



## TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes Tuesday, February 4, 2020 Westport Town Hall, Room 201, Westport, CT

**Attendees:** Harold Bailey (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Catherine Lewis, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Susan Ellis, Maggie Mudd, and Zoe Tarrant

**Guests:** Pippa Bell Ader, Matt Gouveia (Westport Police), Sam Arciola (Deputy Chief, Westport Police), Brett Aronow, Danielle Teplin, Rebecca Marsick (Staples High School), Jill Greenberg, Shanelle Henry (Greens Farms Academy), Foti Koskinas (Chief, Westport Police), and Tom Foran

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

**Welcome:** Harold reviewed highlights over the past month: the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. service in January, the launch of the 2020 Essay contest, and the activities with respect to the Westport school system.

**Approval of Minutes:** Maggie moved that the minutes of our January 14, 2020, meeting be accepted with an amendment. Catherine L. seconded the motion. The motion carried. The minutes will be posted accordingly.

### **Schools/Strategic Planning/Staples/Board of Ed:**

- Harold has met with Dr. Abbey (our interim school Superintendent) and has presented recommendations for the school district. Also, a meeting took place with Dr. Joe Erardi (the consultant who is working with the School Board during our new Superintendent search). TEAM Westport has submitted and Dr. Erardi has accepted without qualification 2 questions that will be asked of the candidates during the interview process.
- Maggie, Harold, and Bernicestine met with Candi Savin, chair of the Board of Education, and introduced recommendations for Westport schools.
- On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019, training was given to Westport school administrators by the Anti-Racist Research and Policy Center founded by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi (American University). Follow-up gameplan and ongoing training is desired by attendees and required for effective implementation and sustainable improvement.
- The State of CT is launching a strategic initiative on work force diversity within its school systems “to attract, recruit, support and retain educators of color”. Statewide and in Westport, the school population is falling and employees without tenure are susceptible to being released. At the same time, the state and our town are under-resourced with respect to educator diversity. Westport is one of 8 districts which has volunteered to participate in a regional pilot improving educator diversity with respect to employees of color. John Bayers, Director of Human Resources for Westport Schools, has put together a team and is going to the first session in March. He has been invited and agreed to attend our April meeting to provide an update. “Last Hired - First Fired” is an issue, since it can negatively affect our diversity numbers. Several recommendations we have offered to improve Westport’s diversity include a) building a school community of people of color, b) coordinating across multiple districts to increase the numbers and to share ideas. Consultants will be involved in the pilot to explore additional ideas. TEAM Westport may get involved in follow-on planning.
- School budget cuts are very possible this year.

### **PTA Micro-Aggressions/PTA Parent Updates/TW Book Club**

- Catherine and Zoe will host a parents’ meeting in February – date to be determined.
  - In the Pre-K arena, we have met with Eileen Ward at the Children’s Community Development Center who is currently coordinating an annual program to be hosted at Greens Farm Academy on May 4<sup>th</sup> for the parents of the 20+ preschools in Westport, Weston, and Fairfield. The topic to be discussed is equity and inclusion at an early age. The Pre-K community wants to develop strategy overall and we are now meeting with them to shape the event. Harold will appear on a panel (now in formation and to be moderated by Shanelle Henry) to present what TEAM Westport is doing. The composition of the panel is still being formed and evaluated.
- Pre-K teachers need training and several groups have been recommended to be contacted for such training including the Center for Racial Justice in Education located in New York City.



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**Essay Contest:** We officially launched our 2020 contest on January 24<sup>th</sup>. We challenged entrants to examine “stereotypes” this year. Posters have been distributed with the details which are also on our website. Teachers are pushing hard. Entries are due on February 28<sup>th</sup> by 11:59p. The winners will be announced publicly on April 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Library in the Forum. We continue to seek donations and grants for contest funding.

### **Policing:**

- Deputy Chief Arciola and Chief Koskinas outlined the recent incident in which a carjacking occurred in Norwalk resulting in a chase to West Haven where the person stealing the car (clearly armed only with a knife) was shot with seven rounds through the car window and killed by a state trooper. The main question asked was what is the protocol that law enforcement officers follow when they are confronted with people who have mental health issues. Officers do receive training and tools to make sound judgements. Locally, the police department has access to flagging systems to identify people who may have problems. If anyone has family members or friends who need special help or have medical conditions, it was recommended that they contact Human Services to use the confidential Disabilities Registry so that, in an emergency, officers are aware and informed beforehand and can react accordingly.
- The State has been conducting a traffic stop study focused on racial profiling for about 10 years. Westport has not been out of line or on the spectrum for concern by the State. However, Chief Koskinas wants the department to work on some of the areas where our numbers are higher to stay ahead of the curve. We are awaiting contact by the State for follow-up. It is a balancing act, because we do know that if traffic stops decrease for moving and/or equipment violations (broken out by the time of day and weather conditions), more traffic accidents occur.
- How do you handle the use of social media and other sites by officers? A policy is being developed state-wide with respect to groups you can join as officers. They do screen to see what’s being looked at before hiring as is commonly done by other employers.

### **MLK/Clergy:**

- The 2020 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. event was held on Sunday, January 19<sup>th</sup> at the Playhouse and was listed beforehand as being “sold-out” (500 + people pre-registered). Our speaker, Dr. Carol Anderson, author of White Rage and One People, No Vote, received high marks and many kudos. As a result of her talk, individuals are looking at how to help in “purple” states such as poll watching during this election year. We raised over \$2300 for ant-racism training and related initiatives. We are now looking for suggestions for speakers for next year.
- Members of the Interfaith Clergy and TEAM Westport are planning a trip to Montgomery to the Equal Justice Initiative’s Museum and Memorial and to Selma. The proposed time frame is mid-October.

### **Westport Library:**

- The documentary *True Justice* will be screened at the Library tonight at 7. We will be joined by Trey Ellis, the film’s Executive Producer, for commentary after the screening. Harold will facilitate.
- There is year-long programming at the Library about 1919 and women’s suffrage including coverage on the Library’s website, via speakers, books, and the Yale Campaign School. Kate Walbert who wrote A Short History of Women will speak at the Library on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. A women’s chorus will perform in August to celebrate the actual anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### **Westport Museum:**

- The Museum is moving forward following the strategic plan developed by the Historical Society and funded by the state. Additional exhibits are in place and others are being planned.
- A talk on “Sisterhood and its Discontents: Suffragists and Antisuffragists in the Age of Total War, 1914-1924” will take place on February 19<sup>th</sup> as part of the year-long examination of the 1919 women’s suffrage act. The talk will contrast an African-American suffragist and a white anti-suffragist among others. Also, not all women were in favor of women being able to vote for a variety of reasons – for example, women were alleged not to be smart enough to vote.
- We would still like to redo the plaque outside of Town Hall. If anyone’s interested in helping, let us know.



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**Playhouse:** A reimagined *Ain't Misbehavin'* is a major piece for this year, July 14<sup>th</sup> – August 1<sup>st</sup>. It will go on tour and hopefully back to Broadway after being here. The original composers for the 1978 production are involved in the redo. In addition, the Director is Camille A. Brown, one of the emerging superstars on the Broadway front.

**Affordable Housing:** There has been no feedback from the State yet on the 4-acre state-owned site about which the Town has inquired. Danielle Dobin heads the P&Z and chairs the Affordable Housing subcommittee. We can show support by contacting our state representatives.

**Announcements:**

- Shanelle announced that she will be conducting the Institute for Teaching Diversity and Social Justice in three locations this summer: at Greens Farms Academy, in NYC, and in Newport.
- Rosa Parks' birthday is today. She would have been 107 years old.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:26am.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 3, 2020, in Room 201 at Westport Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod  
Secretary