



TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes Tuesday, June 4, 2019 Westport Town Hall, Room 201, Westport, CT

Attendees: Harold Bailey (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Elaine Daignault, Susan Ellis, Alison Patton, Catherine Lewis, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Ramin Ganeshram, Althea Seaborn, Zoe Tarrant, Candace Banks

Guests: Lauren Francese (Westport Schools), Rebecca Marsick (Staples High School), Michael Barker (Westport Playhouse), Chief Foti Koskinas (Westport Police), Deputy Chief Sam Arciola (Westport Police), Lt. Eric Woods (Westport Police), Dr. David Abbey (Interim Superintendent, Westport Schools), Jeff Wieser (Homes with Hope), Pippa Bell Ader (Sustainable Westport)

The meeting was called to order at 8:05 AM.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes from our May 7th meeting were distributed beforehand. They will be voted upon for approval at our July 2nd meeting.

Superintendent – Dr. David Abbey: Dr. Abbey joined us for the first time and shared his background with us. He has been in Westport three weeks and is open to recommendations from TEAM Westport.

Schools Strategic Planning / Staples / Board of Education:

Harold reviewed a list of preliminary recommendations developed by TEAM Westport for the school system re: equity based on the input of community members including parents and students.

Lauren reported the following:

1. The school district is currently talking to several groups about providing equity training.
2. Lauren is committed to doing an equity audit and examining the Staples code of conduct which needs to be updated with policy about harassment and sexual assault as well as hate and equity.
3. Teachers read this year's TEAM Westport essays to help determine professional development needs. Rebecca is leading the Professional Development committee at Staples and will support the Connections team. [The mission of Connections is to: serve as an intentional time to communicate school-related information, foster meaningful connections between students and staff members, and create a safe environment where students feel comfortable to hold open discussions throughout their Staples career]. It provides the protocol for difficult conversations and what teachers need to lead small groups, etc. This just passed at last night's School Board meeting.
4. Harold spoke at this year's Rho Kappa (Social Studies Honor Society) induction at Staples and was, himself, inducted as an honorary member of Rho Kappa.
5. Several students from TEAM Staples, coordinated by Rebecca, entered the NPR podcast competition.
6. Julie Heller, Lauren, and Maria Zachery (World Languages Coordinator) will be attending the *Institute for Teaching Diversity and Social Justice* conducted by Shanelle Henry at Greens Farms Academy, June 17th-21st.
7. Catherine and Zoe will continue to lead and extend TEAM Westport's focus re: educating and sensitizing our community about equity and inclusion.

TEAM Westport Book Club / PTA Microaggressions / PTA Parent Updates:

1. Zoe, Catherine, Candace, Bernicestine, and Harold met with the current PTA Council Presidents to review the list of concerns as to how issues of race are handled in the schools. The intent is to get momentum in the district so that our continued efforts and resulting policy will ensure we are all thinking about inclusivity and diversity all the time.
2. Zoe and Catherine are hosting another meeting with parents next Monday about inclusivity.
3. They are planning to meet with the PTAs in the Fall and plan a follow-up meeting with Dr. Rosen (Bedford Middle School principal) re: plans for next year.
4. The book group has wrapped up for the year. TW and Westport Library are planning to develop an "Equity" Book Club and set up multiple book discussions per book under the "Equity Lab" umbrella. Professor Ibram Kendi has published a list of anti-racism books in the New York Times. We shall be compiling and listing recommended books in some to-be-determined space at the Library.



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Housing:

Because of the “Pro Publica” article about the lack of affordable housing in Westport and the appearance that there are efforts to keep multi-unit housing out of our town, Jeff Wieser joined Elaine to discuss this topic with us. It relates to the mission of TEAM Westport since if this is the case (and it certainly is the perception), then Westport would not be a welcoming community re: our areas of focus. Also, the lack of affordable housing may impact Westport’s diversity, but it does not necessarily guarantee diversity. Lots of calls come in each week from people looking for housing, but we have no other units available. This topic will continue to be discussed at our future meetings, now that it has come up so prominently.

Basic facts to note:

1. The Housing Authority is governed by the State – not by the Town and, of course, we must always adhere to the Fair Housing Act.
2. There are multi-unit housing developments in town currently. Any housing, though, built before 1990 does not count. Some new developments are being built now and a percentage of each of those complexes should be affordable.
3. “Affordable” is a term that is determined by several factors including the number of people in a household and income. There are tables and ways to calculate for each situation what income is required to qualify for an affordable unit.
4. Private affordable units are also possible.
5. People in affordable units often need to be able to access public transportation. In Westport that means they need to be close to the Post Road or Metro North.
6. Some people decline the opportunity to live in Westport because they feel uncomfortable based on economics and racial identity.
7. Challenges affecting affordability include space to build, location, and access to emergency services.
8. Westport Human Services and the church community are helping wherever they can by supplying food and assistance for energy bills after supplemental funds for the winter cease on May 1 annually.

Bottom line: there needs to be an effort to develop the town’s vision for a targeted number of affordable units as well as the roadmap for getting us there. We pay an economic price by not having employees of the town (for example, police officers and teachers) live here.

Policing:

1. Chief Koskinas indicated that recruiting police officers in this environment is more difficult. As currently structured, Westport’s compensation package is ; officers want more flexible schedules. National coverage about police shootings and other questionable behavior by police officers in other areas of the country does not help.

Lt. Woods talked about the Department’s recent recruitment efforts for officers of color. They have used several vehicles to recruit officers including job fairs at colleges and a consultant.

The community was recently involved in interviewing several strong candidates. Interviewers included members of the RTM, the Westport Schools, and TEAM Westport. In closing the deal on recruits of color, we continue to run into the hurdles of compensation competitiveness and the town’s reputation re: welcoming officers of color. Chief Koskinas requested that members contact him with any recommendations, candidates or leads.

2. We’d like to schedule the next TEAM Westport/Police Department Leadership meeting.



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Library Partnership / Coming Events:

1. The Library is reopening on June 23rd at 11am. Their “Booked” event takes place tonight in the new space. Our discussion of what we could do at the reopening included a workstation for Project Implicit, a TEAM Westport recommended bookshelf in the Library with signage and a sign-up sheet for the TEAM Westport book club. We may not be able to do anything for the 23rd, but we will try to work something out.
2. Rebecca is working on Story Fest for later this year.

Westport Historical Society:

1. Congratulations! For the exhibit “Remembered: The History of African Americans in Westport”, the WHS has just received the Award of Merit from the CT League of History Organizations; add to that a curatorial Excellence Award to Ramin from the New England Museum Association; on the national front the American Association for State and Local History (which has also awarded, in the past, organizations such as Washington’s Mount Vernon and Madison’s Montpelier) awarded the exhibit a National Leadership in History Award for Excellence in the Field; and Congressman Jim Himes nominated it for an Institute for Museum and Library Services National Medal – a prestigious nomination indeed. Ramin was recently named a 2019 Paul Cuffe Fellow for the study of race and ethnicity in American maritime history at the Munson Institute at Mystic Seaport, the foremost international institution for the study of American maritime history and will be participating there during the month of July.
2. The Social Studies curriculum re: African American History has changed at the state level, namely that an elective course must be offered to high school students. Small historical societies can work with schools to ensure that histories are accurate. Lauren is meeting next week with teachers about the curriculum to make sure this is implemented properly at Staples. Ramin will work with Lauren.
3. The brick walk, containing the names of the 240+ enslaved people known to have lived here and been integral to the building and development of Westport will be dedicated on Sunday, June 30th at 11AM. Also, the “Remembered:” exhibit will close on that date.

Playhouse:

Very good news! The Playhouse has just received three Connecticut Critics Circle Awards: Best Play (for *Flea in Her Ear*), Best Actor (Philip Hernandez) and Best Director (Mark Lamos) both for *Man of La Mancha*. *In the Heights* was the most successful run in Playhouse history. Students loved it. First preview of *Skeleton Crew* by Dominique Morisseau is tonight with a cast of four African American actors. A must-see!

Announcements:

1. Dr. Abbey mentioned attending the scholar athlete event and shared the write-up about Chet Ellis, our two-time essay contest winner, in the Scholar Athlete bulletin.
2. Our top 3 essay contest winners are doing a podcast with Rana Hafiz.
3. Elaine invited everyone to celebrate the anniversary of ADA with Human Services, Disability, and Parks and Rec on June 26th.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:41AM.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 2nd, 2019 at 8AM in Room 309, Westport Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary