



## TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes Tuesday, September 15, 2020 at 8AM Via Zoom – Westport, CT

**Attendees:** Harold Bailey, Jr. (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Judith Hamer, Susan Ellis, Maggie Mudd, Rev. Alison Patton, Zoe Tarrant, Lee Goldstein (Member, Westport Board of Education (BOE)), Jim Marpe (First Selectman), Melissa Kane (Third Selectwoman), Catherine Onyemelukwe, Candace Banks, Catherine Lewis, Elaine D'Aignault, and Ramin Ganeshram

**Guests:** Holly Sulzycki (Staples High School), Helen McAlinden (Homes With Hope), Sara Harris (Operations Manager, Town of Westport), Lauren Francese (Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator, Westport Schools), Faith Sweeney (Coleytown Elementary), Liz Falk (DE&I Coordinator, PTA), Rebecca Marsick (Staples High School), Michael Barker (Westport Playhouse), Ted Gillman, Danielle Teplica, Shanelle Henry (Greens Farms Academy), David Farrell (Captain, Westport Police Department), Dave Wolf (Lieutenant, Westport Police Department), and Tom Foran

### **Welcome**

**Approval of Minutes:** 1.) Catherine Onyemelukwe moved that we approve the minutes from our June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, meeting. Maggie seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously and will be posted. 2.) Susan Ellis moved that we approve the minutes from our July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020, meeting. Catherine Onyemelukwe seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously and will be posted.

**Introduction:** We discussed the rules for conducting online public Town meetings to make everyone aware. Harold gave a special “welcome back” to Catherine Onyemelukwe. He also stated that Tom Scarice is attending a regional superintendent’s meeting, so will not be able to join us today. Chief Koskinas may not be able to join our meeting today either.

### **Harold summarized activity that has taken place over the past few months:**

1. There have been meetings to discuss establishing a bias hotline and placing commemorative signage in Town and at the train stations.
2. There has been increased interest in learning about racism from different groups in Town. Harold has made several presentations covering a brief history of black people in America from 1619 (when problems began) up through 150 years later when the 3/5<sup>th</sup> Compromise was written into the Constitution and on up to the present. The groups have included Sustainable Westport and the Sunrise Rotary.
3. Weston wants to set up a TEAM Weston. Amy Lin Myerson and Stephane Kirven (and Brett Aronow) are Weston residents and are working with the town of Weston on establishing a TEAM Weston. [Note: when we first started out, Weston was a part of TEAM Westport, hence our Weston members.] Amy is also working on renewing our 501(c)(3) status for our Friends of TEAM Westport.
4. The TEAM Westport parents’ group conducted a session featuring student alumnae of Staples about their preparation from a DEI point of view for college. They collected remarks from Staples’ graduates – most of whom were not students of color – and reported on their findings. What they reported literally affects all students. This session has now been posted on the TEAM Westport website and has been sent to the Board of Education (BOE) and the Superintendent. It is riveting.
5. Harold participated in a “Why is Westport so White and What We Can Do About It” rally on August 31<sup>st</sup> put on by Westport Forward, a ground-roots group, discussing affordable housing. This session was mentioned in the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) as something that is a positive for the Town.
6. We are looking at refreshing our TEAM Westport logo. Ramin is in contact with an artist who has some proposed designs. TEAM Weston will pick up whatever logo we use – whether it is our current logo or a new one.



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7. Serena Levin is our TEAM Westport intern until January. She is now working with the Westport Museum as a docent on the *Remembered: Walking Tour* and making website and FaceBook changes for us. Please take a look at our online presence to see if you have any recommendations.

**First Selectman – Jim Marpe:** Jim has gotten positive feedback from around the country about the WSJ article and said he was surprised at the number of people who responded. Affordable housing is a very important topic. Now it is being known beyond Westport that we are addressing it.

Jim told us about a moving experience this past Saturday morning. The Water Rats presented Trevor Freeland (a world class swimmer) who talked to a mixed group at Mahackenoe about his experience as a black swimmer. He told an inspirational story about how he learned to swim in West Philly, was recruited, and chose a university in the South in the 80's. His team would coalesce around him. He broke barriers and he now mentors students.

**Sara Harris:** The plaque in the back of Town Hall stating that Westport is a white settlement has been removed. It did not tell the true story in that it did not tell about the contribution to Westport of Black and Native Americans at all. A new plaque is being developed as well as one to commemorate 22 ½ Main Street. (African Americans lived here until the building caught on fire in the 1950's and was not rebuilt.) This project needs to get lots of signoffs. Ramin will provide the images and history and these signs will be ordered this week or next week.

Town Hall is being redesigned with tighter access control in order to limit entry, so a plaque will be put in the front as well as the back. We acknowledge this history and we respect Black Lives Matter (BLM). We are also looking at signage inside Town Hall. Kathy Benowitz, the Arts Curator for the Town, is planning to mount an exhibit in Town Hall in line with the new values to acknowledge what is going on now. Sara is getting things moving across a lot of departments.

**Schools/Board of Ed/Staples:** Harold spoke with Superintendent Scarice yesterday. He has been very busy with opening schools during this pandemic in a climate with lots of anxiety all around town. He has seen the 10 TEAM Westport-proposed recommendations; he has viewed the August 25<sup>th</sup> session conducted by the Staples alumnae as well as the June 30<sup>th</sup> TEAM Westport parents' meeting which reviewed the 10 proposed recommendations. He has not yet had a firm look, though, and wants to get data on disparities (equity audit) to determine how we start and what we do to move forward. We can't eliminate areas of concerns overnight. He wants us to present recommendations to him for consideration.

**Catherine Lewis:** Other school systems and town organizations are addressing equity despite the pandemic; for example, the Playhouse has prioritized this work during this time. The pandemic should not be an excuse to wait. We have the opportunity to make changes. Teachers and parents need to be thinking about this. How do we use the pandemic not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity to make changes?

**Zoe:** We have been trying to take the opportunity to make changes in our TEAM Westport Parents' group. We have been meeting; we just did a training which included the Chair of the BOE, teachers, members of the PTA, and community members. We have to keep going and have to make a statement that this is a priority. Parents are getting trained and are learning the language. They are listening. The Town should be concerned and should be able to be proud of our educational system.

**Lee:** We acknowledge what you are saying. The Superintendent, in just coming in, had two goals – to reopen the schools safely and to get Coleytown Middle back in operation. The Superintendent has added Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) as a third goal. However, we need to follow a process. An audit may be needed to provide a baseline.



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Zoe: I hear you. For a student of color in a school building, though, nothing has changed. There is nothing in the interim. Safe spaces, for example, can be set up easily. The pressure will be kept on.

Lee: I agree 100%. We need short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans.

Ramin: Lauren has been an amazing advocate. The Westport Museum has tried to bring black history programming into the schools, but it has been a struggle. We've been told by the teachers that we need a video, so we have made one that fits in with the curriculum. It is important for our students to know history and this history is foundational.

Lauren:

- The teachers in Grades 6-12 will look at these materials tomorrow to see how to fit them into the curriculum. Teachers need time to react. Taking kids out of buildings has always been a logistical challenge. As difficult as it is, we can now do things better. Teachers are looking at new ways to talk to organizations.
- We fully support an equity audit that would happen concurrently with things we have already identified.
- We will push for evaluation of the K-5 curriculum this year.
- We still have the committee that is working on the multicultural and global studies course and we plan to implement as soon as we have the materials.
- Keri and Rebecca talked to teachers and they are watching the video from the Westport Museum to address how to incorporate it through an anti-racist lens.
- All of our students in grade 10 are reading Stamped - The Remix by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi. Our AP US History students are reading it, too. The College Board curriculum does not include this book, but we will be using it for historical thinking and Rebecca will be using it for literacy.

Faith: Comment: In order to move forward, we need to revise our curriculum. Now we're teaching core courses to meet the national test. Faith took 3 courses over the summer related to culturally-responsive education (that it is to be seen, heard, and valued). We need to look at the content for instruction. It is not necessarily that teachers don't have time; teachers should have the message that they have a way to change the curriculum and to incorporate new ideas.

Faith was asked by a black family how to locate other black families in Westport. Harold commented that there had been such a group when we moved here 32 years ago that disappeared shortly thereafter. However, he has heard that there is a new group here now.

Judy: With respect to curriculum concerns, we cannot look only at areas of study that go deep. We have to go wide, because unless all teachers get the message and reinforce the message, the message will be seen as pertaining to just Social Studies, just English, or just AP. Every discipline has to deliver the same message of equity and fairness and that we all belong here whether it's math, physics, or gym. It needs to be uniform and universal. No one gets a pass. It's almost like saying that black literature is for black people. It is for all people. Equity and justice are for everyone to carry, be aware, and deliver.

Shanelle: We often talk about schools teaching to the test instead of teaching core. Teaching Tolerance has a curriculum written to teach the core as well as for the test. This curriculum can include cultural teaching; it helps to re-lens across each discipline and teaches how to engage students for global learning.

Rebecca: Westport has started using Teaching Tolerance's identity standards with all English and Social Studies classes.



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### **TEAM Westport Parent Updates/Book Clubs – Catherine Lewis and Zoe Tarrant:**

The next discussion piece is the 5-series podcast *Nice White Parents* on Tuesday, October 6<sup>th</sup> from 7-8:30. If you are not on the email list, please let Zoe know.

### **Policing – Captain Dave Farrell and Lieutenant Dave Wolf:**

- Captain Dave Farrell reported on recruitment on the force as well as retention. Both areas are difficult. Even when they are able to hire officers (especially of color), it's hard to retain them. There is room to hire since the force is down slightly. They like to hire laterally from another force since it takes a year to develop an officer right out of the Academy. They have identified two candidates to interview in the near future.
- With respect to the Police Accountability bill, the force just fine-tuned a lot of their policies since they were already ahead of the National curve. Specifically, they tweaked the "pursuit policy" because it changed as a result of the bill.
- The force is doing bias training and de-escalation training and are now observing a zero-use-of-force policy. We are transparent and proud of the work of the department and what comes out of it.
- The Civilian Review Panel (CRP) is meeting on this Thursday.

Melissa: We are excited that we're having our first meeting of the CRP this week. It is an important topic to be dealing with. It is an opportunity for people, who have had other than positive experiences and feel that they were treated differently by the police, to state their opinions. We have been careful to train our police in the past. We are looking forward to other views of the department as well as looking forward to meeting the candidates. The CRP can receive input from the public and TEAM Westport although our role has not been defined and we need to put a framework around it.

The CRP was not formed by the Police Department. It's out of Town Hall in a partnership with the department.

Alison: As for the attrition rate, are officers retiring, leaving the profession, or going to other towns?

Capt. Farrell: Many are leaving the profession since they feel they are getting lumped in with the bad apples and are getting treated the same way no matter what. We love protests and work to keep the protesters safe. However, many of the protests seem to be against the police. Some leave because of our pension contract; one officer moved out of state. So, all of the reasons suggested above apply.

### **Affordable Housing:**

Harold outlined the two main Planning and Zoning (P&Z) recommendations now in process with respect to affordable housing – the removal of a cap on the number of affordable units Westport can have and loosening requirements on Accessory Dwelling Units. Helen McAlinden asked that we support the Affordable housing initiatives and that it is great working with Danielle Dobin (P&Z) and Carol Martin (Westport Housing Authority).

Westport Library: Harold recommended that we take a look at StoryFest 2020 that starts today and runs through September 29<sup>th</sup>. It has a nice lineup with respect to panelists, authors, and works that are of color. The Library has been our backbone over the summer in hosting our presentations and the Essay Contest award ceremony. We are continuing this partnership.

### **Westport Museum – Ramin Ganeshram:**

- The Museum has rebuilt the *Remembered*: exhibit online at [virtualhistory.com/remembered](http://virtualhistory.com/remembered). Things that were not in the original exhibit have been added. Please take a look at it.
- The Museum has developed a Black History walking tour (1 – 1 ½ hours) in Westport. A few people from TEAM Westport have been involved. The Museum is willing to adapt the tour for students.



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- Cemetery tours (Evergreen Cemetery) are being conducted in addressing the erasure of black history.
- Halloween tours will also include Black History.
- An extensive virtual school trip has been developed around *Remembered*.
- Programming has included Kyle Bass, one of the descendants of an African American family included in the *Remembered* exhibit, and Mary Thompson who has done a talk on slavery at Mount Vernon.
- The Museum did a book called Images of America – Westport. It is written like a narrative non-fiction book starting with the history of the Paugussetts and then African Americans. The CT Post wrote a review. It is priced under \$21.95.
- Ramin encouraged us to go to the Museum's FaceBook and YouTube sites.

Brett is a docent-in-training for the Walking Tour and was very impressed at the thoroughness of the training. She gave kudos to Ramin and strongly recommends going on the tour. It enlightens one about the black history of Westport. The tour will be great for education since it makes history come alive. Brett stated that one can relate to all the familiar spots identified on the tour. She further recommends putting the tour into the curriculum. She is looking forward to conducting a tour.

### **Playhouse – Michael Barker:**

- The Playhouse has been busy on DEI. Brian Klekatsky (who lives in Westport) is a white facilitator. The Playhouse is discussing hiring a senior staff Chief Diversity Officer, which is touchy in this economic environment. However, they see it as necessary to keep them accountable.
- Subscriptions will go out this week.
- Harold said the Playhouse should be applauded (full disclosure: he's on the board). The Playhouse is temporarily closed for this season. However, there has been a lot of work on the board with training and the discussion of DEI including strategy and action. The strategy sets an 'audience of color' target of 30% in the future to decolonize 90 years of history. It's a tough financial year, but the Playhouse is continuing their efforts.
- A Playhouse book club has been formed, too. They are reading Eddie Glaude's book on James Baldwin, Begin Again.

Judy: Meadow Ridge is looking for a facilitator. Michael will send Brian's contact information to Harold.

### **Interfaith Clergy – Reverend Alison Patton:**

- Liz Falk and Ngassam Ngoummen (PTA DEI chairs) met with Rev. Patton to find out what the clergy is doing with respect to antiracism and students.
- Temple Israel is still engaged in antiracism training and discussion activities having built a workshop around Ibram Kendi's teachings. They are reading 2 books and viewing 2 movies and then discussing.
- The Unitarian Church is working with its congregation and leadership to help gauge individual progress on equity using an implicit bias test as a basis.
- Saugatuck is gearing up to do leadership training and will incorporate antiracism training. There is a webpage containing antiracism resources (books and articles) on the Saugatuck website. A member of the congregation who curated a list of fiction authors posted them on a reading list.
- Several congregations are working. Everything is public. Check out websites to see what's going on.
- We need to begin our conversation about our January 2021 Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration.

**Essay Contest – Harold:** The awards ceremony for the TEAM Westport Essay contest winners was held at the Library on August 13<sup>th</sup> in front of a limited socially-distant audience. The session was livestreamed and is on the Library's website. Our TEAMWestport.org website has the essays now. Thank you to Judy and



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Susan for their participation in the ceremony and to Margaret in the Human Services office for preparing all of the plaques, paperwork, and checks, etc.

**Other:** Ramin is also in touch with a designer to do artwork for the billboards at the railroad stations that Chief Koskinas offered to us to use a few years ago.

Ramin moved to adjourn the meeting and Melissa seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 9:50AM.

The next meeting will be determined subject to COVID Crisis Availability.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod  
Secretary