

MINUTES
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee
August 19, 2021

The meeting of the Sharon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee was called to order at 7:03 by Chair Mrs. Kiana Pierre-Louis remotely via Zoom in accordance with Massachusetts Law pandemic policy extension. The following, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee members were in attendance:

Members Present

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| Chair: | Mrs. Kiana Pierre-Louis |
| Vice Chair | |
| Other Members: | Mrs. Wendy Alexis-Janvier |
| | Ms. Marjorie Mitlin |
| | Zainab Mohammed |
| | Rev. Dr. Bill Kondrath |
| | Mr. Lajos Kamocsay |

Members Absent

Ms. Dru Ledbetter (Vice Chair)
Lt. Stephen Coffey

Others Present

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| Select Board Member | Hanna R. Switekowski |
| School Board Member | Tanya Lewis |
| Police Dept. | Lt. Penders (in lieu of Lt. |
| Representative | Coffey) |

Administrative Items

Correspondence

Pierre-Louis reported that DEIC received five items of correspondence.

An email from the chair of DEIC to the Select Board (SB) with an advisory opinion which was copied to the Committee.

An email from Select Board Member Switekowski regarding Indian Day which is going to happen.

A couple of test emails to be sure that members of DEIC were receiving emails.

An email from a member of the community about race in the schools that was forwarded to DEIC members.

An email from Ms. Mitlin to the Committee regarding conduct of board and committee members.

Committee Structure

Secretary

Pierre-Louis mentioned that we need to elect a Secretary or rotate taking minutes.

Alexis-Janvier mentioned that getting emails without a town account may be problematic. This is still being investigated. At present, emails are being forwarded to DEIC members.

Kondrath suggested that secretary responsibilities could be divided (taking minutes; and summarizing and responding to correspondence.) This would make the secretary job less onerous. Wendy has done a great job of both. Pierre-Louis volunteered to handle correspondence for a time.

Kondrath volunteered to take minutes for *this* meeting. Pierre-Louis will set up a rotation for taking minutes. Because of Yom Kippur, DEIC will not meet on the third Thursday of September. DEIC will likely meet September 23.

Yearly Election of Officers

After discussion, Kamocsay mentioned that the Committee voted to elect officers (Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary) each July. Mitlin seconded.

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| Mrs. Wendy Alexis-Janvier | Yes |
| Rev. Dr. Bill Kondrath | Yes |
| Mr. Lajos Kamocsay | Yes |
| Zainab Mohammed | Yes |
| Mrs. Kiana Pierre-Louis | Yes |
| Ms. Marjorie Mitlin | Yes |

Chair and Vice-Chair

We will vote these positions in September (when we have new member and school member).

Resource Guide

Wendy will take over from Ellie's excellent work. Mohammed will assist.

Training Update (budget and fundraising)

The Greater Us has suggested adding affinity groups to the training of DEIC, SB, and Office of Town Administrator. They have forwarded an explanation regarding affinity groups.

The town has paid \$7000 to date for anti-racism training.

The contract for the first three phases of training originally called for a budget of \$10,865.

DEIC was given \$9000 from the town administrator from his FY2021 budget for training. The original contract was a little over that amount at \$10,865 and the DEIC was to pay the additional \$1,865 from our FY2022 budget. The additional cost for the affinity group work would add \$3997.50 to the contract. This would mean that we would have an additional cost of \$5,862.50. Our allotted budget for FY2022 is \$5000.

Kondrath is working with SB Member Smith-Lee to raise \$6000 for training, which would leave the FY2022 budget of \$5000 available for the committee's work.

Kondrath has met twice with Smith-Lee and they are working on a letter to business members of the Sharon Community to be signed by Smith-Lee and Kondrath, and followed up with phone calls. In addition to asking for financial donations for training, the letter asks recipients to express interest in supporting the work of DEIC and joining as stakeholders in a diverse, inclusive, and equitable town. We have a \$3000 contribution for matching money from donors. We envision sending the letter to 20 – 30 individuals or businesses. The hope is to have the letter in people's hands by the end of August.

We are optimistic about inviting members of the business community to join DEIC in the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Employee Training

The town administrator said that we could amend the contract with the greater us to move the employee training out of the contract. Pierre-Louis stated that she and Kondrath have offered to do training for Sharon for a smaller stipend. Dates for the training with employees are being worked out with *The Greater Us* and Sharon. Pierre-Louis stated that the training for employees will be about working across differences.

Kamocsay remarked that we could meet as an executive session if we are talking about contracts. Switekowski clarified that our discussion is advisory to the SB and that the Town signed the contract.

Kondrath suggested that the biggest distinction between the training we received and the training for employees and volunteer members of committees with differ mostly in numbers and that the training for volunteers will be more presentation format and less direct interaction.

Switekowski asked how training by Pierre-Louis and Kondrath would differ from *The Greater Us*. The Town Administrator asked if Pierre-Louis and Kondrath would be willing to do some training with for other groups in town. Pierre-Louis commented that if we were to do three hours, we could include anti-bias.

Alexis-Janvier urged caution about expanding the contract with *The Greater Us*. Could the affinity groups have been foreseen and built into the original contract? We will need money for other issues.

Kamocsay stated that the goal posts seem to be moving. Changing the budget seems to be unfair to the other consultants. We were supposed to be receiving advanced training.

Kondrath, speaking as a trainer, regularly renegotiates with clients after learning more about the strengths, weaknesses, and unanticipated challenges of clients. He said that he is realizing that we as white people may have work to do in looking at the ways in which systemic racism, bias, is playing out in our town, and that we do not need to be burdening the folks of color with the work that we need to do to see where historical white privilege is operative. Some of the discussion that has come up since our training is the way in which the search of our new police chief is happening. It may be seen by some people as biased, outside of people's awareness. Without training to change that process, this might be an example of how white people are operating in the ways they have always operated. That is the kind of example *The Greater Us* may be suggesting that we need to look at in affinity groups.

Mitlin believes there is value in digging deeper through affinity groups. She might also have access to funds to help us out.

Mohammed likes the idea of affinity groups, and is not sure how it fits into strategic planning.

Switekowski expressed concern about the timeline. We need to get others trained and do the strategic plan. We seem to be going around in circles. I want to see our boards and committees trained along with our employees and then get to strategic planning.

Kamocsay agrees that we should prioritize employee training. If we need additional training, we should give the other consultants a chance at that. Let's make employee training a priority.

Mitlin pointed out that *The Greater Us* knows us.

Lewis suggests that we can probably move things along together, employees, deeper training, and strategic planning.

Pierre-Louis agrees, as a trainer, that consultants discover things as they move along. We need to do more work on systemic issues. Employee training is already in the budget. Strategic planning was to be paid for this year. I believe that we need to look deeper at ourselves on deeper dive.

Pierre-Louis quoted from an email (August 9) to DEIC: "we offer participants an opportunity to learn skills for communicating more effectively across difference. We will give participants exposure to tools that will give them options for interacting differently, more authentically, and effectively across difference. If they employ these tools in their daily interactions, this will support a shift towards a more inclusive workplace culture." She concluded that when you do this you have to bring in anti-bias, anti-racism to talk about culture. They gave dates to Fred for September, but that is a quick turn-around for 150 employees. Pierre-Louis further said that if we don't do deeper work we shouldn't do strategic planning because it won't be done well.

Kamocsay said he felt guilty that we are spending all this taxpayer money on us. We could spend this money on a flagpole in front of town hall where we could fly a LGBT flag.

Pierre-Louis did not feel this was inequitable. This deeper work is for the SB, the Town Administrator and DEIC who need this work.

Kondrath proposed “We follow the recommendations of the trainers we hired and do affinity group training as part of our training before we do the strategic planning and that the money that I am confident will be raised will be put to that training and the rest will be used by the DEIC as they see fit.”

Kamocsay wanted the employee training to be done first.

Kondrath and Pierre-Louis stated that the money is already there for employee training and the dates are being worked on.

Mitlin seconded the Kondrath motion.

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| Rev. Dr. Bill Kondrath | Yes |
| Mr. Lajos Kamocsay | No |
| Ms. Marjorie Mitlin | Yes |
| Zainab Mohammed | Yes |
| Mrs. Wendy Alexis-Janvier | No |
| Mrs. Kiana Pierre-Louis | Yes |

Administrators in school were trained. We also need to look at Fire Department.

Pierre-Louis and Kondrath have volunteer to offer training for Committees and Boards. Lewis suggested that School Committee does not fall under this and does not have a budget. Lewis would like the DEIC to train School Board Members.

Switekowski mentioned that there are about 20 committees. Whether elected or appointed, boards should be treated the same. Alexis-Janvier asked about the budget for committees. Pierre-Louis said we have \$5000 in our FY2022 that could be used for committee trainings. Lewis is checking on money for training for the School Committee. Lewis preferred members of DEIC for training of School Committee because of their knowledge of the local issues. Komocsay agreed. Mitlin feels that we have the expertise internally. Alexis- Janvier wants the training to happen and we don't have budget. Kondrath is willing to do the training with Pierre-Louis pro bono. He sees offering that training to the town as part of what he gives to the town. He suggests 2-4 trainings for a mix of committee members. Then Fire Department or School Committee could ask for more individualized training or consulting. Pierre-Louis is considering offering the training pro bono, knowing that the resource committee may need money as well as tracking data, website, etc. She will work with Fred to look at dates.

Conduct on Social Media

Mitlin came up with a first draft. Anyone who wants to work on this should send ideas/comments to Mitlin by September 3, who will present any advisory opinion to the SB on September 14. Switekowski suggested that the police department might have a policy.

Announcements and Updates

Switekowski mentioned that the benches (from Sharon celebrates Diversity) outside of town hall will take place on Sunday, September 19 at 1:00PM.

Sharon Day is October 3 from noon to 5:00 PM. DEIC could reach out to Fred if it wants a booth. It would be good to attend. There will be fireworks on the night before. Volunteers are need for both October 2 and October 3.

Pierre-Louis was nominated as Citizen of the Year and voted such by SB and will receive that honor on Sharon Day.

Movie Night will welcome our new school superintendent at 7 PM on Monday August 23. (Rain date Tuesday) Wednesday, August 25 is the last Recreation Department concert.

First day of School is August 30.

Lt. Penders is filling in for Lt. Coffey. The police department would like volunteers to greet people October 2 at the fireworks.

Police Chief Selection Process Announcements

Police Chief process will be an internal search.

There will be a sample survey that will go out to all citizens. Pierre-Louis will send that to DEIC for suggestions. SB would like DEIC to submit questions to be asked of candidates at oral interviews on Tuesday, October 12. September 15, there will be an assessment center for all candidates, held at the Community Center. A small number of community members can be part of that. Two hours for community members. Town Administrator asks if DEIC has a list of underrepresented people might be part of this. Switekowski asked DEIC members to share the survey with religious communities, seniors, others. It has not been decided if there will be an open hearing.

All this information will be on town website and town social media.

DEIC meeting will likely be Thursday, September 23.

Topics not anticipated within 48 hours of posting

We have two candidates for DEIC. I will send statements and resumes.

Adjourn

MOTION: (Komocsay – Mohammed) To adjourn the meeting at 9:07 p.m.

VOTED: 6-0-0 **PASSES**

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| Mr. Lajos Kamocsay | Yes |
| Rev. Dr. Bill Kondrath | Yes |
| Ms. Marjorie Mitlin | Yes |
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