



TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes
Thursday, December 16, 2021
Via Zoom



Attendees: Harold Bailey, Jr. (Presiding), Jen Tooker (First Selectwoman), Bernicestine McLeod, Maggie Mudd, Ramin Ganeshram (Westport Museum for History and Culture), Zoe Tarrant, Rev. Alison Patton (Saugatuck Congregational Church), Dolores Paoli, Elaine Daignault (Westport Human Services), and Catherine Onyemelukwe

Guests: Brett Aronow, Danielle Dobin (Chairwoman, Westport Planning and Zoning Committee and the P&Z Affordable Housing Subcommittee), Kevin Christie (Westport Board of Education), Pippa Bell Ader, Bethany Gugliemino (Westport Playhouse), Lynn Scully (Town of Westport), Deputy Chief Sam Arciola (Westport Police Department), Jill Nadel, Harris Falk (RTM), Danielle Teplica (Volunteer Director, Friends of TEAM Westport), Liz Falk, Kris Szabo (Principal, Coleytown Middle School), Faith Sweeney (Literacy Coach, Coleytown Elementary School), Patra Kanchanagom (AAPI Westport – Asian American and Pacific Islanders and Co-Chair, Westport PTA DEI), Geoff Gaspar, Trammi Nguyen (Co-Chair, Staples PTA DEI), Jonathan Steinberg (Westport State Representative), Shanelle Henry (Greens Farms Academy), Tom Scarice (Superintendent, Westport Schools), Nancy Lewis, Alex Giannini (Westport Library), Rebecca Marsick (Literacy Coach, Staples High School), Rebecca Martin, and Kristi Law

The meeting was called to order at 8:05am.

Welcome / Approval of Minutes – Harold Bailey, Jr.:

Maggie moved that we approve the October 21st, 2021, meeting minutes. Catherine O. seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Comments – Harold Bailey, Jr.:

This is the last meeting of the year. I'd like to review the year with respect to our charge: race, religion, and LGBTQIA+:

- We started the year with our Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration in January – a virtual conversation between Layla Ali (from Qatar) and Bernicestine. In looking at structural inequity, we as a community committed to do deep dives with our personal attitudes about people of color. This same exercise can be used as a template to take on 'othering' in arenas including religion and ethnicities. Discussion groups formed on their own or were conducted by TEAM Westport. These discussions allowed us to disconnect from color blindness. We have to understand how our narratives interact with each other.
- I think we did some award-winning work with the Library and the Playhouse. We have lots to be proud of. The Underground Railroad, by Colson Whitehead, helped to expand the knowledge although it was fictional. We expanded the narrative of people from different backgrounds and led to greater awareness and respect.
- Caste, by Isabel Wilkerson, talked about the unspoken but widely assumed hierarchies of race in this country. The book rigorously surfaced the assumptions and dynamics between the top level with each of the other levels in the hierarchy. Isabel Wilkerson is coming to the Quick Center at Fairfield University next year.
- The Sum of Us, by Heather McGhee, uncovers the pervasive costs of the perpetuation of white supremacist inequalities on all citizens (especially white citizens). That perpetuation has been driven in great part by the move toward the false ideal of color blindness to address assumptions. Of course, Heather McGhee will be here in January.
- Net, net is that we have been talking about gaining respect where our different narratives intersect. We are trying to build these in this Town to let us move forward as Westporters who are truly respectful of each other. Two organizations, Westport Pride and AAPI Westport – (Asian American Pacific Islanders), have incorporated and have added a tremendous amount about value and challenges. Others that are less visible include A Better Chance (ABC) and Friends of TEAM Westport (FOTW) whose youth volunteers have done some wonderful work.
- Our Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. event is coming up in January and we will have more discussion.

- We're announcing our Essay contest topic at the end of January. Lots of people are working on it. It will be a great topic.
- We have a lot to talk about today. Our next meeting is January 13th, 2022.

First Selectwoman / Messaging Update – Jen Tooker:

Jen, welcome.

Harold: This is a proud moment with our Board of Selectwomen – 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Selectwomen.

Jen is all set with her holiday earrings to go around to all the Town Departments. She was at the transfer stations earlier today!

- Jen has reinstated the Civilian Review Panel (CRP) with 3 members. She is meeting with Jeff Weiser, moderator of the Representative Town Meeting (RTM) and will map out the process to name two additional members. Harold (Chair) plus Andrea Moore (2nd Selectwoman) and Candi Savin (3rd Selectwoman) are the current members. After the beginning of the year, we'll get the full 5 seated as soon as the process is worked out.

Lynn: We've agreed that we are in good shape with the design of the third new Town plaque and its QR code. It's been a really interesting process and we worked well together. It is to be sent off to be printed and then we'll work with Pete Ratkiewich (the Town Engineer) for placement. It is the last of the three plaques and is exciting, beautiful and impressive. We'll have a dedication ceremony at some point.

Maggie: Which plaque is this?

This is the 3rd one on Town values and our DEI statement. We always planned to have three plaques.

Superintendent / Board of Ed / Staples – Tom Scarice:

Tom: Rebecca has to leave to welcome Kevin Staton, who is doing a site visit on the course on African American, Latinx American, and Puerto Rican history.

Rebecca: The course is going great; we have had Will Haskell visit with the State Rep from Fairfield who came with him. We are using a State template as a blueprint and have to contextualize the course and modernize it. We thought it should be updated with current issues. Whether we call it a pilot or not, the first time is a pilot, and we will debrief after this year. Every year will look different. The course can change with what's happening in the world. It does cover why what is happening now is because of what happened in the past.

As an example, we talked about the Rittenhouse and Arbery verdicts. We discussed the Fugitive slave laws and how they remain. Also, we look at how citizens are making decisions based on things that were put in place a long time ago. We looked at historical documents, readings and discussions.

Tom: We are on pause with the Equity Study. We just received a draft report from the consultants. We'll go through that in small teams to make sure the data points are accurate. That is going on now. Any report will be shared publicly at the Board of Education (BOE) and then reviewed iteratively.

Harold: Will the next step for the public to see the results be when you present to the BOE?

Tom: Our plans have shifted to deal with the pandemic. Coinciding with the break, we are focusing on our budget and strategic planning. Our next step will to be roll out the results to the BOE. I don't know when that will be. Ideally, I wanted it a little while ago. Everyone needs a break. So, maybe by the end of the month we can be ready. I have to talk to the BOE.

Policing – Deputy Chief Sam Arciola:

We are do now recruiting and interviewing to fill 3 to 4 positions. These would be lateral transfers. We are keeping options open and are pretty busy during the holiday season. Any Questions?

Catherine O. Are they similar to current police officers when they are coming in laterally?

Deputy Chief Arciola: Some have 25 years or more of experience and some have 2 years. We are looking at bringing in seasoned officers as well as new ones.

How many are of color? We currently have 1 African American, 7 female, and 2 Asian American officers. Four of the female officers are in the chain of command – lieutenants, sergeants, and detectives.

Harold: Having been through the recruiting process, I'll say that it is rigorous with psychological testing and background checks. The external committee that interviews the candidates consists of a member of the CRP, one from the RTM, one from Human Resources, and one from the Westport Schools. We try to assess the candidate's attitude with working with the community (residents, employees, and those who drive through Town).

Deputy Chief Arciola: It is important to understand that a candidate has to be a good fit with our community. Also, it is important when recruiting a new officer since it's almost a year at the academy plus 400 hours of field training. The force can dismiss anyone at any point whenever. We have done that. We take it very seriously and include the community in the process.

Affordable Housing – Danielle Dobin:

The 830J Affordability Plan will present what we want to do with our Town over the next five years. We want to stimulate the private sector to create affordable housing. New Canaan has done their plan and has greater local control. The First Selectman's office is involved, and they have a fee structure to constantly fund and refurbish houses. This is a priority for our Selectwomen. It will be a robust plan. There will be multiple events and meetings where people from within the town are involved as well as some who are external. The document will be drafted internally versus farming it out. We are looking for vibrant participants. Allies have shown up from TEAM Westport from a racial equity lens or with respect to the economics of creating housing. In recently putting together documents, I see that 600 have been approved. I recently ran into a developer who is now including standalone Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in their designs. It's beginning to happen.

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

- Zoe is excited about Heather McGhee. The book group had an animated discussion about her book in November and December. They have other books and movies planned.
- The parents' discussion group's ongoing theme is "How to talk to children about topics around race".
- We'll plan more of our directions once we hear about the Equity Study.

Harold: Thanks for the work, Zoe. I hope we have some great questions for Ms. McGhee.

Westport Museum of History and Culture – Ramin Ganeshram:

- The Museum has a couple of exhibits for the holidays. Even our holiday exhibits are inclusive and show diversity.
- We are starting our planning for next year. We ask if you have suggestions for authors we can invite to speak. They do not have to be from Westport.
- Our Walking Tours are suspended until it warms up again.

AAPI Westport – Patra Kanchanagom:

The purpose of our Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Westport group is to build community and to build visibility. Sarin Cheung, Rosie Jon, Patra Kanchanagom are the three co-chairs.

- We have had beach meetups with AAPI members of the community.
- We held two events at Local Westport involving our kids and art activities.
- We had a great Diwali event in November. Indian American families were excited.
- Right now, we have a business guide on our website: Aapiwestport.com. Let us know if you have some ideas to add.
- Our Instagram is: @aapiwestport.
- We are starting to plan for a lunar new year.
- We are planning for AAPI month in May. We would love to have others come, so we can distribute to the whole community.

Westport Library – Alex Giannini:

- Our Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration event will be held on Sunday, January 16th, 2022, featuring Heather McGhee, author of The Sum Of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together.

Tickets are going quickly. We are offering live streaming and in-person attendance. Our maximum seating is 400, but we'll monitor.

- On January 11th, Paco Underhill will be doing a session on How We Eat – covering food insecurity.
- We're trying to get Lynsey Addario to do a program. Her photos of Women in Afghanistan will be in the gallery.
- In setting the calendar for 2022, we already have events in the Forum into October. If you're trying to get a program on the calendar, please let me know soon.

Harold: Is there a requirement that attendees be vaccinated?

Alex: It's tricky since we are a public institution. We can require masking for some events, but we are not requiring vaccinations.

Alison: I recommend that we require masks.

Alex: We have been one of the safest places in the Town. Live streaming numbers are going to start to go up. Attrition on in-person attendance has increased even at paid events. Let's have the discussion.

Westport Playhouse – Bethany Gugliemino:

- The EDI section of our website will have quarterly updates on what we're doing. Please reach out.
- The press release for the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration went out.
- Our Social Justice feeder camp for Middle Schoolers will run from 6/27 -7/23. They will do a play. Please register.
- Our Joann Woodward Intern program will be back. Applications will be available in mid-January. Interns will receive minimum wage and free housing.

Harold: I'll reiterate the Social Justice camp; such an experience can be invaluable. The Playhouse is working with the Interfaith Council, the Interfaith Clergy, and the Library on this.

Interfaith Clergy – Rev. Alison Patton:

- We are back at the drawing board on discussing the community-wide trip we had been planning to take to the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, with potential visits to Selma and Birmingham (Alabama). We were in talks with a clergy colleague out of Boston to facilitate the trip along with local partners.
- We are looking forward to our Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. event.

Closing:

Ramin moved that the meeting be adjourned. Alison seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Happy Holidays! Stay healthy! Thank you all for your hard work.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:04 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary