

Longmeadow Coalition for Racial Justice

Meeting Minutes Thursday, January 21, 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 De Maio, Neena Grover, Charlotte LaForest, Lauren Rollins, Michelle Tom, Zach Verriden

Others present: Saul Finestone

I. Call to order

Chair Zach Verriden started recording the Zoom. The meeting started at 7:03pm.

II. Roll call

All task force members present except Ryan McCollum.

III. Public comment

Zach began by mentioning the incredibly historic week we've just witnessed, with the inauguration of Kamala Harris as the country's first female/black/South Asian vice president. With such a profound achievement, he felt it was important to call attention to it given the work this task force is doing.

There were no other public comments.

IV. Approval of minutes from last two meetings (12/10/2020 and 1/7/2021)

Hearing no comments or updates, *Zach moved to approve both sets of minutes. A roll call vote garnered all yeas. The minutes were approved as presented.*

V. Format of Select Board Proposal discussion

Sharing her screen, Mara De Maio showed us a five-page white paper that she and her staff recently authored, the content of which was similar to the topics our task force has been talking about. But for this meeting she just wanted to show us the format they presented their information in, as an example of a route we might take with our report presentation.

Her report had patient stories, data, and text, and was visually eye-catching. We know some people skim reports like this, so the aim with the formatting is to make sure their eyes fall on the most important and persuasive information.

Our group very much liked and appreciated this presentation style. The report began and ended with patient narratives in colored boxes, making them stand out. Each section was neatly arranged in "Here's

the problem” and “Here’s the answer” segments, which we all thought was very effective and easy to follow. Data was displayed in tables and graphs, which grab attention better than lists. And the length of the report was reasonable, though some thought it could even be shorter, to make it more likely that people will read all of it. Overall, we could work towards producing a similarly formatted document.

Lauren Rollins thought that for our report, we should also have a separate section of action items that would make the recommendations easy to find, as well as easy to see what hasn’t been done yet.

VI. Review and discuss research on organizations that are confronting racism

In between the previous meeting and this one, members of the Coalition populated a shared Google spreadsheet listing “alliances with organizations that are confronting racism and how those alliances can benefit the community,” per our task force’s founding document. Throughout this agenda item, members who submitted organizations had a chance to describe those organizations, what they do, and why we might recommend them to the Select Board as a potential alliance to pursue.

Organizations suggested by task force members:

- [Integrated Comprehensive Systems \(ICS\)](#) – Educational equity training organization with nationally recognized equity leadership that has recently expanded into municipal and non-profit equity trainings. Could be ideal for town government. One of the people who founded this organization was a professor of Zach’s.
- [Undoing Racism Collective of Western MA](#) – Offer workshops and trainings locally.
- [Western Massachusetts Health Equity Network](#) – From UMass Amherst, has a goal of making racial justice a named priority in the Network’s activities. They offer a series of virtual conversations/webinars relating to racism as a public health crisis.
- [Healing Racism Institute of Pioneer Valley](#) – A community-based effort that has convened business, non-profit, and philanthropic leadership in engaging the community in a process to recognize the impact of racism in our region and empower individuals to take action to eradicate it. They feature an audit of policies and procedures for the purposes of identifying blind spots. Hamden District Attorney partnered with this group in 2019.
- [Multicultural BRIDGE](#) – A minority- and women-run non-profit in the Berkshires that provides training, advocacy, language access, and community building services. They hold community forums, dialogues, and classes to dismantle systemic racism. They engage youth outside of schools, which would be good for us because we’re not directly working with Longmeadow Schools.
- [Pioneer Valley Project](#) – A coalition of churches, synagogues, labor unions, and other organizations that have a strong interest in community life, in particular in building relationships and finding solutions to social problems in the Pioneer Valley. Charlotte LaForest mentioned that she had spoken with them recently, and they’ve done lots of work already with Longmeadow faith communities.
- [Thought Partner Solutions](#) - Minority-owned and led management consulting firm that provides advisory services to public and private organizations with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training and coaching. Clients have included municipalities. Michelle Tom’s work organization (Windsor Historical Society in Windsor, CT) participated in their non-profit Board Diversity Initiative and highly recommends them.

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- [Sojourner Truth School](#) – Teaches movement-building skills for social change leaders through free community classes like “Cultivating Cross-Cultural Understanding in Personal and Organizational Settings” and “Cross-Generational Dialogue: Talking and Listening So That Others Will Talk and Listen.” Could be a post-COVID possibility for in-person classes.

Zach had previously reached out to Annamarie Golden, a participant at LCRJ’s 12/10/2020 listening session, who submitted these organizations for our consideration:

- [Nellie Mae Education Foundation](#) (grant prospect) – East Longmeadow Public Schools applied and received a grant from this funder for a speaker series on equity and Black experience
- [National Conference on Community and Justice \(NCCJ\)](#) – “This is the Anti-Racism Workshop I personally participated in last fall - highly recommend. This is the sort of training that I would recommend gatekeepers and decision makers in the Town participate in from Town Manager, Select Board, School Committee, Library, and more.”
- [Inclusive Strategies, LLC](#) – In Springfield. Waleska Lugo-DeJesus CEO
- [Growing A New Heart: Dialogues Across Differences](#) – Collective of professionals in the fields of social justice advocacy, communications, community building, etc. Offer retreats for skills on difficult conversations across social locations.

Kathleen Allen’s suggestion was not a specific organization but rather a series of ways one could educate themselves to be an active ally, so they can understand how racism affects people and how to be anti-racist. She thought we could provide a list of resources (books, articles, videos, etc.) that could meet people wherever they were on their journey to becoming anti-racist. She listed several resources that had helped her in this way.

Kathleen also wondered if Bay Path University offered anything that would resonate with the Select Board, and she and a few others said they would look into it.

Zach said we could keep dropping other organizations into the spreadsheet after this meeting. He then asked us how many orgs we wanted to include on the list, say the best 3, or a huge list and empower the Select Board to decide for themselves.

Our group generally thought we should curate the list somewhat, perhaps put them into categories (local, consulting companies, etc.), but not give them something overwhelmingly long. When we’ve organized the list, we can home in on the ones we want to include.

Before our next meeting, we’ll be doing homework on “identifying methods or areas to promote racially equitable hiring and promotion of all employees, including Town employees.” We’ll discuss what people have come up with at the meeting.

Neena Grover wondered if things like suggesting including more diversity in town events and spaces (like multicultural food at Long Meddow Days and diverse programming at the senior center) would fit into this category. Zach thought it might fit under our March 5 meeting on reshaping discourse and actively engaging all citizens.

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VII. Adjourn

Lauren motioned to adjourn. Michelle Tom seconded. The roll call vote was all yeas. The meeting adjourned at 8:03pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Tom, clerk

Approved as presented, February 4, 2021