



**TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, November 5, 2020 at 8AM**  
**(Rescheduled from Tuesday, November 3, 2020–Election Day)**  
**Via Zoom**

**Attendees:** Harold Bailey, Jr. (Presiding), Jim Marpe (First Selectman, Westport), Bernicestine McLeod, Reverend Alison Patton (Saugatuck Congregational Church), Candace Banks, Catherine Lewis, Elaine Daignault (Westport Human Services), Judy Hamer, Lee Goldstein (Westport Board of Education), Maggie Mudd, Dolores Paoli, Melissa Kane (Third Selectwoman, Westport), Ramin Ganeshram (Westport Museum), Stephane Kirven, Susan Ellis, and Zoe Tarrant

**Guests:** Sara Harris, Stafford Thomas (Principal, Staples High School), Danielle Teplin, Tom Scarice (Superintendent, Westport Schools), Alex Giannini (Westport Library), Carol Martin (Westport Housing Authority), Danielle Dobin (Chair, Westport P&Z), Elizabeth Falk (PTA DEI Coordinator), Chief Foti Koskinas (Westport Police), Lieutenant Dave Wolf (Westport Police), Helen McAlinden (Homes with Hope), Jenny Nelson (Westport Playhouse), Jill Nadel, Keri Jockers (K-6 Curriculum Coordinator, Westport Schools), Lauren Francese (Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator, Westport Schools), Ngassam Ngoummen (PTA DEI Coordinator), Rebecca Marsick (Staples High School), Deputy Chief Sam Arciola (Westport Police), Serena Levin, Ted Gillman, Tom Foran, and Adam Rosen (Principal, Bedford Middle School)

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

Harold welcomed everyone. Today's agenda will be rearranged to accommodate schedules.

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

At Board of Education (BOE) meetings, Superintendent Scarice has shared the idea of conducting an Equity Study. He has a 1-year plan in effect now in his first year, but he wants to present a 3 to 5-year plan for moving forward. The high priority now is COVID. He has met with University folks about structuring the Equity Study and expects to issue an RFP within a month. He wants to cover the areas of policy and access (to determine what practices are limiting), to see whether the culture and climate is welcoming, and to look at how well we prepare our students for a diverse world once they leave us. We are confronting potentially difficult content.

Harold stated that it's good to be data-driven (as achieved via the Equity Study) to plan for the long term. Until then, what do we do in the interim to address some of the issues?

Tom: That was a good question that was raised at the BOE meeting. We will circle back to determine what we can do. We have people committed to doing that work. It will be critical to look around the system. Teachers on Election Day were trained at CES (Cooperative Educational Services) about these subjects. In the immediate future, we'll take stock to see if there are any gaps we can fill in and we'll try to do as much as possible concurrently. Our report to the board will be informal within the next couple of meetings. By the end of the school year, however, we'll have a good plan going forward.

**Stafford Thomas:**

- Sessions on implicit bias and microaggressions are being held at Staples for staff.
- He is meeting with SERC (the State Education Resource Center) to look at the state's new course on African American, Latinx American, and Native American history. The State is creating the curriculum and they are now starting to work at the content while looking to see if they can expand the reach and the attractiveness of the course itself.



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- The climate study that Yale is working on is in progress and we're looking at that to see how that can help with the climate in the building. We hope to have an update next month with that.
- Our Professional Development Committee was looking at microaggressions and implicit bias just before COVID. We are now running later than we had hoped; however, this should contribute to building climate.

Lauren:

- We had a sneak preview of what SERC has put together for the course. It's pretty impressive. Lauren spoke to Glenn Singleton (Courageous Conversations). Staples is looking at whether they have the flexibility to split the course into segments, but they will certainly talk about how to encourage enrollment in the course.
- Dr. Yohuru Williams is meeting with the Area Studies teachers (revised name is Global and Multicultural Studies). It's going to be busy over the next few months.

Question: Do you feel we are stable enough to know whether schools are going to be open or not?

Tom: We will be living with instability throughout this year, so we need to focus on classroom instruction as well as technology. We do have a model and framework in place now, though.

In a hierarchy of needs, we are at the level of observing safety and security. Last Wednesday, we met with the school leadership and we were able to look at how we're doing. We also have a report from the parents. There are areas where we have to improve. The rhythm is constant disruption. What is inspiring is that public school may be the safest place for children since we are not seeing spread of COVID. Schools can enforce standards. The students wear masks. We do our best with distancing.

Danielle T. Do we need a DEI person during this time?

Tom: We want to do the Equity Study to see where we are and then bring someone in once we know what we're fighting.

Harold: We need to know if you are going to reassign resources in a different way in the interim so that children of color are able to access assistance if they feel they need help.

Catherine L.: Many school districts have made statements about DEI; however, when you do a search not a lot comes up with respect to Westport schools. It would be good for us to be ahead of other districts. Other school districts that are doing something include Wellesley, MA.

Tom: When I came in, I picked up on a lot of energy and resources around this request. The Equity Study will be a revisioning and re-missioning of the system and give insights as to how we do this work. At some time, this will be part of the outcome and it IS part of the conversation.

Alison: We appreciate the way you're trying to bring everything together. Can we be able to articulate our efforts going forward? There is value in having everything polished, but we can at least make a statement that we are working on this and here's what we are doing now.

Tom: It's the overall coordination across our district that is a problem. However, you make a great point that we should add an objective for the district that communicates our current direction and current work.

Lee: As an individual, I support Tom's report. I don't like grand gestures and statements are not action. We need Stafford and Lauren to do the work and make statements in that way. The head of DEI at some school system just resigned since the system did not have a mission. We need to know what we're doing first. We'll continue to work with the system and the board to get clear lines of operation and develop



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strategy so that we have something to message. There has been a lot of work accomplished despite COVID-19, so we don't want to lose sight of that work. We'll continue to do the work and to get our communications straight.

**First Selectman/Messaging Update – Jim Marpe:**

Harold: Before the election, Jim presented to the Connecticut Council of Municipalities (CCM) which is responsible for all the towns and cities in CT. CCM has spent a great deal of work looking at key issues in the towns and cities of Connecticut. One forum included DEI. Westport was asked to represent towns similar in demographics. Jim carried the freight for us and did a great job.

Jim: It is good to be out of quarantine.

- The CCM is involved with education and opportunities for us to improve our communities. It convened a regional panel focused on DEI. You are invited to look at the recordings online. The panel Jim was on represents the Western part of CT. Panels covered affordable housing, policing, education, and disparities. Jim represented an affluent town (Westport). Other panelists were from Bridgeport (the City Council), Danbury (Police), and Stamford (a leadership program). Thank you to all of the people in Town who helped him prepare for this session. Jim's being able to talk about DEI was an angle that surprised the other panelists. He was interviewed by a reporter from Hearst. I believe we can be proud of what we have accomplished. We are more focused than the inner-city communities. Bridgeport went into what they could be doing more. Jim expected more from large communities that have the same concerns we have. He was proud to represent Westport.

**Policing – Chief Foti Koskinas:**

- We are improving our communications with the schools (via the SRO).
- We are also swearing in an African American officer. Every time in the past that we've gone down this road, we have lost the officer. It is important to have him as a part of our community.
- We are looking at training. The training market is flooded. We need to determine how any course is applicable in our community.
- We would rather speak through our actions versus issuing a statement about commitment to equity and inclusion. We have held off because of politization; however, if people think it's important, please let us know.
- We monitored a successful elections process at the polls in Town.
- Department management has been signed up for a course conducted by a former black police chief. If it's good, we'll sign up more people. He uses a different approach and talks about the relationship between African Americans (especially black men and black youth) and law enforcement – how each community feels about the other. Also, why law enforcement has a hard time with the Black Lives Matter movement. The Department wants to make sure it's useful training. It is a 3-hour ZOOM session with a live person and Q&A.

Judy: What is the goal for this training? What do you want to come out of this?

Chief Koskinas: We are trying to find training that has impact. What we get through the Police Academy is not enough; so, it's important to look at the impact and feedback from both sides in order to improve the relationship and understanding in our community.

**Affordable Housing – Danielle Dobin:**



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- Our recommendation to remove the Affordable Housing multifamily cap has been successful, so Westport can now approve multifamily homes. The P&Z was trying to pass a text amendment; however, the Courts in Connecticut removed the cap. We thank everyone for the supportive letters before the Courts ruled. The exercise was worth it because of the actions our community took and the messages that were conveyed.
- We will reach out again to the State Department of Transportation to see about the West Parrish road plot. The request is on hold currently. We were able to articulate why that land is good for us to use even if it is only 1 to 2 acres instead of 4. The Greens Farms Community Association had been concerned about community character; but they voted to approve our ask for this land. Alison made sure people understood what we were talking about. We really hope we can make something happen there. We are working to make it possible for everyone to live here with a specific emphasis on opportunities for diversity that will also diversify our school system. We have a long list of people who are diverse and are looking for affordable housing. In general, black families have always been left out.
- Danielle is speaking at a conference with respect to Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) where she is the only person representing a town. We may need your help. The State wants everyone to allow guest houses and pool houses to be rental stock. They will allow up to a 2200 sq. ft. area as an ADU; however, in Westport, the rent for a space of that size could be \$4500 to \$5000 a month. So, this does not move our goals forward. We're looking at spaces of 650 -700 sq. ft. For a single mom, this would be better priced. We need help and would appreciate draft language from you to present to the state versus criticism. As the zoning laws get discussed on the State level, we'll come back to let you know what's going on. We hope it's positive. Everyone in town government and the non-profit sector are now working together toward this end.

Helen McAlinden: Helen commented that she has never seen such good support for these issues. Let's continue to support Danielle D. so that children will get an opportunity to go to Westport schools.

- There is a new group in Town -- Westport Pride to support the LGBTQ community run by Brian McGonagle. The most important thing, overall, is to run for elected office. Also, keep in mind that there may be Town funding opportunities for DEI; so, it's important to have support on the RTM.

Harold: Thank you, Danielle, and thank you to this group for your support. The RTM statement on equity and inclusion for the Town of Westport that was presented last month almost failed.

**TW Parent Updates / Book Clubs: Zoe and Catherine:**

- Catherine and Zoe are working on the TEAM Westport parents' group focused on the schools. We need voices to address our administrators and the BOE. It's an engaged group that is looking at how best to support what our leadership wants to change and to take the lead in our schools. Many did the 3-hour training in September.
- The TEAM Westport community-focused group, also being coordinated by Zoe and Catherine, will be meeting next on November 17<sup>th</sup>. The recent RTM meeting was motivating for the parents. We have a collection of young parents that feel we have to speak up to get action. Thank you for your work.
- On December 9<sup>th</sup> we'll host the TEAM Westport book club discussion of Caste by Isabel Wilkerson and invite anyone to come join us.



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**Westport Museum – Ramin Ganeshram:**

- We are continuing our work. We're excited that an archivist is creating a finding aid resource guide for all materials we hold about African Americans.
- We are still working on historical signage for the town. We have designs and hope this will be resolved by the end of the year.
- We are continuing our very well-received *Remembered*: walking tours. If you are interested, we are asking that you have a group of 8-10 people. Thank you to those who went through the docent training including Darcy. Reserve a spot at: [programs@westporthistory.org](mailto:programs@westporthistory.org).

**InterFaith Clergy – Reverend Alison Patton:** Rabbi Friedman at Temple Israel is conducting a class based upon Dr. Kendi's concepts of antiracism. He attended the class that Dr. Kendi conducted in Westport in 2018. The Temple Israel class will run in five 1-hour sessions from Tuesday, November 17<sup>th</sup> through December 15<sup>th</sup> from 8-9PM and will consist of content up front followed by break out discussion groups. We invite you to take a look and participate if you're interested. Sign up on the Temple Israel website. If you'd like to facilitate, please let Alison, Harold, or Rabbi Friedman know. Already 75 people have signed up. This is a different format from the Sept 13<sup>th</sup> training. It is also a larger group. There is no charge.

**Westport Playhouse – Jenny Nelson:**

- The Playhouse is continuing in our EDI work. We have an EDI check-in meeting on Wednesdays. On Fridays, staff and furloughed members of the staff review the document containing the demands of the BIPOC theatre community so that we can create an action plan for the Playhouse.
- The Playhouse Youth Council is a new program. If anyone would like additional information, we can send it out to you. The target is 10-12 high school students who want to participate in board meetings, a speaker series, professional aspects of the arts community, create their own community event, put on a fundraising event, and form a grass roots organization. The application goes live on November 9<sup>th</sup> for two weeks. The interview process will start on December 9<sup>th</sup>. The virtual meetings will begin in January 2021. The objective is to foster empathy, collaboration, literacy, and activism. We are trying to have equal representation among the group and are targeting students from Fairfield County.

Judy: How are you going to do that?

Jenny has been running a social justice theater in New Haven and served as a recruiter for the Regional Center for the Arts. She can get the information out to guidance counselors and to teachers who really know the students. She has a list of students from doing work with them in the past.

Danielle D will post the announcement as a Staples Players parent. She also mentioned that Norwalk High School has a wonderful theater program. Because of the demands of the theater curriculum and schoolwork, it may be hard to have any student meet before 8PM.

Tom: Anything I can do I will funnel through the system.

General Comment: Staples Players is not diverse; we need to focus on making sure that there is diversity.

**Westport Library – Alex Giannini:** Alex has been a part of all our programming with the Library, although Cody Daigle-Orians was our primary contact over the past few years. Alex is happy to be working more directly with us. He is meeting with Brian McGunagle from Westport Pride on Monday and will set him up to meet with TEAM.

Programs:



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- Next Tuesday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, Anna Devere Smith will appear as the Malloy Lecture Series speaker. Her presentation is prerecorded and will appear at 7 followed by a live Q&A session.
  - On Tuesday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, Candace Parker, Charles Smith, and Dave Winfield will be hosted by Jeff Pegues (CBS News). It will be an Interesting conversation. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> in a series that we started on October 22<sup>nd</sup> with Professor Jennifer Richeson. The session with Professor Richeson has been taped and posted. There will be more to come.
  - As for the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration this year, we are excited about a lead we have. We are anticipating turning the celebration into an event over a few days with a speaker, a panel, an artists' reflection/response to Sunday's keynote, followed by an opportunity to engage in some ongoing education together as a community. It should be a big deal if what we're planning to do works out. This programming builds on what we've been doing all along in our community. We are using this opportunity for collective learning and engagement.
- Teen Essay Contest—Susan Ellis:** We settled on a topic quickly this time for the next Essay Contest. The topic was Catherine Lewis' idea and this one really stood out among the other good ideas. The Contest will be launched in late January/early February.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:02 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod  
Secretary