



TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes Tuesday, December 8, 2020 Via Zoom

Attending: Harold Bailey (Presiding), Jim Marpe (First Selectman), Melissa Kane (Third Selectwoman), Judith Hamer, Bernicestine McLeod, Reverend Alison Patton (Saugatuck Congregational Church), Althea Seaborn, Candace Banks, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Catherine Lewis, Stephane Kirven, Susan Ellis, Maggie Mudd, and Ramin Ganeshram

Guests: Superintendent Tom Scarice via phone (Westport Schools), Ted Gillman, Adam Rosen (Principal, Bedford Middle School), Alex Giannini (Westport Library), Sara Harris (Operations Manager, Westport), Chief Foti Koskinas (Westport Police Department), Brett Aronow, Brian McGunagle, Danielle Dobin (Chair, P&Z and Chair, P&Z Affordable Housing Subcommittee), Danielle Teplica, Elizabeth Falk (PTA DEI Coordinator), Eugenie Ten Cate, Harris Falk, Holly Sulzycki (Westport Schools), Jenny Nelson (Westport Playhouse), Jill Nadel, Michael Guadarrama via phone, Rebecca Marsick (Staples High School), Deputy Chief Sam Arciola (Westport Police Department), Shanelle Henry (Greens Farms Academy), Ngassam Ngnoumen via phone (PTA DEI Coordinator), Captain Ryan Paulsson (Westport Police Department), and Tom Foran

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

Welcome / Approval of Minutes: Harold welcomed us. There is a lot going on including preparation for our 2021 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration beginning January 17th, programs at the Library, Anti-Racist training at Temple Israel, as well as follow-on updates to other activities.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the September 15th and October 6th meetings were presented. Judy moved that the minutes be accepted. Candace seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous. The minutes will be posted accordingly.

- Harold introduced Brian McGunagle who is representing the LGBTQI community. Brian thanked Harold for the opportunity to join us this morning. He has resided in Westport 4 years. He wants to have a conversation about the LGBTQI community and what can be done here. Over the past few weeks, he has been able to get lots of followers on Instagram and will be kicking off a meeting tomorrow.
- Danielle Teplica will research community resources along with Serena, our intern, and with the Library to set up a database of skills.
- On December 16th at 7PM, Harold will be doing a session along with Sustainable Westport hosted by the Library entitled "To Be an Environmentalist, Start with Antiracism". A Rhodes scholar from UConn, Wanjiku Gatheru, will be the main presenter.

First Selectman / Messaging Update:

Jim Marpe: Thank you for the work on Town signage. We are looking at ways, via signage and plaques, to represent our history and remind people of what Westport is about and what it should be. We are also looking at where this messaging should be located. In Town Hall, the history represented will be inclusive and acknowledge those who have contributed to the building of Westport including black and indigenous people. Pete Ratkiewich, Director of Public Works, has noted sites in Town to place additional historic narrative plaques to commemorate 22 ½ Main Street – one on Elm Street and one near the site of the former 22 ½ Main Street. We are reviewing alternative designs and want to move fast accurately and respectfully with all signage and plaques.

Brian Stern from the Board of Finance, in budgeting for the Town, wants to message diversity initiatives and the challenges we face in diversifying the workforce on many levels. We appreciate the effort to work with department heads to bring employees of color into our public workforce to retain and develop them. We can measure and work on it.



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Harold: Has Brian looked at incentives to help in the process of hiring and recruiting?

Jim: We are having early discussions; but find that pay is not an issue. It's about comfort, feeling welcomed, and feeling respected. The Police Department has had difficulty with retention because of this and it is a challenge. The community is the broader issue – how comfortable does one feel? Jim said that it's hard for him to speak to that; however, that's why TEAM Westport is here.

Judy: If managers are measured on retention, as part of their reviews, they will pay attention. If this is a nice-to-have, they won't pay attention.

Jim says that he agrees. In his prior career, it was important to retain and to develop people. It is more challenging in a civil service environment and it is also not as straight forward with unions. Jim has 17 direct reports. He will talk with his department heads and does not anticipate any resistance. The incentive is that this is what we stand for as a Town. We are just looking to find qualified people who want to be employed by the Town. We will recruit as well as make the Town a positive place for people to submit their resumes for any job posting.

Harold will follow up with Brian.

Policing – Chief Foti Koskinas:

- We need to get the sizes of the billboards at the stations for our messaging. Unfortunately, there are not as many commuters now during the pandemic, so not as many people will see them. The messages are being designed as Mr. Marpe indicated.
- Recruitment was a topic covered in the Police Accountability bill. Cities with a high concentration of minorities have to publicize and have to recruit. The State wants to use us as an example.
- The department is working with our new police recruit who was just sworn in on November 10th.
- There will be a food drive at the Imperial Parking Lot on December 19th. Any help is appreciated. We'll distribute the food collected. This is in addition to the toy drive we regularly hold.

Affordable Housing – Danielle Dobin:

- Danielle had the opportunity to participate in the Tipping Point conference. In some other municipalities, police departments act in opposition to affordable housing. Danielle stated how our police department is more positive about affordable housing. In fact, all applications go to the police department. She said that multifamily housing is not considered dangerous here as in other places unless there are some specific traffic concerns.
- According to the Fair Share Plan from the Open Communities Alliance (OCA), we need to develop a certain amount of affordable housing. We can take a broad view as to what housing should be created. Instead of dense housing, we're looking at a toolbox for Connecticut that will suggest Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as a way to create more affordable housing. There should be a legislative proposal next year to have a housing fund match with municipal funds to use for other efforts. A statewide advocacy group took a broader view on what housing can look like. They looked at below market as well as integrated initiatives. Keep an eye on what they are doing. OCA has been invited to our affordable housing subcommittee meeting.
- The cottages at Long Shore are available for town housing. P&Z looks at the leases. Teachers can be included. Can any of these be used to recruit teachers? High costs can be a disincentive; but Danielle will look at them and make recommendations to P&Z and Town.
- The State Legislature will be working on widespread rezoning reform led by the head of the State Housing Committee. Our State Senators and Representative -- Haskell, Whang, and Steinberg – are working



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to prevent ADUs from counting against us for the 830G compliance. Everyone has adopted the idea of removing ADUs from the calculation. This is really good for Westport since it does not hurt our numbers.

Westport Library – Alex Giannini:

- The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration will be held on January 17th at noon featuring Layla Saad in a conversation with Bernicestine. Her book me and white supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor presents a 28-day challenge for white people to explore their relationship with racism. We should have a prep meeting next week. This event will be the official kickoff of WestportREADS entitled *Toward a More Perfect Union: Confronting Racism*.
- The books for this year's WestportREADS are several: Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead, Caste by Isabel Wilkerson, Class Act by Jerry Craft (for Young Adults), and I am Every Good Thing by Derek Barnes (for children). We are pursuing some of the authors to provide programming. We would like to follow up with discussions in smaller group workshops. We'd like to distribute the workbooks throughout Town. The Library is doing the advertising. Thank you for all of the partners who are working on this.

Interfaith Clergy/MLK – Rev. Alison Patton: Bernicestine will be conducting the interview with Layla Saad who is based in Qatar. We may be one of the first Towns to do the 28-day challenge. Ms. Saad had to assess our community to ensure that we intend to take her work seriously. We had to tell her about the history of TEAM Westport, who we are, what our plans are with respect to her work, etc. Only then did she agree to speak. We are able to take advantage of our virtual world this year. In thinking creatively, we are planning three separate but related events that week instead of the normal hour and a half program on Sunday. On 2 additional days, there will be a panel of local nonprofit leaders in response to Ms. Saad's work. Additionally, Jenny is coordinating an artists' response production on the third day. Then we'll extend the invitation for community members to dive into the book and the workbook. Everything is being coordinated with the Library.

History behind the Layla Saad event: This began as an initiative that Ms. Saad put together on Instagram two years ago. She designated 28 days of looking at racism and white supremacy for people who are not of color. Every day of the 28 days, she gives you some context. Then you review yourself and write down for yourself where you are personally on white supremacy and racism based upon the context she supplied. Ms. Saad started with 100,000 people who were involved online and, as a result, published the book which has become an international best seller. The accompanying journal/workbook just recently came out. We'll be one of the first to encourage people to go through this deeply personal exercise as a Town. The conversation with her on Sunday will be live – not recorded; however, she is not allowing any questions on the spot.

Amazon is selling the book and the workbook as a package for \$40. However, we are encouraging you to find a black-owned bookstore to purchase the books. We are encouraging community members to join us.

Quick update on anti-Racist training: For each of five weeks, Rabbi Michael Friedman at Temple Israel is hosting 5 one-hour online sessions plus conversation time at the end. We have 120 people who have registered and who are attending. The current interest and energy are exciting, but this work only scratches the surface. We are looking forward to continuing the work with Layla Saad's book. A little knowledge can be more harmful than no knowledge. We can stumble. So, we're at the beginning and it is good that we have a next step to take on top of the training that is currently being conducted.

Jill Nadel has participated in the anti-racist training at Temple Israel. She has also started Ms. Saad's book. She commented that it's really hard work especially for people who are new to this journey. We should



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keep in mind that the 28-day challenge is not an entry point. Participants in the challenge may need more handholding. We need to think about how to implement this effectively – maybe we need to provide support or prework before the session and think about how to balance the personal reflections of individual participants while they join small discussion groups. However, she is proud to be a part of Westport.

Westport Museum – Ramin Ganeshram:

- The Westport Museum adopted a DEI and anti-racist mission statement as a formality since it's been our position all along. Please take a look at it. It's proactive. Lots of history organizations are doing so now.
- Previously we were documenters of history, but we now actively interpret it in order to understand racism and bias today. We will reorganize our exhibit structure to support our DEI statement. One gallery that is anti-racism based will be open to everyone. This could be a statewide change.
- We have proposed holding a micro-crash course in museum curation. If it is accepted, guest curators from the public will have access to files, be able to choose artefacts, will do the history, and will learn how to write panels. This idea was born out of putting together other exhibits. We'll announce in January.

Westport Playhouse – Jenny Nelson:

- We are working on a new website that will include our DEI work.
- The Board has adopted a DEI statement.
- We are continuing to review and respond to the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) demands made of the “white theater community” and adopt changes, accordingly, at the Playhouse.
- The DEI Committee of the Board, consisting of Board members and staff, is doing additional training – including “bystander” training.
- The celebration for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King is a joy to work on with revolutionary planning as a result. Four artists of color will create original works as a way to end the week of programming in response to Layla Saad's talk. We also have students for the Regional Center for the Arts performing.
- We have received 31 applications for The Youth Council pilot program that will start in 2021. We're now interviewing to select 10 or 12. We garnered response from towns including New Haven and Stamford.
- The Playhouse Book Club is reading and discussing August Wilson's speech – *The Ground on Which I Stand* – which was prophetic in 1996. He was involved in a subsequent debate with Robert Brustein, an American critic, with obviously opposing views about African Americans in the theater community. This debate was moderated by Anna Deavere Smith.

Superintendent / Board of Ed / Staples – Superintendent Tom Scarice:

- Harold and Tom met a week or so ago.
- The RFP for an Equity Study will be going out soon. We have talked to three different universities and anticipate that the study will begin in March to wrap up by the end of the school year. We are optimistic that we'll have access to students to interview, as well as getting information on our climate and culture. The resulting report should enable us to make recommendations to the board and to determine a long-term strategic plan. We'll have great data to which to look forward.
- Hiring initiative: The Capital Region Education Council (CREC) in Hartford began a process around hiring. John Bayers has gone to recruitment fairs, but the pool of applicants is a problem. CREC is increasing the pipeline. They've established a Teacher Residency Program as a fast track to identify people already in the system. Our regional Cooperative Educational Services (CES) will implement the same program in order to identify staff with a fast track to certification. All the regional superintendents are excited. This will probably be included in the budget process. As an example, paraprofessionals can go through this process,



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since a lot of them are interested in becoming teachers. John Bayers can come to the next meeting of TEAM Westport to speak to the mechanics of this program that was rolled out 2 months ago.

- If we want to address the environment and climate in the buildings now, what do we do in the interim? This will be part of the equity study. However, until we have those results, we can put together recommendations about the blind spots. We shall be back shortly with those recommendations. The Board of Education (BOE) had asked about what is going on already in the DEI world. Initiatives have stopped, but we need to build. It helps to get info from parents, students, organizations, and teachers/admins to find out what things to address and how things are handled. We'll be in touch as to a target date for the BOE presentation which should be on the other side of the holidays – maybe January. The first budget presentation is due by December 28. We'll talk about the current state of affairs and what we need.

Rebecca: The Professional Development Committee is working with Principal Thomas at Staples in talking with staff. Work is being done with respect to LGBTQIA+. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Center will follow up on Race and Equity. The Rowan Center in Norwalk is working with us on sexual assault. We would need to have BOE level approval for wider programming for anything more rigorous than 1 hour. Faith Sweeney is working with parents and students in the lower grades – identifying picture books. English students are reading Stamped by Jason Reynolds and Professor Ibrahm X. Kendi and are studying Fences by August Wilson. They are discussing Buffalo Soldiers in Social Studies at the 10th grade level. The experience is awesome. Holly has worked on the curriculum.

Danielle Dobin is seeing a difference in what her son is experiencing at Staples. She mentioned that Harold is speaking to a Social Studies class (Drew Coyne's) on December 16th.

- She also found the latest BOE meeting interesting, particularly the in-depth presentation on demographics and its applicability to the discussion by the P&Z about multi-family housing in Town. This potentially affects the future school population. The data-driven analysis provided shows that there is no flood of students into the Westport schools. We need more students in the school system and multi-family dwellings should help.

Tom offered caution since the school system was viewing the data from a different perspective. The P&Z can commission to get the data to confirm the interpretation for its purposes. A deeper dive into multifamily housing with respect to school system enrollment may be needed.

Danielle Teplica: We need something on the school website that addresses the commitment to diversity. Work is taking place behind the scenes. The Library also has nothing on its website. We talk about our commitment, but talk is not an incentive for people to come in. It is intimidating to people if they do not see anything. Anything positive might be attractive. We should at least say that we are moving toward something.

Tom: When we give an update to the Board, we can do that. Stay tuned.

Teen Essay Contest – Susan Ellis: The 2021 topic will roll out with Rebecca and Shanelle in January. The students normally write their essays during the February break. Our head judge, Judy, is still in place.

TW Parent Updates / Book Clubs – Catherine Lewis and Zoe Tarrant:

- The Book Club is discussing Caste by Isabel Wilkerson tomorrow from 7-8:30PM.
- We propose changing our Westport Parents' meeting to Wednesdays with the next session being Wednesday, January 6. We are discussing how the parents and workgroup members can support the schools while in a shifting environment during the Equity Audit. We support having teachers and administrators get training to be able to support students. Currently, it is not clear who can support the



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students in the schools in instances where kids face microaggressions or, for example, are called names. It's an ongoing quest and we don't want to wait longer.

Harold appreciates the work in process, but we have to make sure that students are not left exposed any more than they need be.

Judy: In those workshops with teachers and administrators, something as simple as including information in each session on microaggressions would be helpful. It would be nice if students CAN go to their teachers.

Rebecca: After the larger sessions, we do have small group discussions. Principal Thomas is working with everyone; it is something we need to study. TEAM Westport students have put together presentations on race and have spoken out through Connections. Discussions about Stamped have been great. Students are bringing up affordable housing discussions in classes, for example.

Ngassam Ngnoumen: We should emphasize at all times that, although all students are being inadvertently impacted when issues with respect to race are not addressed correctly, this is particularly not good for students of color.

Jill Nadel is uncomfortable with the term microaggressions and suggests that we should think about not using that term. Her concern is that microaggressions are seen as "little knicks"; however, racist acts are much more than microaggressions. We should communicate the message with stronger language.

Judy: Going back to Layla Saad's work, perhaps the 28-day challenge is the answer for what to do at Meadow Ridge this year. Jenny and Alison will discuss with Judy what makes sense for senior citizens as we pursue these issues.

Catherine O. would like to be a part of that discussion.

Althea announced that she is working with the Racial Justice Committee with David Vita at the Unitarian Church. They are collaborating on how to work with TEAM Westport and with the Police including reviewing current legislation.

Tom Foran: Is there any diversity in hiring initiatives? A diverse slate has an impact on diverse hiring. John Bayers will be the one who is up on this for the school system.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:55 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary