



TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes
July 11, 2017, 8:00 AM
Room 201, Westport Town Hall, Westport, CT

Attendees: Zoe Tarrant, Judy Hamer, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Jennifer Keller, Catherine Lewis, Karen Kleine, Maggie Mudd, Bernicestine McLeod, Harold Bailey (Presiding), Elaine Daignault, Dolores Paoli

Guests: Chief Foti Koskinas, David Kennedy (Artistic Director, Westport Country Playhouse), Peter Chenot (Director of Marketing, Westport Country Playhouse)

The meeting was called to order at 8:04 AM.

Approval of Minutes: Catherine Onyemelukwe moved that the minutes of our June 6th meeting be approved. Judy Hamer seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Programming:

1. **Senior Center (Recap):**

The 2nd and 3rd place winners of the 2017 TEAM Westport essay contest presented their essays at the Senior Center on July 1st. Josiah Tarrant and Claire Dinshaw thoughtfully answered questions. They also indicated that they had seen some changes at Staples with regard to diversity. Members of the press attended as well.

2. **TEAM Westport Book Club (Recap and Upcoming):**

Zoe and Catherine Lewis reported that the group of generally 8-12 people that varies each time will be viewing the movie *Get Out* on July 24th and will finish reading the book *The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabel Wilkerson. This session is listed as an open meeting and is not a Library co-sponsored event. Books and films were suggested for future sessions.

We will give information about Book Club sessions to Human Services and Celebrate Westport in order to increase our reach in the community.

3. **Flyer response:**

TEAM Westport was asked by First Selectman Marpe to develop community programming in response to the racist and anti-Semitic flyers that were distributed in town during May. Maggie, Bernicestine, and Harold met with representatives of the Interfaith Council – Rabbi Jeremy Wiederhorn (The Conservative Synagogue) and Rev. Willie Salmond (Saugatuck Church in Rev. Alison Patton’s absence).

We proposed three events to implement in the fall that could possibly increase our community understanding about different faiths: 1) a conversation featuring a Rabbi, Imam, and Christian Pastor; 2) a dialogue by three Interfaith women representing Judaism, Islam, and Christianity (Dolores is involved); and 3) a presentation by the former Mayor of South Windsor, CT who is Muslim. The Westport Playhouse can be a possible location for this series on Monday evenings.

4. **Conversations:**

- a. Future conversation topics will at times focus upon “confronting history”. Maggie referred to the book *Who Killed John Clayton? Political Violence and the Emergence of the New South, 1861-1893* by Kenneth C. Barnes that discusses the murder of a politician who had been trying to organize the black vote in Arkansas. This relates to the Playhouse’s production of *Appropriate* and can be added to a suggested reading list.
- b. Applications are down currently at the University of Missouri, so much so that they had to close 7 dorms. How to deal with conflict and controversy may be a great conversation with respect to local Westport matters such as the Black Lives Matter banner at the Unitarian Church.
- c. A discussion of Black Lives Matter: Concept vs. Movement may be a great topic.
- d. Free Speech is very applicable now as a topic.



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5. Library Partnership/Coming Events:

- a. We can co-host another session featuring Jeff Pegues (Black and Blue).
- b. We are proposing to feature an author for a book that comes out on January 2nd.

6. Playhouse – “Appropriate”:

David Kennedy is the director of *Appropriate* (August 15th – September 2nd) by Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins, an African-American playwright who is a MacArthur recipient (2016) and Obie Award winner (2014) for best new American play. *Appropriate* is about a family whose patriarch has passed away on an Arkansas plantation. They discover relics of his past that denote extreme racism in the context of a “family drama”.

David proposed a talk-back after every performance to try to get people to engage with each other. This would dovetail with the “white privilege conversation”. However, we do not know if these discussions would be feasible given the run-time of each performance. We can provide a reading list for those who may want additional information.

7. Policing:

Chief Koskinas will host a session for TEAM Westport members and his Police Department team.

Education:

1. Julie Heller will be joining us at TEAM Westport meetings starting this fall.
2. Redacted versions of the essays submitted for the contest will be read by the English and Social Studies teachers and others within the system.
3. Harold has spoken with the consultant who is working with the Superintendent on her strategic plan particularly with regard to leadership around diversity – how it’s built and maintained. Members of TEAM Westport will have an opportunity, at the Superintendent’s request, to participate in a focus group (there are several being conducted in Westport) later this summer.
4. The Director of Human Resources for the School system, John Bayers, is proactively recruiting candidates based on skill level and other factors. Several members of the system who are diverse have been hired to date; however, we recommend that more teachers of color be hired.
Once teachers have been hired, retention is important. Also training for new hires and veteran teachers as to how race is discussed in the classroom and throughout the system is important. There are resources and materials to help address cultural differences.
We also suggest working with students of color in the system more proactively.

New Events (ADL):

Voices – A Concert for Unity will be held on September 10th at the Levitt Pavilion in Westport (5:30 PM). TEAM Westport will discuss convening the participating non-profit and like-minded organizations at some point after the concert and helping determine partnership possibilities.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:40 AM.

The next meeting will be at 8AM on Tuesday, September 12, 2017, in Room 201 of Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary