

Attendees: Harold Bailey, Jr. (Presiding), Jim Marpe (First Selectman), Bernicestine McLeod, Maggie Mudd, Ramin Ganeshram (Westport Museum for History and Culture), Susan Ellis, Zoe Tarrant, Lee Goldstein (Board of Education), Rev. Alison Patton (Saugatuck Congregational Church), Catherine Lewis

Guests: Helen McAlinden (Homes With Hope), Lynn Scully (Interim Operations Manager, Westport), Kris Szabo (Principal, Coleytown Middle School), Kristi Law, Ted Gillman, Patra Kanchanagom (Co-Chair, PTA DEI), Liz Falk, Tom Scarice (Superintendent, Westport Schools), Chief Foti Koskinas (Westport Police Department), Lauren Francese (Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator 6-12, Westport Schools), Rebecca Martin, Kevin Christie, Deputy Chief Sam Arciola (Westport Police Department), Danielle Dobin (Chair, Planning & Zoning), Trammi Nguyen (Co-Chair, PTA DEI - Staples High School), Abby Gordon-Tolan, Jenny Nelson (Westport Playhouse), Brett Aronow, Jonathan Steinberg (State Representative), Ngassam Ngnoumen (Co-Chair, PTA DEI), Bethany Gugliemino (Westport Playhouse), Youn Su Chao (Board of Education), Danielle Teplica (Volunteer Director, Friends of TEAM Westport), Harris Falk (RTM), Rebecca Marsick (Literacy Coach, Staples High School), Holly Sulzycki (English/Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator 6-12, Westport Schools), Maddison Tirado, Joan Gillman

The meeting was called to order at 8:06am.

Welcome / Approval of Minutes – Harold Bailey, Jr.: We are delighted to be back after our summer hiatus. Sara Harris, the former Operations Manager for the Town, has returned to the private sector. We welcome Lynn Scully, the interim Operations Manager for the Town.

- The draft minutes for our June 10th and July 15th, 2021, meetings were distributed to everyone before this meeting. We received some amendments that will be incorporated before the approved minutes are posted on the Town’s site.

Catherine Lewis moved to approve the minutes with the recommended changes. Maggie Mudd seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Comments – Harold Bailey, Jr.:

- We thank Danielle Teplica for working with the TEAM Westport Student Volunteers. Students can volunteer by signing up through Friends of TEAM Westport. They have thus far helped with food drives for Homes with Hope and the Gillespie Center and The Rotary’s Lobster Fest.
- Last night, we distributed the presentation from the Westport Arts Advisory Committee (given in our July meeting by Nancy Diamond).
- The historical plaques are in place at Town Hall (inside and outside) and “at” 22½ Main Street. We are about there on the 3rd plaque. Thanks for input given thus far to compose the text for the plaques.
- A number of things occurred this summer with respect to the degree that we discuss race, religion, ethnicity, and LGBTQIA+.

What happened? We’re under siege. Across the country, Boards of Education (BOE) have been hit with the “issue” of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Where is this coming from and what happened? Locally, It started with a FOIA request for 30 or so keywords used in any interaction that takes place between members of TEAM Westport. What are the keywords? Equity, racism, students of color – just to name a few. This ATTEMPTS to puts a pall over any discussion we might have and is designed to make us careful going forward.

- This is happening all over the country and throughout Fairfield County. Some organizations are funded by the Heritage Society and the American Enterprise Institute. Their message is that racism and implicit bias do not exist. They proclaim that “CRT” is being taught in our schools. What is CRT? It is a

limited view of systemic racial structure that is/was taught in law schools. However, it is now being used to mean anything that has to do with discussions about race. It is supposedly anything that is poisoning our children and making them feel guilty. It declares that we should not talk in terms of Equity vs. Equality. Equity is a Marxist agenda. They say that there is no problem with race – they are race deniers. Therefore, race should not be discussed because there is no racism. They have put together black academics, contrarians with PhDs, to promote and validate their message.

- Locally, listen to our BOE meetings to hear the views expressed. The Equity Study being conducted here in Town is being trolled. The meetings are public; however, we have people taking pictures of the screen. Bullying of teachers and administrators who are focused on the state-mandated course offering on African American, Latinx, and Puerto Rican history and on our English curriculum is taking place. BOE meetings throughout the County are being interrupted. Such activity led to a resignation in Easton this summer of a black superintendent. Some school systems have removed DEI from their curricula. The Anti-Defamation League is seeing withdrawals from its programs especially in the South and West.
- Several new groups have popped up nationally very quickly. For example, one group did not exist last year and came into being in February. Now there are 40 “chapters” across the country – including Fairfield. Each local website focuses on the local BOE and may give false information about what the schools are doing. Some here are saying that TEAM Westport has paid our essayists during the Teen Essay contest to present a predicted view. This is a lie and impugns our students and the Town, and the Library, and TEAM Westport. They accuse us of using techniques they use where we do not. As for CRT, they say that Westport and Weston have implemented CRT – this is a lie and is against everything we stand for, and that the Town stands for. Our schools are not teaching it; but we are discussing race.
- They are questioning the humanity of people. We shall not debate the humanity of any people. When we talk about anti-hatred, Anti-Semitism, LGBTQIA+ -- it’s all the same thing. Race, women’s rights are the same historically and now. This is the backlash to George Floyd that has been leading to a national narrative and now locally. Even locally, Anti-BLM, Anti-AAPI, Anti-Semitism, the vandalism of Westport Pride items shows how it metastasizes. The discussion of hatred starts with race and spreads. The Equity Study has started with race. The Staples alumni who are not of color told us that they were not prepared for college totally because they did not talk about racism. This environment metastasizes to religion and abilities from race. There is othering that needs to be addressed. The othering starts to go on when smaller groups are in an environment. We start with race and keep going. We have to look at the Town to make sure we keep going locally on what we are doing versus the larger picture that’s going on nationally. There are some answers in the Wilton Schools based on an article we saw recently.
- We support Superintendent Scarice. Where did “we are making students feel guilty” come from and how did we get there? We have to understand what’s happening and put the word out knowing what the stakes are. We can’t say that all the work we’ve done is for naught (that it disappears nor that it is not OK to discuss anymore). We can’t let that happen. We must move forward. Everyone has to feel they belong. We have to continue talking about this topic. This is critical to our focus. The BOE is championing a forum to talk about equity across the schools and across the Town for the foreseeable future. Thanks.

First Selectman / Messaging Update – Jim Marpe: Jim can’t echo enough concerns about the issues that Harold raised. The Town’s commitment is still there to continue on our path.

- Welcome to the FOIA club. FOIA extends back to when decisions were being made without public input. They used to write letters. They want to see what's being discussed and typically meeting minutes were requested. Over the past decade, this has mushroomed out of control. The FOIA Commission works under some dated rules. We apologize that some people are being subjected to search for terms that are used in a variety of ways.
- Plaques are in place in Town Hall and at 22 ½ Main with a third plaque in the works. We should have a dedication in October or during the two weeks after the election.
- The Board of Selectmen met last night to discuss how to spend money from the Federal Government [the American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA)]– on Town infrastructure, etc. We should also address equity issues and issues with which Human Services deals to make sure we are addressing our entire population. The Commission on People with Disabilities is meeting – another group of people who face the same challenges. It may be in different forms and in different ways, but all othering is from the same cloth. We have proposed to use money to address affordable housing. Danielle Dobin and I have worked with the State Department of Transportation (DOT) and, subsequently, they are turning over land to the Westport Housing Authority and Homes with Hope to construct family-centric housing near Greens Farms School. The DOT has moved forward and is taking the next step to free up some land. \$650,000 to get that started has been committed from the Town. We will be addressing emergency assistance with housing due to the pandemic. Additionally, we will put money toward mental health services. Lots of ideas were put forward last night. We have earmarked \$150,000 for bus shelters in Town.
- Jim expressed the personal commitment and civic commitment of the major candidates for the First Selectman's office to support TEAM Westport and to keep moving forward.
- Jim applauded the work that Superintendent Scarice has accomplished with the Westport Schools in providing for all students.

Superintendent / Board of Ed / Staples – Tom Scarice: Thanks Harold. We are providing support for all kids in the community. That's what this is all about. I won't duplicate any comments already stated. First, we are about equitable access to all programs for all students. We will produce a policy that states that. Such a policy will play out in schools via access to programs, providing an equitable opportunity for every kid. You ask questions in a study to lead to more questions; so, we are conducting a study. The second point is around belonging which is a core feature of any public school. It is important that you are known by an adult and that you are known by your peers. You have a place where you belong – a human connection. This big rock around belonging is important. Thirdly, we must prepare our kids for a global, diverse world as the world becomes "flattened". I have spoken with tons of kids. They talk about the bubble and the fact that the world does not look like Westport. In summary, then, the three key things are: access, belonging, and preparation. Belonging never goes out of season. It is critical. It is humane. Individual narratives do matter. We have fielded some comments from the community, but they are largely inaccurate. We've had a small group of people commenting on the vaccine. However, the community at large supports our work. Kids have stories. This is a national conversation. I have been saying so for a while. I am not an expert; however, I do know kids.

- Our focus group themes have been consistent with what I've learned from talking with students. It has been affirming. We were stressing the pressures on kids. We cast an even wider net than we'd given credit. We would like to get more folks to engage as we plan our actions. How does this fold into the larger school district? Our work is folding into the culture and climate for the whole district as well. So,

our action plan will include community comments. The tenor is different in certain districts. For example, Guilford made national news. We would like to get our arms around our curriculum. Nothing has been adopted around the Equity Study yet. It really speaks to all kids so the community should embrace what we come up with. We are the ones doing it. This is not being farmed out to anyone. Harold. Curricular work has already started. The course currently being taught was NOT driven by the Equity Study; but will fall under the area covered by the Equity Study. I hear there is intimidation and bullying of the coordinators. The course that is being piloted now was a result of a state law passed two years ago for implementation in 2021. The State Education Resource Center created the course. Lauren. We have started the pilot. Rebecca Marsick and Kathy Schager are teaching it. They are unpacking a curriculum they did not write. School districts are planning to run it. There will be several pieces of curriculum developed. Steve Armstrong is a State consultant who will do courses for other identities. The pilot will require a review. We want to inform and guide districts on courses especially for K-8 that will be released throughout the State. Over the next 3 years, we will see changes. There's lots of work to do.

We need some evaluation tools around our curriculum. We used to do so every 6 years. We want to start up again. To prepare kids for the world, we have to be thinking about what's beyond the access of content knowledge. Our job is not to teach kids what to think, but how to think. The teachers have the knowledge to do that.

Maggie: A question raised in a study by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences: should we be obligated to teach kids citizenship? The feeling is that it's been many years since kids have been reminded of what it means to be a citizen.

Lauren: We have strands of standards (Civics, Economics, History, Geography). Civics is required at the high school level – Media and Politics, Govt and Civics. We are going to look at the strands. CT state standards need to be updated; so, we need to go through the review process to make sure courses are relevant.

Policing – Chief Foti Koskinas: Harold: The Civilian Review Panel (CRP) is now in place. The RTM is requesting an independent Civilian Review Board (CRB) that will lead to a dual investigation process. We have to see how the CRB proposal will be voted on by the RTM on October 5. In both models, TEAM Westport has a seat or can propose a person. Either way, we are involved. It has been a pleasure to work with Foti. TEAM Westport has been proactive in consolidating complaint forms and processes.

Chief Koskinas: This meeting has felt as if we are discussing deeper matters – not in a bad way. We have to ask ourselves how much is out there and how much work is ahead of us.

- As for recruiting, we had 5 finalists appear before our community interviewing panel consisting of an RTM member, a representative from the school system, and Harold from TEAM Westport. Out of 5 candidates, 3 walked away. One was disqualified. We hope the last one stays. We have 3 vacancies out of 64 members on the force.
- As for the State Accountability Act, we met and exceeded the standards at the time it was passed. Currently, we are meeting and exceeding the new standards where other departments are lacking.
- We requested funding for body cam upgrades. These are not discretionary upgrades, whether through ARPA or Town funding, since body cams are mandated by the State. We have vendors in place already.
- We want to team up with TEAM Westport for a food drive before Thanksgiving. TEAM Westport working with the police has been a good experience.

- As for the CRP and the CRB, different things are being proposed. October 5th may be a long RTM meeting. We are happy with the panel thus far and are glad it is in place. It is time for us to show our accomplishments. The opportunity was given to us. We are now looking at how thorough the process is. Has everything been done? The Town does not have a police commission. The current panel has more oversight than any police commission. They see the initial complaint, the process, the resolution, and can give input on the method of discipline. We can make recommendations. We look forward to working with the group no matter what it is.

Affordable Housing – Danielle Dobin:

Planning and Zoning (P&Z) and the First Selectman's office can work together. We've actually come out on the other side for the DOT land. Now it's been handed over to the Westport Housing Authority and Homes with Hope. The Town is using ARPA funds toward making this happen. This distinguishes us from people who are using the money for beaches, etc. Now Greenwich is looking at doing the same thing. We hope the next First Selectman will continue the progress.

- As for 830-G funding, we want to do roundtables. We want to create a public forum at the Library to discuss this and to get ideas as to how to incorporate new housing along with the culture of the town. Why not use more plots? We want to get suggestions for our own backyards versus those of others.
- The Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) regulation that we passed, nobody else is talking about it. There was a post on a Westport website that nobody knows about it. We need to talk about ADU from a design perspective. People don't know what the law is. We need to make sure people know. Westport is doing more.
- People are implying that children are being indoctrinated. Talking about what's really going on makes people more comfortable. If someone is seeking info about housing and what is happening, please pass along how to contact Danielle. People should be embracing what we are doing versus trying to stop it.

Harold: TEAM Westport members aren't structured for FOIA. We all have to be engaged and to be ambassadors. Whenever anything comes up, we should be prepared to discuss it.

TEAM Westport Parent Updates / Community / Book Clubs – Zoe Tarrant and Catherine Lewis: We have more new parents. Tuesday, October 28th is our next Parent Group meeting. We'll kickoff the year and set up an agenda for the year. New families are looking for a way to connect. We want to schedule a panel for school board candidates in mid-October. We hear different community members' ideas. Listening to different people speak, we are impressed by the steadiness and forward movement. We won't get knocked off track and will keep at it. We're going to keep moving along. Do we want to reinstate a book group not to just check off the list but to continue to learn about the context of our country? We will conduct a planning and brainstorming session to discuss where to take the group.

Harold: There are now four candidates for four positions. It is important for us to get their views.

Westport Museum of History and Culture – Ramin Ganeshram: We are planning to open on October 1st with time slots that will allow no more than 10 people in the building at a time. We are opening some new exhibits as well as continuing some that had to close because of COVID, including an exhibit about the pioneering life of anti-Nazi reporter Sigrid Schultz who lived here in Westport after she left her service on the *Chicago Tribune* and as a US War Correspondent during World War II.

- All of our exhibits are being approached with a DEI focus based on our mission. The Museum's main program gallery now has both our mission and a native land acknowledgement on the wall.
- The Museum is spearheading an initiative to begin to ID and catalog resources related to slavery in Fairfield County at other institutions.

- Lastly, we have made some significant donations of previously purchased decorative items to the Freeman Center in Bridgeport for the purpose of helping them install their interpretation of the life of Mary Freeman's home. Freeman was an African American entrepreneur in the mid-19th century and a member of the founding family of Little Liberia, a free black community.

Homes with Hope – Helen McAlinden: Thank you, TEAM Westport volunteers, for support in many initiatives – including our food drives. We had many volunteers and got enough food to carry through for a while. It is great to see everyone supporting us and that Westport will stay on track to keep going.

- We are glad the money was set aside last night for affordable housing.
- Thank you for attending the rally on August 18th at Jesup Green in our Fairfield County Call to Action. 100 people attended and voiced their support. Statewide advocates joined us. There is a lot more going on around affordable housing. It really is hard to afford to live here. We have people in our shelter with 3 minimum-wage jobs. Even with subsidies there's not enough for housing. Thanks again.
- The art from the Westport Arts Advisory Committee that you sent out is stunning.

Harold: We look forward to continuing the work.

Westport Library: No Update.

Westport Playhouse – Jenny Nelson: Thanks for your support after our flood.

- *Doubt* will preview on November 3rd. Please come into the theater.
- Our commitment to EDI is strong. We created an EDI committee with action steps. Quarterly on our website we will be putting up a list of what we're doing to be an anti-racist theatre.
- On October 30th from 12-4, we'll host our Family Fun event with crafts and food trucks. We are conducting a food drive also co-run by our Theater Council and our Youth Council.

Bethany: The Playhouse has added an anonymous form to the website for feedback as a means of accountability on EDI. This will contain paragraph updates on what everyone's doing.

Westport Pride: No Update.

Interfaith Clergy – Rev. Alison Patton: We just went through the High Holy Days.

- We have another effort underway to resettle a refugee family in our community. Mohammad, from Syria whose family was resettled a few years ago, is now the Imam at a community center in Norwalk. We want to respond to the current (800 in the State) refugees as a result of the end of the US involvement in Afghanistan. Previously there were 400-500 refugees in the State. Is it on anyone's radar to consider housing for refugees? We are starting to see calls coming in. Temple Israel has taken a lead along with 5 or so other organizations. We are standing by to help out. Trammi Nguyen is also helping with Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) in New Haven to obtain resources.
- We'll report on our Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration (scheduled for January) later.
- Next fall, Dr. Ayana Johnson will speak here on climate and racial injustice. We are still looking for people to be involved in the planning for that event. The Library is working with us.

New business: Audio recordings of our meetings are available online as well as minutes and agendas.

Catherine moved that the meeting be adjourned. Zoe seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous. The meeting was adjourned at 9:48AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary