



TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes
September 12, 2017, 8:00 AM
Room 309, Westport Town Hall, Westport, CT

Attendees: Susan Ellis, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Elaine Daignault, Karen Kleine, Catherine Lewis, Maggie Mudd, Harold Bailey (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Althea Seaborn, and Dolores Paoli

Guests: Michael Barker (Managing Director, Westport Country Playhouse), Julie Heller (Staples High School), Rebecca Marsick (Staples High School), Cody Daigle-Orians (Westport Library), Alison Patton (Pastor, Saugatuck Congregational Church), Puneet Bhullar, Candace Banks (Co-President, Westport PTA Council), and Foti Koskinas (Chief of Police, Westport)

The meeting was called to order at 8:06AM.

Attendees introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes: Catherine Onyemelukwe moved that the minutes from our July 11th meeting be approved. Catherine Lewis seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously and will be submitted for posting.

What's Up:

We shared titles of books to read: Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood by Trevor Noah and Green by Sam Graham-Felsen.

Harold reviewed a summary of our current initiatives and mentioned two recent events, namely the distribution of discriminatory flyers in town and the tearing down of the Black Lives Matter banner that was outside the Unitarian Church. The response from the community and the police has been very strongly supportive.

Programming:

1. ADL Voices Concert (Recap): The concert had a diversity of actors, entertainment, and videos and a great turnout. Several speakers referenced Charlottesville.
Action: We should decide how we should proceed with follow-on activities in this post-Charlottesville environment.
2. TEAM Westport Book Club: Participants are now reading Michael Eric Dyson's book, Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America. The group has met 5 times since it started and has discussed books that include The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas and The New Jim Crow by Michele Alexander. The movie *Get Out* was fun to view during the summer.
Action: At the session this coming Monday (the 18th), the next segments will be planned and will include additional movies and essays that examine structural racism.
3. Interfaith Clergy / Interfaith Council: A discussion was held earlier this summer with the Interfaith Clergy about how to respond to the flyers that were distributed earlier this summer. Now that the clergy members are back from the summer, three events already discussed as potential community programs in response to the flyers will be researched. Individual congregations are having conversations (Temple Israel participated with the Bridgeport Council of Churches on racism; Saugatuck Congregational is showing the movie *Zootopia*). The 2017 programming theme of the Interfaith Council is *Welcoming the Stranger. It was launched last Spring with a Ramadan*



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celebration led by Dolores Paoli in which several other TEAM Westport members participated. Planned future programming includes a discussion of Sanctuary organizations and institutions. Derogatory anti-Semitic/anti-Muslim and pro-Russia leaflets were left on windshields in Stamford and Norwalk recently.

The new Black Lives Matter (BLM) banner is up again at the Unitarian Church and will be rededicated on Sunday, September 17th at 12:15.

Actions: We will follow up with the Interfaith Clergy and Council re: potential jointly-sponsored programming.

Several members of TEAM Westport will attend the rededication of the BLM banner.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (January, 2018) planning committee will start meeting this month.

4. Conversations: Maggie and Althea reported that the committee is putting together a series of topics under the rubric of “Confronting History”. These conversations and topics should be in sync with the TEAM Westport book group if possible. One topic might be “What it means to be a patriot”. During past conversations, 20-25 people have shown up. The question is how to expand the group beyond “the choir”. Cody is starting a project at the Library designed to encourage our community members to honestly express thoughts when discussing issues so we get away from the “I win, you lose” mentality. This training is in line with the guidance of Frank Sesno (formerly of CNN, now with George Washington University) in Ask More which emphasizes the importance of questions and with the work of Krista Tippett (of *On Being* on NPR) who has developed models for getting to layers of discomfort. Stay tuned.
5. Library Partnership/Coming Events: TEAM Westport is co-sponsoring Tony Horwitz, the author of Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War at the Library this Sunday, September 17th at 3PM in the large Reading Room. He explores issues around the flag as well as the history, nostalgia and romance of the Confederacy.
Haris Durrani will be presenting at the Library in late October.
Action: Several members of TEAM Westport will attend this Sunday.
6. Playhouse – Appropriate Follow-on: Michael Barker discussed the play and answered questions. There were no in-depth community conversations during the play run since the director did not want to reveal how the play ends. Although there was no direct current events connection when the play was selected for this season, Charlottesville coincidentally happened during the previews. Now that the production has ended, we would like to invite the playwright to come here. We do think the production left people wanting to discuss the play and the topics it presents.
Question: Will any of the coming productions use “race-conscious casting”? In choosing works to present, do you select another play if you can’t cast other races?
Answer: *Michael Barker* will work with us to pursue 1) potential for playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins to Westport; 2) development of a discussion of the issues surrounding “race conscious” casting. The overall questions are how to effectively “do” art across race and culture and how not to stereotype.
7. Policing: Chief Koskinas reported that a session will be scheduled for TEAM Westport members and his department. In addition, another conversation on policing and racial profiling will be set-up for the community. Chief Koskinas and Jeff Pegues are speaking at other venues.



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Action: Chief Koskinas will work with us to schedule another town session featuring Jeff Pegues and him, since the one held in June at the Library earlier this year was too short.

Education:

1. Strategic Planning: In August, members of TEAM Westport participated in a focus group with Superintendent Palmer as part of her development of a 3-year strategic plan for the school system. Our suggestions with regard to diversity and relevant considerations were compiled beforehand and presented before our session. Superintendent Palmer stated that at her opening convocation for the school year she would reinforce the values of the school system. Strategic leadership with accountability is being taught to the entire team with an emphasis on teaching staff to be able to convey “diversity” in a meaningful way.
Our suggestions have been shared with the Board, teachers, and the PTA. Superintendent Palmer is now figuring out her strategic goals and objectives and making them measurable. Teachers will have opportunities to hear the message during Professional Development days. The first PTA meeting has been scheduled. Catherine Lewis mentioned that Border Crossers (NYC based) also trains teachers via intense programs and may be a resource.
2. Staples: TEAM Westport Staples is still a club at the high school, but the year is just beginning so there is not much to report yet.
Julie Heller and Rebecca Marsick emphasized that training of teachers is key. Educational material is in the process of being diversified. Julie Droller, Assistant Superintendent for K-5, is looking at all of the books in the schools to evaluate the mix. In general, teachers and students need to be able to discuss hard issues and be supported in that effort. Hence there is a need for training teachers so that they feel confident.
ADL has programs for students at all grade levels and some of these programs are being used.
3. PTA: The presentation and slide show developed by Zoe and Catherine Lewis was shown to last year’s PTA Council. That needs to be shown again to this year’s Council and to school PTA group parents. It is also necessary to arrange presentations for parents system-wide. Parents do need to know what to say when “stories come home” about racism or to their children who might forestall racist acts at school.
4. Board of Ed: The Board will be discussing the Strategic Plan at the October board meeting.
5. Essay Contest Planning: Susan Ellis, chair of the committee, is working on coming up with a subject that is good and allows students to talk.
Action: The committee will be meeting. Rebecca Marsick, Julie Heller, Drew Coyne, and Lauren Francese – who are all currently at Staples – will help out.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:37AM.

The next meeting will be held: Tuesday, October 3rd, 2017 at 8AM in Room 201, Westport Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary