



TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes Thursday, April 8, 2021 Via Zoom

Attendees: Harold Bailey, Jr. (Presiding), Jim Marpe (First Selectman), Bernicestine McLeod, Zoe Tarrant, Susan Ellis, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Ramin Ganeshram (Westport Museum), Catherine Lewis, Maggie Mudd, Lee Goldstein, Rev. Alison Patton (Saugatuck Congregational Church), Judith Hamer, Althea Seaborn, Dolores Paoli, and Elaine Daignault

Guests: Thomas Scarice (Superintendent, Westport Schools), Helen McAlinden (Homes with Hope), Sal Liccione (RTM), Sara Harris (Operations Manager, Westport), Holly Sulzycki (Literature Curriculum Coordinator, Westport Schools), Lauren Francese (Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator, Westport Schools), Kris Szabo (Principal, Coleytown Middle School), Adam Rosen (Principal, Bedford Middle School), Danielle Dobin (Chair, P&Z and P&Z Affordable Housing Committee), Jennifer Keller (Westport Library), Alex Giannini (Westport Library), Deputy Chief Sam Arciola (Westport Police Department), Rebecca Marsick (Literacy, Westport Schools), Liz Falk (PTA DEI Coordinator), Ngassam Ngnoumen (PTA DEI Coordinator), Danielle Teplica, Harris Falk (RTM), Trammi Nguyen, Kevin Christie, Tom Foran, Jill Nadel, Brett Aronow, Kristi Law, Pippa Bell Ader (Sustainable Westport), Brian McGunagle (Westport Pride), Patra Kanchanagom, Amy Kaplan (RTM)

The meeting was called to order at 8:02AM.

Welcome / Approval of Minutes – Harold Bailey:

Harold welcomed everyone.

Susan Ellis moved that the minutes for our February 9, 2021, meeting be approved. Catherine O. seconded. The motion was approved; the minutes will be posted accordingly.

Susan Ellis moved that the minutes for our March 4, 2021, meeting be approved. Catherine O. seconded the motion. The motion was approved; the minutes will be posted accordingly.

Comments / Teen Diversity Essay Contest – Harold Bailey:

Our major highlight for this period was the teen Diversity Essay Contest award ceremony held on Monday, April 5. The essays were powerfully presented, demonstrating a tremendous amount of maturity at a young age. The ceremony can be seen via a link to You.Tube which will be posted by the Westport Library. The topic was the current issue of “Black Lives Matter” with respect to othering including #AAPI Hate and LGBTQIA+. Jim Marpe stated that he was really impressed as well.

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

The Equity Audit Kick off meeting with NYU was held two weeks ago. It is a challenge to do this work in two-dimensions via Zoom. However, the work is visionary and there is a moral imperative around the work. Overall, the group is engaged. A number of people are involved. It is incumbent upon us to keep working to create the environment for every kid to be seen and heard. We cannot deny the national conversation about equity and our personal interactions with respect to equity. Every child and adult should feel a sense of belonging. We are all having conversations publicly and individually that will continue. At the end of the study, we hope to have a product we can be proud of and will stand behind. We have talked to the facilitators about keeping the focus on all kids and all demographics. They have been responsive to that.

Harold: We are identifying systemic hurdles for “other” students and then addressing them as a team. We continue to reinforce that this work does not just help “those” kids; but rather, it helps white kids as well. It’s helping everyone. You hear parents complain that we are taking time away from “my kids” and giving to those kids. Nothing could be further from the truth. All of our kids are at a deficit. They don’t understand it is important to know how to operate outside the Westport bubble. Our teachers don’t



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understand. Kids need to be able to dialog and to understand the real world. It's so important for parents who are opposing this to realize that we need this to keep our district ahead of the pack.

Tom: Certainly, the value of the work is obvious; but we feel the responsibility to cast our net wide enough to engage each one face-to-face, if necessary, to explain what it is and why it is. The most effective talking points are the local narratives from students and alumni/ae in our district of which many are not aware. We are preparing our students to go beyond what we do here and to live in a global economy and a multicultural world. We won't be finished with that work. We are now clearly defining what this work is and what it's not. Breaking into small groups in our electronic platform helps our discussions somewhat. We would like to be in person; however, we can't for the time being.

I echo the importance of the essay contest. I could never compete. Students are finding their voices.

Lee: As for the product of this work, we won't define the curriculum. However, this will provide us a lens that will be a mindset for going forward. It's slow and messy. But we are all trying.

Tom: It is critical to go through all the steps and the processes to get to what our lens is and what it means. This is the most powerful work. There is nothing to fear. It's necessary and it is beneficial for all. We are off to a great start.

Judy had an assessment and evaluation question. With all of these programs, there is a danger of the effort petering out. You are planning to build policies and procedures. How will you know that you are effecting the change that you want?

Tom: You build in steps; you have an evaluator at all stages, so they understand at each step what is going on. Everyone whether they are pro or con needs to know where we are versus the goals. This needs to be built into the process. It is spot on. An indictment on the history of public education is that we put a lot of wind into initiating. Then we move on for a variety of reasons including our institutional ADHD. We have been delayed because of COVID. In talking to former leaders, there was a point where Westport was evaluated well. Due to budget and leadership changes, we fell by the wayside. Our strategic plan next year will codify what the evaluations are. We'll understand what we have as our destination and then design the curriculum. This is critical.

Harold: The ratings are going to change for school systems. We're planning for 10 years down the road.

Tom: Enough people realize that and that we can do a lot of important work for kids. Districts can present a demeanor but may not be doing the important work. If we can't do it here, it can't be done. We have the fire power and the resources in this community.

Rebecca. We look at the skills that students need to do this work as well as the content. It is important to teach them how to interrogate the world themselves. Kids will wrestle with some concepts but will apply them to the real world. This is part of the equity work and it has to be demystified.

Ngassam: It seems that our conversation boils down to one question. If we believe that what our students need has not changed, then we do not need to do anything. We have to retool to be successful. It's a journey we are on. We have to agree that we need to change along with our landscape.

First Selectman / Messaging Update – Jim Marpe:

Jim was moved by the outpouring in support of #Stop Asian Hate. One of the students had been an intern at Town Hall. Hearing them speak was a tribute to the role that TEAM Westport plays in this community. He wonders if it would have been possible 10 years ago. It is essential to enable people whose voices have not been heard to say how they are treated and how we should all be accepting and welcoming.



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Another factor is the importance of metrics. We need to be measuring what we are accomplishing as we address issues that have been brought forward. Sara is introducing metrics into how we run the Town and how to move forward. Sara has been here 4 years.

Sara: The historic plaques are up in Town Hall. The exterior plaque is on the way as is the metal frame for it. Public Works should have it by next week and it will be installed. The outside plaque will be closer to the sidewalk and more prominent. A QR code will be attached. A complementary plaque will be placed near where 22 ½ Main Street was located, in memory of the black community that lived there before a fire destroyed the building. David Waldman will place something on his property in this area. A bronze plaque outside of Anthropologie will designate the community in addition to the descriptive plaque.

Harold: This will also have a QR code. Additionally, we are currently brainstorming ideas for a value statement and a set of initiatives that represent Westport now, so it's clear that this is where we are and how we stand as we move forward. The Arts Council and the Westport Museum are working with us.

Jim: Yesterday Lt. Gov. Bysiewicz, EPA, DOT, State Senator Haskell, State Rep. Steinberg, and Jim did a press conference at the Ruth Steinkraus Cohen bridge to kick off an initiative to alleviate traffic congestion via a federal grant for Westport re: the timing of traffic lights. Generally speaking, the lights on the Post Road from Imperial to Riverside often don't help. They would like to use smart traffic lights. We used the opportunity to talk about the Coastal Link (CL) Bus Route – Westport, Milford, Norwalk – and how we need to connect with the Westport Transit District and that we're looking for additional funding to improve that route. We have the tendency to focus on shuttle routes; however, train travel has fallen off. We continue to sell parking passes, but the lots are empty. The CL is vital for people who work in Westport and live nearby. Bus shelters were part of the Town's commitment to make the CL attractive. Thanks to the ad hoc team to make bus shelters happen, we shall start to see them within the next few years. We have identified where the spots are for placing the bus shelters.

Policing – Deputy Chief Sam Arciola:

- A #Stop Asian Hate rally was held at Jesup Green on March 27. The Police Department has reached out to local Asian businesses letting them know that the Department supports them.
- The Department is recruiting and has conducted interviews – 2 males and 1 female. We are committed to diversity.
- Police reform – we are well positioned with respect to the reform bill. We'll continue with bodycams.

Maggie: You are still recruiting for 6 vacancies.

Sal: How's the pension problem? Are you going to college campuses for fresh recruits?

Sam: These vacancies were unexpected.

Harold: The rally was effective and quickly arranged. Our State Atty Gen. Tong, Sen. Blumenthal, other political figures, and our young people were able to come together with the Police Department.

Althea had a question about lateral hires. We need to look at people from other departments and their backgrounds to see whether they will adapt to Westport. It's hard to change over to progressive policing. So, background checks, vetting, and the officer's consistency should be validated to make sure they are a good fit for the community. It'd good to have the Civilian Review Panel give input and feedback on this.

Affordable Housing – Danielle Dobin:

- Zoning doesn't exist for bus shelters. State land, private land, step back regulations all come into play, though. Neil Cohn (Economic Development Subcommittee of P&Z) is looking at where zoning regulations are issues. P&Z is sponsoring a text amendment to address any of these issues. The features that are



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being discussed for bus shelters include art, solar panels, and battery charging capability. A support system is in place. We've talked on the state level and have lots of thoughts about funding. There is no regulation to prevent them from happening. It is possible to sponsor a bus shelter. Harold was at the meetings. We appreciate the interest and community support.

- Tonight P&Z at 6PM is hearing the internal text amendments so that Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) can be approved. Email Mary Young by noon to participate by Zoom tonight. If passed, residents will be permitted to create a detached ADU or accessory apartment in their home. Typically, these are basement apartments. Before this was only allowed for senior citizens. This is a positive way to diversify housing.

Units can be up to 25% of the overall house. Only 3 off-site parking spaces are allowed. We're not changing the look and feel of the town. This opens up avenues for people to live here. Requirement: the owner needs to live in the house; but the owner can also move into the smaller unit. There is no annual certification process. This is impactful and will take time to roll out.

Tom Foran: the email address for comments is pandzcomments@westportct.gov

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

Catherine L.: We have no update with respect to the Book Club other than to encourage WestportREADS participation through May. We hope to have a meeting on April 28th of our Parent Group. Our last meeting was on March 31st; we talked about AAPI hate in the community, how we are talking to our children about such incidents, and what we are doing to have conversations about racialized incidents. This is so we get more comfortable about talking and having challenging conversations about thoughts and beliefs that are hurtful.

Zoe: we realize that the schools can't do it alone. To parents: if you are white parents, come to the workgroup meetings to become more comfortable about talking to our children.

Ngassam: Comment — As we listen to recurring events, we had a march after George Floyd and another for AAPI. Today is Holocaust Memory day. How do we become up-standers versus being by-standers? This is beyond race; how do we progress to disrupt acts of bias when they are in progress? There's work that can be done. We can potentially adopt an initiative. We can work with the PTA DEI and have all of our Town partners go through training. This gives a basis to be able to handle situations when they come up. We do realize that anybody acting as an up-stander will have to be careful about their personal safety.

Susan: ADL teaches how to be allies.

Jill Nadel: ADL has been working with schools via the "Kool to be Kind" program. We are marveling that race and othering was not talked about before in an earlier iteration of the program.

Lee Goldstein: Parents would be glad to do this. Also, we have resources and can pool knowledge and experience.

Catherine Lewis: There are so many programs and movements are out there. We challenge ourselves to look at everything that we have control over.

Harold: Strategy can take time to form.

Maggie Mudd: "Kool to be Kind" was accepted at the time and had a Town profile. It was a chance for the kids to be leaders and to go into the elementary schools. It was successful and well-liked.

Jill Nadel: The program was done away with by a previous superintendent. There is still a "Kool to be Kind" club and Jill would be happy to work on extending the reach.

Rebecca Marsick: It would be great to bring it back. Curriculum coordinators have presented this to the BOE. The program works with kids through books. K-12 can come together. We'll start working on this.



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Westport Museum for History and Culture – Ramin Ganeshram (reported by Harold):

- The Museum is now including a verbal and written native land acknowledgement in all of our programming.
- Please check out our interview with Liz Petry on our Facebook and YouTube channels about her prominent African American CT family which included her mom Ann Petry, the first African American woman to sell over 1 million copies of her acclaimed novel The Street. Her grandfather was the first licensed Black pharmacist in CT and her great-aunt Anna Louise James was the first licensed Black woman pharmacist in the State; they operated the James pharmacy in Saybrook for decades.
- We are doing a CPTV Cutline program on the Underground Railroad with other experts including the curator from the Wilton Historical Society and Joel Lang, the Pulitzer Prize winning author of Complicity (about New England's role during slavery).
- Our walking tours are coming up including the "Remembered:" walking tour, which recently informed Christ and Holy Trinity's and Saugatuck Congregational Church's Stations of the Cross event on April 2nd.

Westport Pride – Brian McGunagle:

- Westport Pride as an organization came together in the Fall. Brian gave us an organizational update presentation on the Mission and Value statement (to connect, elevate, educate, empower, activate, and celebrate); the advisory committee; the action committees (advisory, communications, education, events, and the GSA at Staples for mentorship); their logo design contest resulting in a new logo, their fiduciary sponsorship (including Social Venture Partners, Bridgewater, Melissa and Doug, Sandy Hook Promise, as well as individual sponsorship); and upcoming events.
- Brian has met with Tom Scarice re: observance of a Spirit Day in June, with students, with Liz Falk and Ngassam Ngnoumen, with the Downtown Merchants, with the Clergy, and with the Library.
- Events:
 - There will be a panel discussion with Dan Woog on June 2nd.
 - "Love Wins" is a featured event from June 25th through August 21st in collaboration with MOCA.
 - Westport Pride will do cobranded merchandizing.
 - There is a Pride Book Club in the works that will be held quarterly for the people in the group.
- How to get involved – contact via Instagram (950 followers) or FaceBook (350 followers).

Harold: This is a tremendous amount of organization and work.

Brian: We are excited. There is opportunity and need among students and parents. We'll have promotional materials.

Danielle Teplica: This is so exciting. Is the sidewalk painting happening?

Brian: There will be a rainbow crosswalk and more paving downtown. We have the support to move forward; but we need to know the logistical hoops to select the location as well as the Town regulations.

Susan Ellis: I hope you have a support group for parents who are new to the idea or who are unsettled.

Brian: We'll launch a peer support group in the Fall and will include referrals for parents of trans youth. We want parent groups to support each other during the struggle. If you are a student, GSA will welcome you at Staples. As a mentorship resource, we can anyone refer to professionals who are LGBTQIA friendly.

Westport Library – Alex Giannini:

- The Teen Diversity Essay Awards ceremony is available for replay.
- WestportREADS: in viewership, we have reached 1000 live attendees. We hope that attendance level will continue once we are in person. We've held dozens of events since we started.



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- Tonight, Anthony Ray Hinton is being interviewed by Trey Ellis – during the George Floyd trial. Description: Mr. Hinton is a free man who was released via work by the Equal Justice Initiative (Bryan Stevenson) in April 2015 after 35 years on Death Row. Only 152 people have been exonerated since 1963. We'd like to have a big audience tonight, so please watch. His book is: The Sun Does Shine.
- "Amplify" with Beechwood will be live streamed virtually on May 8th, 2021, at 7PM. This performance features black performers on stage – the largest group we've had on stage in 14 months.
- On May 4th @ 7PM, Maggie Mudd will interview Ty Seidule, the author of Robert E. Lee & Me. He is a West Point graduate and digs into the reality of issues during the Civil War and where Lee stood on them. He explores the way the myth of the honor of the South got twisted.
- On June 1st, Catherine L. will interview Nesrine Malik, the author of We Need New Stories: Challenging the Toxic Myths Behind Our Age of Discontent.
- Caste, by Isabel Wilkerson, will tentatively be discussed in 4 different sessions every other week beginning April 20th @ 7PM. This is just being put together and has not been publicized yet.
- Me and White Supremacy will be discussed in 4 sessions every other week for those who read the book and who journaled. This will be a recurring webinar. Please sign up. We'll conduct a BIPOC group, too.

Westport Playhouse – Jenny Nelson:

We are doing a lot of work with the Board.

We are looking at plans for transforming the audience over the next 3 to 5 years. Subsequently, what does the staff need to be to accomplish those changes?

Danielle Teplica: With the Playhouse changing the audience, the Levitt needs to as well.

Interfaith Clergy:

- Alison has spent countless hours with Me and White Supremacy and AAPI. She, Jenny, and Harold were the 3-person team furthering the work evolving from the Dr. King programming back in January.
- In an event last Friday, there was a Christ and Holy Trinity community walk inspired by the Stations of the Cross. A script was edited that marries traditional reflections around the Stations of the Cross. It began by viewing a choral piece by The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed (out of U. Michigan) – a lyric about 7 black men murdered by police. Then they walked around downtown with 6 history stops related to racism and black people including: 22 ½ Main Street, the Saltbox General Store, and a gravestone in Evergreen Cemetery (of a man who was free then became a servant). We are happy to share the script. Dan Woog wrote up a history that was posted on the Saturday before Easter. Thank you to the clergy.

Other Business:

Sal: Elections are coming up for the RTM, First Selectman, etc. Please get involved.

The RTM Transit and Finance Committees are meeting tonight. The Board of Finance is trying to cut the budget. Public Transportation is something we need. It helps local people, school children, and employees. Sal will send a list of key meetings to Harold.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:15 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary