



## TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes Tuesday, April 2, 2019 Westport Town Hall, Room 201, Westport, CT

**Attendees:** Maggie Mudd, Harold Bailey, Jr. (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Susan Ellis, Elaine Daignault, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Catherine Lewis, Zoe Tarrant, Judy Hamer, and Dolores Paoli

**Guests:** Jennifer Keller (Westport Library), Pippa Bell Adler (Sustainable Westport), Rebecca Marsick (Staples High School), Lauren Francese (Westport Schools), Karen Kleine (Board of Education)

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

**Approval of Minutes:** Susan moved to approve the minutes from the March 5<sup>th</sup> meeting. Catherine Onyemelukwe seconded the motion. The motion passed. The minutes were approved and will be posted accordingly.

**Sustainable CT Update by Pippa Bell Adler:** The Sustainability movement was Introduced in New Jersey. Sustainability focuses on being environmentally sound, economically viable, and equitable (hence, TEAM Westport's contribution re: equity can play an important role in assuring that Westport can attain a higher level). Westport now has Bronze certification and is seeking Silver. Sarah Harris is helping with Sustainable CT.

Thus far, Westport's efforts have been primarily environmental (water use, waste, green gas initiative). Regarding equity, Westport must identify 3-5 Equity Actions. Already this year, the actions (among others) that qualify are: 1) our teen essay contest, 2) Westport Reads (Westport Library), 3) our TEAM Westport Book Group, and 4) the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., celebration.

In addition, Westport needs to:

2. Build an inclusive process to identify who lives in our community and how to connect with all.
3. Create opportunities for dialogue such as open accessible meetings.
4. Carry out actions in an inclusive manner.
5. Continue to refine, revisit, and continuously improve strategies and perspectives as we co-create an inclusive and sustainable community for current and future residents.

TEAM Westport is "doing it" already. Mid-August is the deadline to report on our Sustainability progress. We should also be looking at how to incorporate values of equity into the Town's value statement and mission since our embrace of equity is important for the Town to flourish.

Maggie and Harold will meet with Pippa further to work out the equity action plan and reporting requirements.

### **Essay Contest:**

- The award ceremony for our teen winners is set for Wednesday, April 3<sup>rd</sup> at Saugatuck Congregational Church at 6:30pm. We have to set up the chairs at 6. The press has been invited and Inklings (Staples High School) will be included.
- On the following Monday, April 8<sup>th</sup> from 7-8:30pm at Saugatuck Congregational Church, there is a follow-up to the meeting that Zoe and Catherine Lewis held with parents on March 11<sup>th</sup> about microaggressions in the schools and how we're handling them. Notices are being sent out through the PTA to parents to encourage conversation and attendance.
- The Westport Arts Council is doing an initiative on microaggressions in another month or so. They are meeting with Harold tomorrow to plan the event. They held an art contest highlighting conceptual conversation benches. The Council is using the backdrop of the exhibit to bring



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topics to the community for discussion and conversation and the topic of microaggressions was selected. Our winning students will present excerpts of their essays to stimulate discussion.

**Policing:** The chief is away. Harold (representing TEAM Westport) has been invited to participate along with some other community partners in the interviewing process to fill current openings on the force. We would still like to get the Leadership Council going again.

**TEAM Westport Book Club / PTA Micro-Aggressions:** The most recent session was held on March 25<sup>th</sup>. The book discussed was White Fragility, by Robin DiAngelo. That book may be hard for white people who consider themselves progressive, since it encourages whites to look at their ideology and to look at the way they've been socialized. However, it is excellent. The next reading selection has not been decided, but there are lots of recommendations from different genres.

The March 11<sup>th</sup> session on microaggressions was attended by 5 TEAM Westport parents and 5 other parents. It was covered in *Westport Now*. Microaggressions are tough to get across to white parents who don't feel the urgency, do not know what they are, or don't think they occur. We'll keep trying to educate and make parents aware of what is going on while receiving feedback on experiences – note the next session scheduled for April 8<sup>th</sup> in the evening at Saugatuck Congregational Church.

**Schools Strategic Planning / Staples / Board of Education:** Lauren noted that Superintendent Palmer announced retirement and James D'Amico has resigned as the principal of Staples High School. Harold and Lauren went to an Equity conference given by the CT Center for School Change. They are still working to put together a task force locally. For now, TEAM Westport, as a group, is compiling a list of microaggressions to give concrete examples of what takes place in our schools. Harold has written a letter to the board requesting some involvement by TEAM Westport in the process of hiring new administrators.

