

MINUTES
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee
10.21.21

The meeting of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee was called to order virtually at 7:01pm by Chair, Kiana Pierre-Louis.

Members Present

Chair:

Kiana Pierre-Louis
Wendy Alexis-Janvier
Bill Kondrath-
Lajos Kamocsay
Marjorie Mitlin
Zainab Mohammed
Tricia Asklar
Hanna Switekowski-Selectboard Liaison
Tanya Lewis-School Committee liaison

Members Absent

Vice Chair:

Dru Ledbetter
Stephen Coffey-SPD Liaison

Others Present

Coco Rosenberg- Youth LEAD
Matthew Keenan- Governance Committee

Administrative Items

Minutes

MOTION: (Kondrath -Mitlin) to approve the minutes for 9.23.21.

VOTED: 5-0-2 **PASSES**

Correspondence

1. We received an email from the Town Administrator's office regarding 2 candidates for one seat on our committee.
2. We received 2 emails from residents regarding the Jennifer De Leon presentation at the Middle and High School in support of her presentation.
3. We received a flyer about a UNICEF event on October 7, 2021.
4. The Chair sent a congratulations email, introducing new committee member Tricia Asklar.
5. A community member sent an email out an Indigenous Peoples Day event on November 2.
6. Chair forwarded an email about the demographics of the Girl Scouts.

Critical Race theory:

There was a debate on Facebook with some alleged anti-Semitic tones. Question about whether we can add this to our agenda?

Should we bring in this agenda to our meeting? Should we have a program that talks about information and misinformation on Critical Race Theory.

This topic came up because of the middle school presentation from Jennifer De-Leon. A speaker was brought in by the Sharon Middle School, Sharon High School, and the PTSO. The woman talked about her experience of racism. 65 people wrote a letter talking about the fact that they don't believe that we should be teaching this in the Sharon Public Schools. 300 students then wrote a letter objecting to censoring the talk.

The question came up: what is Critical Race Theory?

Committee member Kamocsay said that there was a New Yorker article about Critical Race Theory, and he thought it was a really good article.

Chair Pierre-Louis stated that she could talk about what it is, or someone else could be brought in.

Committee Member Alexis-Janvier stated that she heard a podcast that would be helpful to listen to. She feels that people need to know what it is. We need to know about slavery and racism she felt, and she thought we could bring someone in from the outside to talk with our community.

Committee member Kamocsay said that we need to teach our children about the real history of America

Committee member Kondrath stated that there has been a lot of controversy around evolution, critical race theory: re: science and religion. He thought it would be helpful for someone to come in and to educate our community. He said that if someone comes in, it should be an event that the DEIC sponsors.

Committee Member Asklar spoke about how the Jews and Blacks have had solidarity in the equal rights movement. There is more of a divide within the new generation.

Chair Pierre-Louis stated that at the root of Critical Race Theory, there is no anti-Semitism. She said that learning about the legal structures of our country is important. We talked about creating a town-wide event on Critical Race Theory, and that it would be helpful to have co-sponsors.

MOTION: (Kamocsay -Mitlin) For the DEIC to co-sponsor a town wide event regarding education on Critical Race Theory.

VOTED: 6-0-1 **PASSES**

Youth Lead Presentation:

Coco Rosenberg from Youth Lead came to talk to us about the development of the Youth Leadership program at Emerson. They talked about the program being two decades old and it is about bringing people together from different faith groups using creative arts and social justice. They said that the program at Emerson is 9 months old, and they see it as a collective learning experience. The students learn together, using personal reflection, solidarity work, and art as a tool for social justice. They talked about wanting community partners such as SREA, the Mosque, schools, and other houses of worship. They talked about the need to listen to young people to guide us, using art to direct the action. In addition, they want to use theater exercises to practice solidarity, social and racial justice. They want to include youth in Sharon and from other surrounding areas. They talked about having a sliding scale for people to join. They could pay any amount between 0-\$500.00 per year. The

meetings would meet twice a month from 6:00-8:00PM, and registration is open until November 3rd. They are holding an info session using collage making and creative writing. Youth Lead now has one full time staff and they will use undergrads as guests to work with the students.

They talked about putting together an adult and a youth advisory board.

Committee member Mitlin asked where they will meet?

Coco Rosenberg stated maybe at Kol Tikvah or maybe at the community center.

Currently there are 8 registered students, and they are looking to have between 15 and 20 students.

Presentation from Matt Keenan about the Governance Committee

Mr. Keenan is the liaison to the DEIC from the governance committee. He said that the selectboard decided to appoint 11 people to this committee.

He said that the function of the committee is the following:

1. To decide what form of government makes sense for Sharon.
2. To look into talking with the selectboards from other communities and to see how they work. Should we retain the current town meeting voting system, or should there be a group that represents the town? (a town council?)

Mr. Keenan spoke about asking if all groups should have access to the meetings? Are there issues of space? He said that now only 21% of the town shows up for town meetings,

He talked about whether our selectboard should have 3 representatives or should we have 5?

Should we look at appointed positions and how should we make changes that make sense in the town?

He looked back into the 1976 notes about how the towns functions, and he said that the debates today are the same.

He said that they will be reaching out to folks for feedback about what the people in the town want or need.

Mr. Keenan said that they do not have the most diverse board.

Chair Pierre-Louis said that our changing demographics should be reflected in our form of government. She said that only 4% of our diverse community participates in our town government.

Committee member Kondrath said that elected voter representatives would pull for a smaller group of people having a voice

Mr. Keenan said that he was just putting out the issues, and not talking about any preferences at this point.

School Committee liaison Lewis asked what are the goals of the group? Are they trying to increase participation in Town Meeting or are they trying to increase the number of select board members?

Mr. Keenan said that they are trying to look at the structure of the town meeting. They want to look at the boards and committees and see if they reflect the town. They want to look at appointed positions as well as elected positions.

Wendy Alexis-Janvier and Zainab Mohammed talked about the resource guide:

They are moving forward. They talked about wanting to have a panel discussion.

Wendy said that she wants to share an educational video.

They want to have benchmarks. They looked at a video in Arlington, they want links to articles, to have joint resource initiatives, have healthy habits to be more equitable and inclusive, and to have graphics. They want to have links to DEI events, include blog posts, questions, etc. They want to meet with a web developer who would maintain the age, and to get clarity about what approval we need from the selectboard?

Chair Pierre-Louis talked about needing someone to VET the material that we want to post on the website.

Select Board liaison Switekowski said that Fred Turkington and Lauren Barnes can work with Wendy and Zainab. They talked about Arlington's website and using it as a model for ours.

Chair Updates:

Police Chief Search

Committee member Janvier asked if the selectboard could post the fact that they are looking for feedback on the police chief suggestions?

On October 26th, the new police chief will be selected.

Chair Pierre-Louis asked that we reach out and give them feedback. She asked that we look at the interviews.

Training

Chair Pierre-Louis said that she and Committee member Kondrath will be doing the employee training.

The Greater Us will be facilitating the white affinity group sessions.

Solidarity Events

Chair Pierre-Louis talked about a series of Solidarity events starting with the Jewish and Black solidarity and doing a viewing of the documentary *Shared Legacies*.

Select Board liaison Switekowski talked about a program at Brandeis. She said that is a lot of programming around that are working on bringing people together.

Committee member Askar talked about the same kind of programming going on at UMass. Again, the topic is bringing people together

Chair Pierre-Louis suggested making a motion for the DEIC to do a series on Solidarity. We could get speakers and talk about shared legacies.

Announcements:

SREA- Nov 2nd at 7:00 pm. It is an Eventbrite webinar talking about "Settlers: Colonist ties to Thanksgiving and Columbus and the Indigenous perspective.

Select Board liaison Switekowski said that she is wearing purple for domestic violence awareness month, and also for spirit day, dealing with youth bullying.

There is a food pantry at Temple Sinai on November 21st.

Topics Not anticipated in 48 Hours of posting

Chair Pierre-Louis brought up: Girl Scouts in Sharon want to create a plaque to present to the selectboard. Can they post their motto on our web page?

Select Board liaison Switekowski said that on Nov. 16th, the girl scout proposal for a plaque will be presented to the selectboard.

Diwali will be held on Thursday, Nov 4th.

Select Board liaison Switekowski town of Pembroke established their DEI committee. We should reach out to other DEI committees in other communities.

Select Board liaison Lewis: School committee's goal is to improve our relationship with other community organizations. Would someone from the DEIC present to the school committee on Nov 17?

Adjourn

MOTION: (Kamocsay -Kondrath) To adjourn the meeting.

VOTED: 7-0-0 **PASSES**