



TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes
Thursday, March 17, 2022
Via Zoom



Attendees: Harold Bailey, Jr. (Presiding), Jen Tooker (First Selectwoman), Bernicestine McLeod, Zoe Tarrant, Rev. Alison Patton (Saugatuck Congregational Church), Elaine Daignault (Westport Human Services), Catherine Onyemelukwe, Judy Hamer, Althea Seaborn, Lee Goldstein (Westport Board of Education), Catherine Lewis, Susan Ellis, Ramin Ganeshram (Westport Museum for History and Culture)

Guests: Brett Aronow, Danielle Dobin (Chairwoman, Westport Planning and Zoning Committee and the P&Z Affordable Housing Subcommittee), Jonathan Steinberg (Westport State Representative), Kevin Christie (Westport Board of Education), Pippa Bell Ader, Jenny Nelson (Westport Playhouse), Bethany Gugliemino (Westport Playhouse), Lynn Scully (Town of Westport), Deputy Chief Sam Arciola (Westport Police Department), Deputy Chief David Farrell (Westport Police Department), Harris Falk (RTM), Danielle Teplica (Volunteer Director, Friends of TEAM Westport), Liz Falk, Patra Kanchanagom (AAPI Westport – Asian American and Pacific Islanders), Tom Foran, Trammi Nguyen (Co-Chair, Staples PTA DEI), Nancy Lewis, Rebecca Marsick (Literacy Coach, Staples High School), Rebecca Martin, Kristi Law, Joan Gillman, Ngassam Ngnoumen (Co-Chair, PTA DEI), Dorie Hordon (Westport Board of Education), Tom Prince, John Schwing (Westport Journal), Brian McGunagle (Westport Pride), Jill Nadel (ADL), Tara Tesoriero, Lauren Francese (Curriculum Coordinator Social Studies 6-12, Westport Schools), Warren

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

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

More will be said about the status of TEAM Westport with respect to recent accusations of violations of the Town charter and state statutes once our First Selectwoman, Jen Tooker, joins us in the session this morning. The First Selectwoman's response is very much necessary and important and actually affects all of the committees in Town.

Tom Scarice will not be able to join us this morning due to a conflict.

Harold asked if there were any other changes to our January or February meeting minutes that were distributed before today's meeting.

Catherine Onyemelukwe moved to approve our January 13th, 2022, meeting minutes with amendments received before the meeting. Susan Ellis seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous. The minutes will be posted.

Catherine Lewis moved to approve our February 3rd, 2022, meeting minutes. Susan Ellis seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous. The minutes will be posted.

Comments: Our initiatives continue.

- Our Heather McGhee, author of The Sum of Us, event (rescheduled from January for our Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday celebration), will be on Wednesday, May 18th at 7pm at the Library. Reservations are possible in person and via webinar.
- Our Teen Diversity Essay Contest Awards ceremony will be held on April 4th at 6pm at the Library. The contest judges are in place. Come hear what our young folks say about why it is difficult to talk about race.
- No matter the structure, we'll continue our mission that we set out to do almost 20 years ago. We started with the towns of Westport and Weston working together. Ten years or so ago, the Weston First Selectman decided not to be involved anymore. Going forward, we will continue to be focused on Westport and proceed accordingly.

From the beginning, we were involved with the Westport schools in that we were asked by the Board of Education (BOE) to be the primary advisor for the school system with respect to diversity. We got involved immediately and have been involved in strategy with the BOE for every community issue. We used to give out scholarships for students who had done the most for diversity at Staples. Then we started the Essay Contest.



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We have been very involved with respect to the environment at the schools of “othering”. We looked at training about bullying and LGBTQIA+ concerns. We do not control the school system. We provide advice. We have worked with all the superintendents and the BOEs to get the environment to be such that all children learn to respect each other. That work will continue regardless. Jen is here on the call with us now to discuss the result and the impact of the legal challenge TEAM received.

First Selectwoman / Messaging Update – Jen Tooker:

Here’s where we are with our attorneys, now and going forward:

Since our last meeting, Ira Bloom (our Town Attorney) issued a legal opinion in response to Vin Marino [attorney in Orange, CT] on behalf of two Westport residents [Zach Alcyone and Camilo Riano] who alleged that TEAM Westport is a board or commission that is in violation of our Town charter and a state statute. Ira concluded that the allegations were NOT accurate, and that TEAM Westport is not in violation of our Town charter but may possibly be outside of the lines on a state statute with respect to party representation. As First Selectwoman, to avoid potential conflict with the state statute, I am changing all committees in Town and am requiring that each committee have no more than a simple majority of any one-party representation on them. Five committees are directly affected including TEAM Westport. All of the elected boards and commissions operate that way. This is beyond reproach and follows the practice with other boards and commissions. This allows us to move on. Also, although it is not a violation for members who do not live in town to be on TEAM especially since it started as a Westport/Weston group, I am asking that only registered electors of the Town remain on the committee. Thank you to members who have served many years and have now moved out of town.

This is how I’ve operationalized our town attorney’s opinion. This change affects committee membership on all sides of the aisle. Some have disproportionate membership of Democrats and some of Republicans.

Any idea on timing?

No timeframe was committed. The chairs of the impacted committees need to get together. A press release is ready to go. We’ll ask for volunteers to serve on the committees about a week from now. They’ll have to submit a resume that shows a skill set that complements the mission and the charter of the committee; they’ll interview with Andrea Moore (our Second Selectwoman); then we’ll confer with the Committee chairs. We expect to interview candidates in mid-April if we have a great response. We want the right fit from a skill set point of view.

Harold: Our mission statement is still about inclusion and about “not othering”.

Brett: Can someone be an Independent?

Jen: Yes. One party just can’t have more than a bare majority.

Danielle Dobin: I feel the genesis from the vocal minority is to disrupt this particular group (TEAM Westport). What is the transparency as you go through this process? Are the interviews open to the public? What happens if someone lies or has a different definition of the mission? I’d want those questions explored before the process starts.

Jen: You’d be amazed how many people want to serve on committees. I’m very much used to sorting out intentions. I understand; Harold and I have had that conversation. I am fully committed to the mission of this committee. It is in no one’s best interest to place people on who are not committed.

Harold: There are people who have contributed a lot who will have to leave, and I’m saddened that a chunk of our diversity will no longer be in full membership. We need to acknowledge that loss.

Jen: Any members have to be voting citizens in Westport. This is consistent with every other board.

Harold: Thank you to two folks – Catherine O., who has done tremendous work on grants and social justice...and Judge Judy who has carried the flag for justice since the 1980’s in this Town. They will be

members emeritae and we want them to please stay involved. Also, Dolores Paoli has represented the Muslim and the Latin-x community; Stephane Kirven stayed on from the Weston “days”; and Steve Daniels, who just moved to Stamford, was an original member of the committee. Thanks to everyone for their work. We’ll continue to see you involved in some way.

Alison: I am hearing words of appreciation all around for the good work that has taken place while also hearing that members have to be electors of the Town. Advisory teams have allowed for people who are not electors before, namely youth and elders. We don’t have a fiduciary responsibility. So, if we are changing, where are our opportunities to benefit from others? How do we build the engagement of our youth, for example? How do we do that going forward?

Jen: All of these meetings are public, and attendance is encouraged on Zoom and in-person.

Lee: To follow up on what Harold said as for interviewing for all the committees, my experience has been that the chairs are instrumental in finding members. What kind of assistance are you seeking from them?

Jen: We accept recommendations along with a resume, cover letter, and an interview. We’ll continue.

Judy: This process is the very process that has served to keep minorities off of committees throughout time. It is the underlying purpose for this suit – to knock minorities out of the picture. To say that you are going to use this process to shrink this committee’s diverse resources and then expand the resources by talking to friends who are not diverse, the allegations, though false, have achieved their intended consequences. You are doing what corporations and schools have done for years to keep us out. Realize this is the elephant in the room and we are replicating it.

Jen: I’m sorry you feel that way. We are opening it up broadly to alert the broadest pool of candidates to join five committees and boards and commissions. I’m sorry you feel that it looks exclusionary. I don’t know what else to do.

Harold: It puts an extra onus on all of us to counter that impression. It’s more difficult if you don’t have the people to talk to. We just have to dig deeper to help counter that fact. We are very committed to doing that.

Danielle D: I think the Board of Selectwomen will have the intention of running an inclusive process. However, the population of Westport is 1% African American. It is hard to ensure that there is representation. Could there be Asian members? That would be great. When you limit opportunities to Westport, you have no demographics with which to work. Also, everyone is busy and it’s hard to engage, in general. It is challenging to have a diverse board. It’s a major demographic issue. The BOE is diverse now.

Harold: At the beginning of TEAM Westport, we had Asian American representation. One of our members ran the Asian American Association for the country and another was President of the NY Bar Association.

Danielle T: Not to be controversial, we have committees in Town, one of which is the Health and Wellness Committee where we should have someone under 18 on the committee. So, if you are making this ruling uniform, we need to have exemptions for youth involvement.

Jen: The membership of the Youth Commission is only youth and opines on all Town-based issues. If anyone is interested in that group, there are some openings.

Thank you. We’ll keep everyone updated as we move forward.

Superintendent / Board of Ed / Staples – Tom Scarice:

Lee: I’ll hand it over to Lauren. We are continuing the pace. We extend our appreciation for TEAM for the guidance and advice that you have shared. Thank you for all the members who have shared our mission of equitability.

Lauren: Announcements from the high school:

- This is World Language Week now.

- I loved to hear how students can be involved with the Town and am happy to help. We have ways to accelerate more opportunities. I am also happy to have conversations to foster civic engagement. In these challenging times, we can move to involve more of our kids.
- We have been able to have more guest speakers in our classrooms:
 - We've had a historical musicologist talk about twentieth century jazz.
 - Tamara Lanier and Josh Koskoff visited from the suit against Harvard University about the pictures of Renty (an enslaved man) that are being misused and misappropriated. Look at the "Free Renty" website. It's great to give our students more experiences so they can do their work without barriers.
- We have 6 Voice for Change finalists at Staples. The students have presented proposals for state funding. The students campaign and the student body votes on the proposals. The proposal put forward by TEAM Staples is to establish a student government at Staples.
- On National History Day, I will be judging for Fairfield County. We have the most entries and are overwhelming the State House. The projects are incredible and show the agency the students have. The competition starts at the county level. Students enter in the Junior or Senior division. They present their projects which can be a performance, a museum exhibit, or a website, for example. The winners go to the State and those winners go on to National. Students can win in every category. Winners get a scholarship to the University of Maryland. The categories include: Military History, Black History, and LGBTQIA+ History. Our middle school and our 10th grade are participating. The students get feedback from real historians who judge the projects. We always need judges.
- Drew Coyne from Staples has been nominated for a state teacher of the year award. Middle school and 10th grade are participating.
- The Equity Study is still in progress. We are finishing the report and will give updates via BOE meetings.

Policing – Deputy Chief Sam Arciola:

- We are filling two vacancies. At the end of March, we'll swear in one officer and another in April.
- Yesterday we conducted 6 Interviews with the Civilian Review Panel (CRP). It was a great process, and we hope to get two candidates.
- On July 1st, we are switching over to new body cams in line with the new regulations in the Police Reform Bill. Now we don't have to take as long to download video. Also, the video starts automatically. We can go back 30 secs and we can edit to comply with FOIA regulations. We're going to be replacing cameras in the building including in the cells.
- We are coordinating a new regional dispatch center with Fairfield.

Harold: With respect to the CRP, at our prior meeting, we were waiting for the two new people to make 5 members. The CRP is involved with the hiring process of police officers. Last year we operated with three members. The group had to be recodified with Jen. Two additional members were named after an RTM process – Mike Guthman and Teri Gabi. We had 6 officer candidates – 2 African American and 1 female, if you look at the demographics. All are strong candidates. Two (2) would be laterals. Two (2) are new hires and would need a year or more of training before they would be active.

Deputy Chief Dave Farrell will train the new CRP members. TEAM Westport always has a special stipulation in the CRP codification that gives us a permanent seat.

Affordable Housing – Danielle Dobin:

We had a successful kickoff on the topic of affordable housing last night at Town Hall in a session designed to create a Town conversation about housing. The Clergy will be moderating our next session.

In the conversation last night, there were complaints about 830-G and the state laws. We need to determine how we integrate housing in our communities to do what we want to do. What is our community value statement and what are we trying to accomplish? Join us at Temple Israel next week to discuss these topics. Sessions will be based on Jen's schedule. There are also Zoom sessions available. Other methods include a survey that will be mailed to residents. Also, there will be a special meeting of the Subcommittee for advocacy groups as well as the builders' lobby to get data.

Harold: Get us information about next week at Temple Israel and any other dates since there appear to be no details yet. Will it be streamed? Maybe.

Danielle D.: We can take away valuable information from the in-person events. The session is about creating affordability. This is not the only opportunity for ideas to be heard, though. We would like for other members of the community to help facilitate future sessions. Perhaps, Harold and other TEAM members will help out.

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

Catherine L.: On March 22nd from 7-8:30p, we are meeting at Saugatuck Congregational Church in the Youth Room. It's easier to be in a space versus Zoom. We continue to have conversations. We are planning to listen to a TED talk on bias by Jennifer Eberhardt (Stanford University). Our book group on April 26th will discuss Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning by Cathy Park Hong. We hope to have this session in person but will keep everyone updated. The purpose is to build community. We have a large room for distancing which we prefer. It is cumbersome to livestream.

Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Westport – Patra Kanchanagom:

Exciting. AAPI Heritage month is celebrated in May, and we are planning certain events including an official proclamation for the month. We are looking at May 2nd and Saturday May 14th for Middle and High school students at 4PM. We've invited someone to talk about the Immigrant History Initiative, and we'll serve dinner. We are hosting a happy hour at MOCA Westport. We'll compile a calendar of events before May. Please recognize that yesterday was the one-year anniversary of the Atlanta shooting and acknowledge the violence that is taking place in NYC again Asian Americans. These might be some things that members of the Asian community are thinking about.

Westport Playhouse – Jenny Nelson:

There is so much happening, but we are back and making live theater.

- Our opening performance starts April 9th – *Next to Normal*. The play focuses on stigma and lack of access to mental health for people of color. We can offer discounts on a sliding scale for the performance.
- Over 200 applicants competed for 7 spots in our Joanne Woodward internship. We removed the barrier that applicants have a college degree and are looking at comparable life experience. 1/4th are local.
- We are about to search for a full-time EDI Director at the Playhouse. We have received funding.
- Our social justice Westport Country Playhouse camp is for anyone who wants to write a social justice piece. Full scholarships are available.
- We are in the process of hiring Jenny's assistant which should be in mid-April.

Zoe: Can you share the process to be involved with the Playhouse's Youth Council?

Jenny: It goes in a yearly cycle every 2 years. Most of the current members are staying on. We only lost two who graduated. It primarily gives a youth voice as to what the Playhouse should be doing, the members act as ambassadors, attend, support and are a voice. Please e-mail directly if there's interest. It's only high school.

Interfaith Clergy – Rev. Alison Patton:

We've been involved in programs that have already been highlighted – the Affordable Housing session and the Heather McGhee event on the 18th of May. We'll try to have the same program structure with The Bridgeport

Boys Choir. It'll be on a Wednesday versus a Sunday. We just want to let people know. What Ms. McGhee is talking about is what we're going through in Town where the attitude is "those people" versus everyone else.

- Ramin Ganeshram (Westport Museum) was our guest at our Sunday service at Saugatuck Church on March 6th and Tom Scarice (Westport School Superintendent) on February 6th. Both videos are on our website. Please listen to our conversations with them. Peter Boyd, Sustainable Westport, will visit on April 3rd.

Westport Pride – Brian McGunagle:

It's been a while. We have been doing community outreach programming and developing a slate of activities for Pride Month – June.

- In the community, we have a peer-to-peer support group called Lighthouse via Kids in Crisis that meets at Toquet Hall on Mondays. Teens talk about what's on their minds. Groups already exist in Greenwich and Stamford. We had four kids at the first meeting.

The Westport Pride Coalition is the group at the schools that started in the Middle Schools. Kayla lanetta is the education chair for Westport Pride.

- We have a full slate for Pride Month. There will be a queer cookoff at Aitoro's in Norwalk in May where appetizers and desserts will be judged. We hope to get teams for the event.

On June 1st, there'll be a queer movie at the Remarkable Theater. Then a family-oriented Drag Show at MOCA will take place. These are drag performances that can be viewed by families and questions can be asked.

June 3rd is Pride Day at the schools. June 12th is the Pride Parade with speakers and performers.

Merchants of Pride throughout the summer will give discounts downtown. There'll be a concert at Sport Hill Farm in September; then a dinner in November. All programs will raise funds and provide visibility.

Harold: That is an incredible slate. The group is on fire and blazing. Can you update us every month so we can publicize what's going on? If Brian can't attend the TEAM meeting, someone will cover this topic.

Essay Contest: We look forward to hearing the essays. There is a BOE meeting that night, so we want to be cognizant of the time the ceremony takes. Maybe we do a session at the Arts Center (MOCA) again and have the students facilitate discussion groups about their essays as we did a few years ago. We could use a follow-on session after the awards ceremony, so we'll pursue that suggestion.

Alison: To expand the conversation, perhaps we should consider including anyone who submitted essays in this follow-on conversation.

Westport Library – Alex Giannini (as reported by Harold):

Check out the lineup for the Verso Fest to be held on April 8th and Saturday the 9th. Michael Jai White is delivering the keynote and is, incidentally, opening a studio in Shelton and is looking for partners.

Westport Museum of History and Culture – Ramin Ganeshram:

Actually, we are in the process of formulating a lecture series on issues – education, equity, and fair housing, for example. We will provide this series to other organizations. Our approach is to think about these issues based upon primary source material.

Our walking tours are coming back. The Women's history tour is of note this month as well as the African American tour and our cemetery tours. Our tours are holistic in the way we examine history and uncover our hidden history. We update our tours as we find additional material, so you can come again if you've already toured with us.

We are having our Roaring 20s gala at Longshore on April 22nd, 7:30. Please come out to support the Museum.

Other Business:



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Catherine O. mentioned the “Celebrate Westport” meeting on March 20th which she had been attending for TEAM Westport regularly. It was determined that she will continue to represent TEAM Westport in her capacity as member emerita.

Catherine L. moved to adjourn the meeting. Susan seconded the motion. The motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 9:47am.

Respectfully submitted.

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary