost like, 'Yeah, I can read master,'" Rivera says of the experience. "It was

crazy.”

Of the city’s state representatives, councilors and School Committee members, Rivera is the only minority. On the 11-member council, she is one of three women.

Mable Millner is among those who not only believe the city has made little progress in enhancing the diversity of its municipal government – she believes the opposite is true.

We have heard criticism about the lack of racial and cultural diversity on boards,” says Millner, who chairs the coalition. “We have not made progress. In fact, we are going backward. In a time our city needs to be moving ahead, we need to be moving ahead with the collective voices of all our citizens.

“As Worcester grows and thrives,” she continues, “our city is becoming more diverse, but this diversity isn’t reflected among citizens holding public office and membership on boards and commissions. The decisions about the current and future direction of the city are then based upon a select few who have chosen to be involved via the electoral process or by appointment.”

There are myriad reasons why more minorities are not involved in the local governing and decision-making process, including cultural and language barriers, a lack of understanding about how to become involved and, some think, a lack of real effort on the city’s part to encourage participation. Dante Comparetto is an area activist who over the past decade has taken part in various boards, commissions and task forces. He says he does not see a city dedicated to enhancing civic engagement.

“The city really has a long way to go in encouraging civic participation,” Comparetto says. “I feel like way too often the city isn’t taking seriously a lot of the things we talk about or discuss. Problems or items that are not politically safe to talk about are often put onto boards and commissions. In a way it’s a lot of the grunt work. We get little to no recognition. It’s not like we do this for any recognition, but certainly it seems like the city does more to discourage folks like myself from being engaged.”

Comparetto says he has even seen instances where an initiative that a group is working on has been taken out of its hands because it is of a sensitive nature.

“I really think the city needs to address these things before it can really take seriously getting more people involved,” he says. “Studies show communities with an engaged citizenry are healthier communities.”

Rev. Jose Encarnacion, who is Rivera's husband, also questions the seriousness of efforts to recruit new municipal volunteers.

"Is there a genuine attempt at recruitment? Some other methods being used are not a genuine active form of recruiting for these boards and commission," Encarnacion says. "Is there really going to be a genuine attempt to say we've got to move beyond just some form of advertising or saying the process is open, but to do an active recruitment to bring in people we are quite capable to serve?"

One of the attempts made to enlighten area residents comes from Chris Robarge and the Citizens Advisory Council (CAC), on which he serves as a representative of District 4. That panel, which itself is currently under-staffed, takes part in the appointments for 29 boards and commissions in three classified categories: advisory boards, such as the Affirmative Action Committee; executive boards and commissions that set policy, including the Historical Commission and Off-Street Parking Board; and regulatory boards that interpret and enforce policy, such as the Conservation Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals.

To apply for a board or commission, people can approach a member of the CAC or fill out an application on the city's website. There are quarterly selection meetings, where candidates are interviewed one by one and decisions are made on the spot.

"It's like having a job interview," says Robarge. "I understand it can be a little uncomfortable for people. You have to get six votes to move forward. You either get your six votes or you don't. Some people don't. We always encourage people to apply again."

If you receive six votes, you will be called in for a second, more formal interview, typically with a liaison from the board or commission to which you are applying, a representative from Human Resources and someone from the City Manager's office. Many of the appointments require council approval. After that, you are sworn in by the City Clerk.

"We have a responsibility to do a better job finding people," Robarge says, "but people who are sort of on the fence have a responsibility to give to the city as well. I encourage anyone thinking about running, just do it. Just apply."

*Have a news tip or comment? Contact Walter Bird Jr. at 508-749-3166, ext. 243, or email [wbird@worcestermag.com](mailto:wbird@worcestermag.com). And don't miss Walter with Paul Westcott on WTAG 580AM Thursdays at 8:35 a.m.*