Lauren is working on an equity audit encompassing district data – one of the top recommendations from the Anti-racism training in December. Additionally, ongoing talks acknowledge that equity needs to be a theme for all administrative training going forward. We are looking at trying to line up an anti-racism session this August, based on Dr. Ibram Kendi's work.

Karen reported that the Board of Education has been dealing with a lot of different issues this year. Information gathering at this stage is key so we can hit the ground running. Training and professional development is still very much needed. Karen will invite Dr. Anthony Buono, assistant superintendent, to attend the Essay contest awards on Wednesday evening.

TEAM Staples is continuing to meet and discuss current issues and it provides a wonderful support group for students. Eight students did podcasts about microaggressions for an NPR contest. Another club, the Unity and Diversity Club, runs separately and raises awareness about community and professional development.

We would like an update on The Open Choice program. Katie Mahoney Brown is the advisor and counselor who oversees the program and meets with the parents. Is it discussed at the Board level? Who evaluates? Is it working? Dr. Tina Mannerino (Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Services) is the Central Office contact. Information about Open Choice would certainly be part of an Equity Audit.

**MLK Planning Committee / Anti-Racism Training:** Dr. James Forman, Jr. was wonderful on March 10<sup>th</sup>. At that time, we collected \$2045 for TEAM Westport's anti-racism training and work.

His recommendation for our community to contribute to a bond fund was picked up by the Interfaith Clergy. He highlighted so much good stuff to do right now on incarceration. NY has eliminated bail for



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misdemeanors and some felonies. Quakers support writing to people in solitary confinement. Attention to these matters helps us understand more while reducing prisoners' isolation. The Town is now trying a restorative justice model where, instead of punishment, juveniles are being referred to a review board. What models work best across the state and country?

**Interfaith Clergy / Interfaith Council:** Alison mentioned that the Interfaith Clergy has agreed to make a donation to one of the Bond Relief funds recommended by James Forman during the Q&A following his address.

**Westport Historical Society:** Ramin has helped out on the contest with press releases.

**Playhouse:** *In the Heights* has gone through the roof for ticket sales. All the freshmen at Staples are going to see it. The Playhouse has the ability to extend the run. Some of the original cast members are involved, so that will be great.

The upcoming season features plays by two women of color.

**Library Partnership / Coming Events:**

- Exit West was a Town read and the session via video chat with the author, Mohsin Hamid, on March 12<sup>th</sup> was incredibly good and thoughtful.
- On April 11<sup>th</sup>, the Library is hosting students from the United States Army War College in Carlisle, PA at Hoskins Hall (Saugatuck Congregational Church) at 7pm. They will also visit the Westport schools talking about national security and public policy. The military does a great job educating their senior officers.
- June 23<sup>rd</sup> is the Library's reopening day. Jennifer mentioned that there will be celebratory events highlighting Library partners potentially including a panel hosted by TEAM Westport. We'll need additional information.
- Maggie mentioned books and possible authors we might attract early this fall. Also, Dr. Ibram Kendi will be launching his book tour for his new book and we hope to be able to have him come here again.
- Cody is collecting Input on how we should leverage the new facilities of the library. He is envisioning a Racial Justice Lab housed at the Library to measure attitudes to see which lectures, conversations, book clubs, etc. influence best over time. The suggestion is to make it the "Equity Lab".

**Other:**

- 1) On April 7<sup>th</sup>, Indian music will be presented in a program at 2pm at Kings Highway.
- 2) Is TEAM Westport marching in the Memorial Day Parade this year? Please see Catherine O.
- 3) On April 13<sup>th</sup> at 8pm at the Unitarian Church, a Duo – Reggie Harris and Greg Greenway -- talk and sing about racial justice and their lives. *Deeper Than The Skin* will be presented at the Voices Café. (BYOB) TEAM Westport can reserve a table. It's a wonderful opportunity. Let Catherine O. know.
- 4) Student Travel Group – Humanities Rights Group -- will go on a trip in February or April, 2020 for 4-5 days. Students apply through Rho Kappa. 20-25 students will be accepted.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30am.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 7, 2019, at 8am in Room 201, Westport Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine E. McLeod



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Secretary