

# Longmeadow Coalition for Racial Justice

## Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 7, 2021

*Arrangements for remote participation by Coalition for Racial Justice members and members of the public are being made in accordance with Governor Baker's Emergency Order Modifying the State's Open Meeting Law.*

*Participation in this meeting was done remotely via Zoom.*

**Task force members present:** Bisrat Abebe, Kathleen Allen, Mara DeMaio, Neena Grover, Ryan McCollum, Michelle Tom, Zach Verriden

**Others present:** Tom Shea, Amy Stec, Martin Hernandez

### I. Call to Order

Chair Zach Verriden started recording the Zoom and called the meeting to order at 7:04pm.

### II. Roll Call

All task force members present except Charlotte LaForest and Lauren Rollins.

### III. Public Comments

The insurrection at the U.S. Capitol took place the day before the meeting, so Zach wanted to provide space to members of the public and the task force for processing those events.

People were shocked, saddened, angry. Many pointed out the clear disparities between law enforcement reactions to this insurrection, where the crowds were overwhelmingly white, and to the Black Lives Matter protests over last summer, where crowds were more diverse. Kathleen Allen said it was a striking example of racial bias, and others commented that events like this show how needed groups like our Coalition for Racial Justice are.

**Martin Hernandez** appreciated the Longmeadow school district providing resources about how to talk to your kids about stuff like this. But he added that a 22-year-old Longmeadow High School alum was arrested in DC because he perpetrated a bomb hoax. This guy has also been a guest on Infowars. "This is a homegrown child who learned his hate from the media or from his home."

**Amy Stec** has worked in Longmeadow for years and recently became a resident. She came to this meeting because she feels that we're doing relational work, which she needs to do in her own life. Writing emails to friends and family is not enough. She wants help to channel her anger and frustration. But she also has hope.

#### **IV. Approval of Minutes from November 19 Meeting**

*Zach moved to approve minutes from our 11/19/2020 meeting. Hearing no proposed edits, he did a roll call vote, which resulted in all yeas. The minutes were approved as presented.*

#### **V. Discussion of Key Takeaways and Summary Themes from Public Listening Session**

Zach mentioned that we had over 30 participants, including many who joined just to listen.

Kathleen had three main takeaways: #1 was the impact of data. #2 was that many of the shared experiences were school-related, which shows importance of having an effective relationship with the school committee. #3 was the importance of providing training. Everyone agreed with all three.

On the topic of schools, Ryan McCollum pointed out that schools are the most common place where people meet, so we need to be deliberate in making a connection with the schools themselves too. Mara deMaio added that we need to make sure that we make recommendations that align with what the schools are doing in order for them to work. She also noted that people are at all different places in their journey on the continuum of being anti-racist, and that we need to take that into consideration when we think about education and training.

Ryan said one hurdle will be that a lot of people who need the training aren't going to do it. We need to incentivize more Longmeadow citizens to participate. Data will be important in making a case for our recommendations.

Bisrat Abebe said we should be using the resources we have in town, like some of the impressive young people who spoke at the listening session. Mara thought we should look to what kinds of education other towns are offering as well, and make sure we have open dialogues with them.

(Zach started recording the Zoom at this point)

Bisrat recalled a few people talked about things that happened in Longmeadow's history, and that previous policies supported inequality, discrimination, and racism. He asked what can we learn from that past, and what do we want to have now instead? Michelle Tom agreed that it's important to include the history of where policies came from, if we can find those things out.

Zach revealed that others have already shared additional information since the listening session. Michelle made a graphic for our upcoming meetings that includes his email address to keep these lines of communication open.

#### **VI. Revisit Scope of Work for Select Board and Deliverables**

Zach has researched other task forces similar to ours and saw that the more ambitious and polished reports were funded through an outside force, where the towns developed a budget or created a local fund. They also hired outside companies to do the heavy research lift. This made him wonder how much research we could do for this report vs what the town could financially support.

He then asked what we want our report format to be. A one-page list of recommendations, a bigger research paper, or something in the middle?

*Approved January 21, 2021*

We decided that it's essential to address the specific issues the Select Board set out for us, and that a one-page list without data or narratives won't be as impactful. We have six charges and six more meetings of this group, so maybe we tackle one charge per meeting and do homework in between. We could bring our research together in a shared Google Doc before each meeting.

Neena Grover asked whether we should give suggestions about how to implement our recommendations. Zach thought our charge was just giving the recommendations, which could include how to implement, but ultimately it's up to Select Board to decide what to do.

In terms of logistics, Ryan thought we should prioritize gathering data right away, especially if we need to ask for resources from the town. And Mara reminded us that if we include narratives, we need to make sure we get permission to share them in the report.

#### **VII. Input for Longmeadow Democratic Town Committee (LDTC) Presentation on Jan. 14**

The LDTC asked Zach to present what we've been doing, and asked us if there is anything in particular he should share. The group suggested sharing a story from the listening session, and to raise the issue of resources whenever possible.

#### **VIII. Adjourn**

*Michelle motioned to adjourn the meeting. Ryan seconded. Roll call vote brought all yeas. The meeting adjourned at 8:05pm.*

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Tom, clerk

*Approved as presented, January 21, 2021*