

Attendees: Harold Bailey, Jr. (Presiding), Jen Tooker (First Selectwoman), Bernicestine McLeod, Lee Goldstein (Chair, Westport Board of Education), Catherine Onyemelukwe, Zoe Tarrant, Reverend Alison Patton (Saugatuck Congregational Church), Catherine Lewis, Maggie Mudd, Judy Hamer, and Elaine Daignault (Westport Human Services)

Guests: Christina Torres (Board of Education), Thane Grauel, Lynn Scully (Interim Operations Manager, Westport), Kevin Christie (Board of Education), Danielle Teplica (Volunteer Director, Friends of TEAM Westport Volunteer Coordinator), Trammi Nguyen (PTA DEI Co-Chair, Staples High School), Patra Kanchanagom (PTA DEI Co-Chair), Bethany Gugliermo (Westport Playhouse), Jenny Nelson (Westport Playhouse), Jill Nadel (ADL), Deputy Chief Sam Arciola (Westport Police), Faith Sweeney (Coleytown Elementary), Danielle Dobin (Chair Planning and Zoning, Chair Affordable Housing Subcommittee), Ted Gillman, Jonathan Steinberg (State Representative), Liz Falk, Chief Foti Koskinas (Westport Police), Rebecca Marsick (Literacy Coach, Staples High School), Nancy Lewis, Holly Sulzycki (English/Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator, Westport Schools Grades 6-12), Harris Falk (RTM), Ngassam Ngnoumen (PTA DEI Co-Chair) – by phone, Alex Giannini (Westport Library), Stacie Shamie – by phone, Robert Harrington (Board of Education), Kristi Law, Nancy Kail, Brett Aronow, Tom Foran, and Rebecca Martin

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

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

We have continued to be focused since 2003 and 2005 on making Westport more welcoming, but we focus on every citizen in Westport including people who are not in the groups we have identified as priorities. Why do we do this – making people feel welcome? The larger group has no intent to make people feel uncomfortable. So, awareness is key. We want us all to be aware of things we have said or done, so that “welcoming” becomes natural for us in our environment. Also, this is a time to look at ourselves to see areas where we feel uncomfortable about dealing with others. The reason we have this group around “this table” is that years ago we decided to work with our partner organizations and not just talk in generalities. We have been following up on the commitments in each of our organizations to address what would make people uncomfortable. Who belongs in Westport? – the people who work here, the people who live here, and people who are passing through. So, we try to work on getting rid of any discomfort that might be unconscious or conscious for anyone while they are in Westport.

- The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) statement of the Town that was signed on October 13th is not just words, it is undergirded by 3+ years of commitment – for example, police hiring and accountability and the Town with its hiring outreach. We already have commitments in place, and we track them daily. We would not have that DEI statement if this were not the case. We want to welcome our new First Selectwoman. We appreciate that we are coming into the next era with a firm foundation because of the Town’s DEI statement, and that we can always move forward with respect to it.

- We now have an AAPI organization. We have people in that group who have been participating. We’ll have them report as well.

- As for Friends of TEAM Westport, Danielle Teplica has had volunteers working during the Food Drive in conjunction with the Westport Police and Helen McAlinden with *Homes with Hope* and the *Gillespie Center*. According to Helen, the food and dollars targets in each of the past 2 drives were significantly exceeded.

First Selectwoman / Messaging Update – Jen Tooker:

This is Day 3 of being in the position of First Selectwoman and technology is touch and go. It is so nice to see the two screens of everyone. Almost all are familiar faces. There is not a whole lot to report. Yesterday, Harold and I met for an hour and a half about TEAM Westport, the Citizens' Review Panel (CRP), and issues we have worked on in common before and will be working on going forward. I am anxious to hear from everyone who is involved in working, supporting, and championing all the work. I am grateful for the work to date and look forward to continuing it. We talk a lot about belonging and that this is a place where everyone feels comfortable and safe. We know we have work to do and look forward to the next few years.

Harold talked about Jen being affected by the statement of an African American woman who said, at a public meeting here in Town, that people of color from outside town 'know' that they should get out of Westport before dark; therefore, they won't stay too long after work. We need to realize that we are a pass-through town for many. It was eye opening and quite a discussion. We focus on the residents, business owners, and employees. We need to make all people feel comfortable so that they continue to choose to drive through Town. The First Selectwoman agreed that there was "more work to be done".

Harold: On the CRP we have not found anything problematic about policing. That's why we were talking about perceptions of Westport and the way people feel about the Town.

Chief Koskinas: A case from 2014 was just reviewed by the CRP. At that time, thresholds were met, but we could certainly have handled things better. It is incredibly hard to oversee and monitor perception. The State is using our stop rate of motorists as an example of how to achieve lack of complaints. No matter what, it is hard to overcome the perception that Westport is bad to drive through because of the national attention on profiling. We are always one step away from having some incident take place and having to do damage control. We have maintenance work to do. We fully acknowledge this and will move forward with the CRP. We are much better and need to continue to be even better.

Superintendent / Board of Ed / Staples – Tom Scarice:

[Tom Scarice was unable to make this meeting because of a school system commitment.]

Lee: We should defer to the faculty who are present to speak about the schools. We have 4 new board members, 3 of whom are on this call. There is no FOIA violation, since we not attending a meeting that we called. The faculty will work on the Equity Study report and an action plan (coming later) along with strategic planning. The strategic planning process is going on in the background.

Rebecca: The class that we are piloting with 17 students on African American/Black/Latinx/and Puerto Rican history is continuing and going well. It is a celebration of people who are often left out of our curriculum. It is a great class. Every day is a new adventure. We'll present our outcome to the State and will give feedback to help refine the class for the roll-out. Think tanks around the State are involved. We also want volunteers who might be interested in sharing their life experience with the class.

Judy has material that might interest the class and would like to send it to Rebecca.

Policing – Chief Foti Koskinas:

There's not a whole lot. We held a successful food drive and brought in more than expected. We'll keep on including collecting from the schools. This will continue through the holiday.

- We need help interviewing officer candidates in December. We are now down 2 more officers. Retention and recruitment are problems. People don't want to come down here with the traffic volumes and problems on I95. We'll work with the Representative Town Meeting (RTM) and the CRP to make sure we get the proper terms. We want to be held accountable and highlight what we're doing that is right. Thank you for the support and the food drive.

Maggie: Comment on the biggest difficulties in recruiting.

Chief Koskinas: One factor, as we recruit, is the adjustment made to the Police pension over the last four years. Other communities can provide better benefits, so officers will elect to go to those departments. This is one factor, but not necessarily the primary one.

Not a lot of people want to become a police officer with the target that has been painted against policing nationally. We don't have that situation here specifically. Qualified immunity, governing police actions, is not an immediate threat here. However, the perception of police protections not being there is keeping people away from the profession. It is discouraging that policing is not what it used to be. You don't get the generations of officers within families anymore. If you are looking for the best, you have to pay for the best. Everybody gets the same pension now. The Fire Department works 24-hour shifts which is different from commuting every day. We need to look at what's best. Otherwise, we will pay for it in different ways.

Harold: Maggie, Althea, and Judy have worked with Foti. When we've worked with interviewing, there is the complexity of dealing with all of the issues in Town. We try to make it clear that we are not your enemy and will support you, but you have to have certain values. That mind set takes time to change.

Affordable Housing – Danielle Dobin:

- Thank you to Foti. On Wednesday, December 1st, we're planning to hold an 830J meeting on where we are in Westport with respect to the data. We are open to hearing everyone's ideas about their own street or neighborhood. Often people don't want to have affordable housing on their street or in their neighborhood even though they are pro Affordable Housing.
- We hear constantly that it's hard to hire people to work in Town, but they often can't afford to live here. We have a lack of accessible housing. The pandemic makes it worse. We want to create opportunities for new people, but also for people who work here.
- Elaine went before the Board of Finance (BOF) to request American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for soft-cost money for the new development for families. We received push-back from the BOF due to a lack of context. We expect First Selectwoman Jen Tooker to be supportive. It's great to talk about our values. We need to live our values. There is an opportunity for us to request these funds to create housing for families in Westport with all affordable versus 30% affordability.
- In December, we'll start drafting an 830J affordability plan designed to develop the first new such housing in Westport in a generation. The State Department of Housing (DOH), the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) are not funding sources due to the scale of the project (<100 units). As a result, the town needs to fund the soft costs. 20 to 30 affordable units at the West Parrish site is a major step for Westport. The Westport Housing Authority will have construction loans but that will not fund all that we need.

Elaine: Thank you. Clarification: ARPA was set aside for a future date. I'll let you know when the discussion will take place and how we should proceed.

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

- We are just resuming the parent sessions and are reading The Sum of Us by Heather McGhee. We watched video clips of Ms. McGhee talking about the myth of the existence of a Zero-Sum Game and there is not an "us" and a "them". We all gain when any of us gains. We had a robust discussion about the book. It's great that we get together, as Westporters, trying to form a base of historical events. We don't know our history. Reach out to us to join in.

- The next parents' group meeting is not scheduled yet. We are working on developing our own skill set about how to help our children talk about similarities and differences and how we interact with one another. We are encouraging the development of relationships with one another. Our discussions are generative. If you are interested in making Westport welcoming and looking at how you move in the world and impact others, you should be there.

Harold: The personal work of looking inside of ourselves and looking at the way our attitudes affect our families could not be more important. We assume that everyone participating in this work is operating in good faith versus being someone who does not think we should be doing this work at all. The work Zoe and Catherine started has led to the DEI component in all the schools – great stuff.

Westport Museum of History and Culture – Ramin Ganeshram: No update.

Interfaith Clergy – Rev. Alison Patton:

- Be sure to watch Kristallnacht if you missed it on November 9th. The event is available on the Saugatuck Church website. We combined Zoom with live streaming and an in-person experience.
- Elaine: Kristallnacht brought together different communities and showed off what technology can do.
- The program and speaker for our Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration on January 16th, 2022, will be announced later.
 - The Interfaith Clergy is now exploring ways to support the Equity Study in Westport Schools and how that might translate into Strategic Planning.
 - We can't have our Thanksgiving feast this year, so we are donating gift cards. There are lots of activities going on behind the scenes to help support. The Senior Center and Homes with Hope have become partners in helping with food insecurity during Covid. We can't provide companionship during this time, but Human Services has agreed to help us in this way. If you want to contribute to Saugatuck Church's "Ways to Give" on the website, we'll purchase grocery cards to distribute.

Westport Playhouse – Jenny Nelson:

- Throughout the year, the Playhouse will be working on an equity study for our workplace. There will be more to come as we collect that data. It is exciting work.
- This is the last weekend of *Doubt* (the last matinee performance is Saturday). Please reach out and come in to see it. We have complementary tickets. We would love to fill the seats for the actors and the staff. We are enforcing safety procedures. A video with Mark Lamos and Harold just came out emphasizing that the Playhouse is a safe space and relaying what we do to make it as safe as possible.

Zoe: I encourage you and your families to go to see the production. It was thought provoking—and safe.

- Our Social Justice feeder camp for middle schoolers is coming back this summer. They will create a play as one of their activities. We are starting registration now. Scholarships are available as well.
- Our DEI updates as we move toward being an anti-racist theatre will be on our website showing our quarterly progress. It is easy to reach out to us about how to accomplish DEI.
- Our Winter Fun Fest will be held in December (tickets are \$5). Our Youth Council is organizing a food drive for *Homes with Hope* and we'll have food and activities.

Danielle Teplica: Jenny is good with how to implement DEI in organizations and has been helpful to other organizations.

Jenny: We know we are not alone. All the theaters in CT are culturally conscious. We are here because of you. We have one more talk back related to *Doubt* by a youth pastor, Thomas Burke who is an Associate Minister of children, youth, and families at Norfield Congregational Church.

Harold: The Playhouse has become a model for DEI – as to how to implement it, how to become accountable, and how to track progress. This is largely due to Jenny. Also, most productions now have components that touch on “othering” since the Playhouse is tasked to look at “othering” in the community. If you look at *Doubt*, it is centered in 1964 with attitudes about homosexuality, race, and religion. It was written in 2005. We’re now viewing it in 2021. It is a tremendously rewarding and fascinating vehicle.

Maggie: Marc Selverstone (a Staples graduate), an associate professor in presidential studies and chair of the Presidential Recordings Program at the University of Virginia’s Miller Center, just presented at a Library program on Monday. To get 1964 attitudes, listen to some of those tapes. It’s riveting listening to them. You think you knew about that time of history, but you’ll see what we were up against.

Westport Library – Alex Giannini: Thank you for bringing that up. The presentation is up on YouTube. An earlier talk was by Mondiant Dogon, the author of *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds: A Refugee’s Search for Home*. He was magnificent.

- Alex is continuing to work on the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration event. We are meeting and will send out links when it is announced publicly. There should be a role for student volunteers.

Jill Nadel: Please send the link so we can access the authors.

Danielle Teplica: Please add the link to Trevor Noah and Heather McGhee that Zoe and Catherine sent out.

- Stephen Graham Jones, a Blackfoot Native American author who appeared at Story Fest this year, is being given the Mark Twain American Voice in Literature award on December 2nd. We can send the link.
- Short Cuts is tonight at 7p with a diverse array of documentaries. *Change the Name* by Kai Thomas, *Coded: The Hidden Love of JC Leyendecker* by Ryan White, and *The Unlikely Fan* are some of the pieces. This is in person and live streamed and held in partnership with the Westport Arts Advisory Committee.
- On December 2nd, Marcus Samuelsson (Red Rooster Restaurant in NYC) is appearing with Jeff Pegues. This was a fee event, but it is now free. Lots of people have signed up, but we are seeing attrition.

Westport Pride – Brian McGunagle:

We are planning for 2022 and we held a forum for middle schoolers recently.

Closing:

Catherine L. moved that the meeting be adjourned. Maggie seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:21AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary