



TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes Tuesday, January 12, 2021 Via Zoom

Attending: Harold Bailey (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Ramin Ganeshram, Candace Banks, Elaine Daignault, Susan Ellis, Zoe Tarrant, Jim Marpe (First Selectman), Reverend Alison Patton, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Althea Seaborn, Candace Banks, Catherine Lewis, Judy Hamer, Dolores Paoli, Melissa Kane, Stephane Kirven, Zoe Tarrant, and Lee Goldstein

Guests: Brett Aronow, Kris Szabo (Principal, Coleytown Middle School), Adam Rosen (Principal, Bedford Middle School), Alex Giannini (Westport Library), Chief Foti Koskinas (Westport Police), John Bayers (Human Resources and General Administration, Westport Schools), Ted Gillman, Jenny Nelson (Westport Playhouse), Ngassam Ngnoumen (PTA DEI Coordinator), Lauren Francese (Curriculum Coordinator, Westport Schools), Deputy Chief Sam Arciola (Westport Police), Danielle Teplica, Elizabeth Falk (PTA DEI Coordinator), Brian McGunagle, Danielle Dobin (Chair, P&Z and Chair P&Z Subcommittee on Affordable Housing), Jill Nadel, Darcy Hicks, Harris Falk (RTM), Michael Guadarrama, Rebecca Marsick (Staples High School), Tom Foran, Amy Kaplan (RTM), Tom Scarice (Superintendent, Westport Schools), Sara Harris (Operations Manager, Town of Westport)

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

Welcome / Approval of Minutes:

Welcome and Happy New Year! Harold apologized for having technical difficulties getting in this morning. We have a lot going on.

Susan Ellis moved to approve our November 5, 2020 meeting minutes. Candace Banks seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously and will be posted accordingly.

Harold commented on the events of January 6, 2021 in Washington, DC: what we have are these parallel universes that are starting to clash. Who we are and what we stand for are finally coming together and exposing a chasm of reality. It really resonated this week with me and brought me back to when I was 14 and integrated a school in Tennessee that was legally segregated. At that time, Tennessee was desegregating schools a grade a year. If you happened to want to take a course such as drafting that was not offered at the school you attended, you could go to a magnet school and jump ahead. So, when I was 14, 12 of us were chosen to attend the white high school to take drafting. The vitriol I saw in the first few months there was what I saw at the Capitol last week. We talk about being in the home of the free but the dichotomy between people of color and the rest of the country is real. We have started to get some resolution with respect to race. We now see this parallel between overlapping forces. We are working through something that is key for our country. The way we are working on it in Westport is unique. We keep getting phone calls about TEAM Westport from other towns. We're looking at what we can do within ourselves and our country. This work is very important; it is not fluff. This coming Sunday (January 17th) is another step that can be taken with all of us involved. The 2021 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration on Sunday will kick off important and valuable programming that leads into Black History Month and WestportREADS. The Teen Essay contest will also be featured during this period. We'll talk about our programming in detail later in this meeting. We'll discuss the keynote coming up this Sunday and the books that will be part of WestportREADS. As a Town we could not have a better focus to address racism. We are where we need to be to move things forward.

First Selectman / Messaging Update:

Jim: We have control over local affairs and DEI is our province. Jim is glad that Westport is at the forefront with respect to DEI. With that lead-in, we'll talk about current initiatives to make a stronger diversified community. Sara, Danielle Dobin, and Melissa are leading some wonderful initiatives.

First, the vaccination process: we want to make sure everyone has access and that we are not ignoring populations. Elaine, Carol Martin, and I sent a letter to the State of CT reminding them that not everyone has access – due to age and other social factors. We've been in contact with Mark Cooper at the Westport/Weston Health District and we talked to Dr. Scott Gottlieb about COVID along with our Governor.



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Sara:

- We will be rolling out plans for vaccinations. Please sign up for news from the Town and listen to social media to get the information about vaccines. We'll put out press releases as well.
- We are working with several of you on signage and messaging:
 - We are going back and forth on images for the historical plaque that will replace the one that was behind Town Hall. We've gone to the designer for a new layout and are close to finalizing this design.
 - With respect to the signs for 22 ½ Main Street, we've located sites for them and are about to do the actual design.
 - There will be an exhibit in Town Hall with images of African Americans in Westport from the Town's Art collection. We hope that when the painting of the facility is complete and Town Hall reopens, that we will have rotating exhibits by current African American artists and that we will be more comforting and inclusive.
 - A Black Lives Matter sign will be placed in Town Hall. We are committed to getting it up and are working with TEAM Westport.

Jim: We have an impressive program and expectations for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. week. We'll push the event and make sure people are aware of it. A virtual platform makes it easier to celebrate Dr. King this year as we explore what he taught us and how to move ourselves forward to a society he envisioned. We'll do what we can to get folks to participate.

Melissa: We want to be welcoming to people who come into Town via bus lines along the Post Road. We have a good committee that is working through what it takes to place bus shelters in Town. Locations have been identified. The hurdles are whether the properties are Town-owned or privately owned. P&Z has to get text amendments through. We think we're on the way. The Town is with us. We have public support. There are 20 transit districts in the State which is a challenge and another hurdle. Three different bus lines come into Westport.

Harold: The designs for the signage at the Railroad stations are being worked on now under Ramin's direction. We are using the blank billboards that face out toward the parking lots. These were offered by Chief Koskinas since the Westport Police have control of those billboards at the stations.

Policing – Chief Foti Koskinas:

- We are watching what's going on with respect to the current National situation and are working with the State and the FBI and we are increasing patrols. We are ready to assist wherever, including the Capitol if need be. There is a lot going on between January 17th and the 20th, but we are cognizant and working with our partners given the concerns that abound.
- We have 3 openings on the force, so we need your assistance and input in recruiting. We could have as many as 2 more before July 1st. We still want to hire candidates who are diverse.

Affordable Housing – Danielle Dobin:

- The P&Z Affordable Housing Subcommittee meeting is tentatively scheduled for January 27th at noon. We are finalizing the draft regulations on Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU).
- We are continuing to seek the land on West Parrish Street. We hope for a positive update soon.
- The Westport Council of P&Z chairs connected with our peers in Ridgefield, Wilton, Weston, Darien, and Greenwich. We are discussing inclusionary zoning. In Westport, 20% of the units must be affordable.
- 1480 Post Road East will add to our totals.
- Also, there will be some units on Riverside near the Sunoco.
- The assisted living facility on the Post Road has been successful.
- Greenwich is looking at inclusionary housing zones and adopting its own districts. Darien requires 12% not 20%. Ridgefield and Weston are also looking at it.



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- We can build town houses for \$1.8M around train stations, but they won't be affordable. We can also look at inclusionary zoning and not allow any building to take place without the 20% affordable allowance. People are concerned that ADUs will count against 830G. Currently no one can live in an ADU; after the regulation passes, they can be rented out. We are encouraging the state to look at a tax reduction to people who rent out ADUs. However, ADUs do not present a major dent in rental stock.
- The Democratic Women of Westport (DWW) is hosting an event on February 4th at 7PM about creating more equitable schools across CT. It is important to create pathways for people to live in high opportunity towns. We have a great team in place at the state level – Stephanie Thomas, Will Haskell, and Jonathan Steinberg – that is focusing on the impact of change versus just doing something. Westport is not trying to stop change. We hope they are able to come up with something to preserve local control.
- Zoning reforms still have a definition of family which is based on the '50s. In today's terms, family members may not be married, so this would constitute a zoning violation. This needs to be redone. A family should be defined as 2 or more people with shared values and a shared commitment to their future.
- We need to create housing development funds to help people receive grants for down-payment assistance. CHAPA (Citizens Housing and Planning Association) does this. Although, they only do so in New Haven and Hartford – not in Fairfield County via the Housing Education Resource Center (HERC). Can we create a second level to make up for the differences between what CHAPA gives and the prices in Fairfield County? We need to help people understand all of this and distribute the messaging.

Teen Essay Contest – Susan Ellis: Things are set to go, but we'll put off the press release until later. We are targeting having the announcement celebration for the winners of the contest on April 5th or later. The Library is still only open by appointment. More information will be provided in the future. We can have a small ceremony like the one we conducted last August.

Rebecca: The kids are looking forward to participating!

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

Harold showed a screen of demographics received from John Bayers on teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals in the Westport Schools summarized and by building. The numbers show that we have 32 certified teachers of color out of 568 (5.6%), 2 administrators out of 44 (4.5%), 16 paraprofessionals of color out of 169 (9.5%) paraprofessionals. Long Lots has 1 teacher of color; Bedford Middle and Greens Farms Elementary have 2 teachers of color. Question is what should the representation be?

John Bayers is an elementary school teacher by training. He taught in Westport for 12 years at Coleytown Elementary and then was a principal at Greens Farms. The focus on hiring then was not on creating opportunities for teachers of color. Male teachers were rare. One question at the time was whether or not there were enough female teachers in other disciplines. Things change over time. Having a diverse workforce across the state is currently important. Edcite for education in Connecticut lists educators and staff across the State. 90% across the State are white. 95% in Westport are white.

Starting in the Fall of 2019, we were participating in a pilot program to develop recruitment plans to increase racial and linguistic diversity. We did some committee work at the local and State level—Principal Thomas is on this committee as is Kimberly Chu at Kings Highway (5th grade). When COVID hit, everything became virtual. Late in December 2020, we reached out to the State Talent Office looking to reengage. They will notify us by January 13th about reengaging. The State is trying to get to 10% by the end of the school year from 9.6% now. That number needs to grow, and it will be lots of work to get there.

We also want to join the Teacher Residency Program. A press release just before the holiday tells why this program was put into place. The State has been grappling with recruiting and retaining teachers of color. Because there is a finite number of certified teachers of color, we are not helping the greater good when we hire teachers from another district. Westport has successfully recruited from other districts. In order to try to



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grow from within and give access to people of color, the Capital Region Education Council (CREC) has created a program to develop a new generation of teachers. [In 2017 the State only certified 22 teachers of color.] Residents in the program will receive pay and benefits and are guaranteed a full-time position when they finish. Our BOE is reviewing funding for 1 resident. The benefit is that it provides greater access for people of color to get certified. Otherwise, they have to go through an expensive program and overcome other barriers to certification. There are more potential positions at the Elementary level since there is a wait for specific openings at the Secondary level. Existing Secondary teachers, though, can be mentors. We can look to see if we might increase to 2 for our local program. Some of the pilot programs have received outside funding; we may have to think about local-committed funding, but we are not hoping for funding to come from another outside source. This would not be a long-term means to get teachers who are diverse.

We can also look closely at the recruitment plan to attract people to come to Westport. Bottom line, we have to find a way to attract people. It's hard to recruit outside of Connecticut because of certification differences and pension plans between states. Housing can be an issue, especially in Westport. 90% of our current staff live outside Westport – they can't afford to live here based on their salaries. We can do a better job.

In conclusion, the Residency program is exciting and neighboring districts are also engaging. John meets with HR Directors from other districts about COVID and about this program. We have to stop the practice of stealing from another district while not really solving the problem of diversity. Other districts are going through their budget process as well. Also, we look forward to the results of the Equity Study. Recruitment involves all of these factors. It was interesting to hear about Chief Koskinas' openings in the Police Department. It's great to know that this is a systemic priority across Town.

Judy is glad to see the initiative, but hopes the initiative includes plans for retention. What we know from other school systems is that it is hard to retain teachers of color when white staff members make it clear that they are not welcome. Students hear and feel this as well. Recruitment is great, but retention is key. We don't want to go get the best candidates who then leave to go somewhere that is more hospitable.

On your first slide, you show that the State's current level for teachers of color is 9.6%. However, it did not break it down by city. Westport has much further to go. John appreciates our feedback and input. That was a statewide objective; and that number is offset by the urban communities. We haven't seen much departure of people coming from urban to suburban communities; but we will keep watching.

Danielle D.: If you need support financially, let us know and we will tap in. Teachers can have conversations with CHAPA and receive loans at 2.5% lower with an income qualification up to 140K. We can look at programs and let people know that resources are there.

John: Great. Teacher assistance can help. Also, forgiveness programs for student loan debt are essential. Five years of teaching will sometimes get relief; however, most who work here get rejected. What are we doing to help them get to the next level? You have to have a Master's degree, but often teachers cannot get the funding. This impacts people of color, in particular.

Harold: What are we doing to retain? What can we do on a state basis? Last Hired First Fired (which we hear is a Union regulation) puts any new diverse teacher hires at risk of losing their jobs if there is downsizing for any reason. As for the Teacher Residency program, why wouldn't we (Westport) try to identify one teacher per elementary school to demonstrate the commitment that the Town wants to address the deficiency in each school versus 1 only for the whole system? What do you need to be able to handle more teachers? Should we put together a group to look at the hurdles? How to get them to help? What are the finances required?

John: There are ways to get involved in-house. As the BOE goes into the budget process, we are open to increasing the numbers. Maybe there's a piece of funding that's used for recruiting and hiring and not a separate fund for each institution. We'll finish the budgeting process with the BOE and then circle back to give an update with TEAM Westport to look at growing the program. CREC said 1 to 2 initially to make sure it's



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successful. We would have to ensure that we have the positions on the other end to keep it going systemically. To cover each elementary school, we need to build toward 5 teachers when we may not have the positions.

Lauren: Having worked with preservice teachers first-hand, there are huge barriers (family and financial) to finishing a program. For example, a one-year intensive course at UConn costs \$30K and you cannot work while going through that program. People have to delay or drop out. We need to work on this aspect.

Ngassam: How attractive are we as a district? Brown v. Board purged a lot of educators signaling that they were not welcome. How do we make us welcoming? We can focus on our viability, but are we attractive? What do potential teachers see on our website? What are we messaging? Mentoring works; but if you feel you're going to be isolated, you won't want to come as we found out when we kicked off the PTA DEI effort.

Tom: You are spot on with the analysis. Culture is complex in its role of having people feel supported and engaging in meaningful relationships with the district. Culture and trust precede performance. It comes down to relationships and a sense of belonging. We want to see success and it's important to have a successful go at it. We could get more ambitious but that could come at a cost. John was received well by the BOE; we think the proposal for the Residency program will go through the budget process.

John: Experiences of the teachers depend not just on the staff, but on students and the parents. A teacher will look at how people respond to the events within the community. He grew up in Northern CT where views are different. When I look at how the community responds, people are thoughtful and strive to make everything better. When we read the student diversity essays, we do think about what we need to do differently and think about what led to these experiences in the schools and in the broader community.

Judy: Some things you cannot change as part of the community such as being followed around in stores. We cannot affect those factors. We CAN affect the way the staff treats teachers of color and how students look at new staff members. We can also try to affect the parents.

Harold: In terms of what we do, we need to show everyone what the community is about.

Catherine L.: Looking at the district's website, there's no commitment to equity. Everything is a process; so when people are choosing, they are looking see what our commitment is. There's nothing in place now except the PTA DEI committee, but you can't find a statement. We can work on crafting a statement while we are waiting for the Equity Audit and more teachers. We can make a powerful difference. We need to jump on it and state the values we are working toward while we are waiting for a study. Why can't we say that this is what we are working toward?

Tom: Our website needs a complete workover. We can certainly advertise the RFP for the Equity Audit.

Zoe: We can't change the community; however, our website can certainly state our commitment. It is important to set a tone in preparing teachers for our community – showing what we working toward.

Danielle T has observed in the workgroups that teachers and staff of color talk about their experiences supporting students of color. The refrain is that problems the students encounter affect the staff members of color. Since there is no DEI person or a person to go to, students are going to staff which becomes an extra burden that they are not trained or paid for. This is a big problem for students and staff. If there are designated staff, this should help with retention.

Westport Library – Alex Giannini:

- Our 2021 celebration for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is coming up on this Sunday, January 17th, at 12 noon. Please register. You will then receive an email with the link to the online event. This year we are featuring Layla F. Saad, author of the best-selling book me and white supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor and her 28-day challenge to help individual participants in their journey to antiracism. Ms. Saad will be conversing with Bernicestine.



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- We're working on finalizing follow-on programming in sync with WestportREADS. The books have been announced. We are working with Ramin and her team at the Westport Museum for activities through April/May.
- Trey Ellis' documentary on Dr. King – *King in the Wilderness* – will be screened on Thursday, February 25th at 7PM. After the screening Harold will conduct a talk-back session with Trey.

Westport Museum – Ramin Ganeshram:

- PBS has just released a teaching guide for parents and teachers about the insurrection, white supremacy, and the difference between how white rioters versus BLM protesters were treated. The Museum has the link and can make it available.
- We are doing a Buildout of history-based programs to support WestportREADS.
- We are expanding our programs with DEI as a core requirement in all of them.

TW Parent Updates / Book Clubs – Catherine Lewis and Zoe Tarrant: There is no report this month.

Westport Playhouse – Jenny Nelson:

- On Thursday, January 21st at 7PM, 4 artists of color will perform on the Playhouse stage their written responses about this moment and about Layla Saad's work. Please register through the Playhouse website.
- Also, the Education Department is doing programming this season focusing on social justice and playwrights, playwriting, empathy, activism, collaboration, and how to get students involved.
- The Playhouse's Youth Council starts on January 25th. We are thrilled to have young people involved.
- There is a voluntary EDI awareness group composed of board members that meets regularly.

Interfaith Clergy / MLK:

This year as we stated earlier, our Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King celebration will extend over the better part of a week followed by the 28-day challenge. Each individual will be invited to participate in the 28-day challenge. The 28-day challenge is an individual exercise. However, we are planning discussion groups of 6 people or fewer at the end of the 28 days. The Library will be organizing. In the long term we want to do deep dives into issues surrounding racism and give the foundation to attract more people to come to Westport to speak. Layla Saad is here because of the work we've done. We are the first community to take this on.

Jill Nadel: How about inviting others to take the challenge since it's virtual and including invitations via Instagram and Facebook?

We'll invite and include as many people as possible since it is virtual.

Judy intends to post at Meadow Ridge, so please send posters and graphics. Our target audience consists of the children of the people who live there.

Alison: We do have digital assets, so we can push out and post. We'll ensure that it is on the Playhouse FB. Please note that the Layla Saad/Bernicestine conversation will only be available until Thursday, January 21st on the Library's website.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:22 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary