

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Asst Town Administrator Becca Meekins
Tim Kaelin
Shika Holland
Virginia Simms George
Mary Leach
Mariam Ibrahim
Diedra Wrighting



MEMBERS ABSENT:

Lauren Bailey Jones

OPEN AND WELCOME FROM CHAIRMAN Tim Kaelin:

Mr. Kaelin welcomed the committee for a meeting of the Northborough Diversity & Inclusion Committee Public Listening Session on September 30, 2021, at approximately 7:00 pm.

Mr. Kaelin conducted a roll call of present members.

Ms. Meekins: Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021; a Bill Relative to Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency; signed into law June 16, 2021; this meeting will be conducted via remote participation. No in-person attendance by members of the public will be permitted. This meeting will be streamed live and will have an option for public participation. To participate, please follow the webinar link information provided on the agenda, posted on the town's website.

Approval of September 2, 2021, Meeting Minutes:

Motion to approve: Shika Holland

Seconded: Mary Leach

Roll call vote: Shika Holland; aye; Mariam Ibrahim; abstain; Becca Meekins; aye; Virginia Simms George: aye; Tim Kaelin; aye; Mary Leach; aye. Minutes approved.

Public Listening Session

Tim first thanked Shika Holland for her work on marketing and spreading awareness about the session using Facebook. Tim reiterated the four questions that the Committee had drafted to guide the conversation. The first question was "how can the town do more to address issues of diversity, equity and inclusion?". The second was "what action do you want to see from the diversity and inclusion in the future?". The third was "does our community demonstrate a commitment to meeting the needs of residents with disabilities?". The final question was "what has your experience been with respect to diversity, equity and inclusion in the Northborough community?"

Tim explained that the Committee's charge is to draft recommendations to the Board of Selectmen. Those recommendations will be things for the Board of Selectmen to consider and implement with the goal of continuing to make Northborough a more diverse, inclusive, and welcoming community. The feedback collected tonight will be used in developing those recommendations for the Board of Selectmen.

Tim asked that participants raise their hand through the zoom application, and a member of the committee will invite you into the panel. Once in the panel, please state your name and address. Each participant will have three minutes to provide comments, ideas, questions, etc. Tim shared the guidelines for participating in the listening session. There should be a mutual respect between community members and members of the committee. The committee will not allow any discrimination or discriminatory remarks. No defamatory or personal attacks will be tolerated. Threats will not be tolerated. Harassment will not be tolerated. The committee also asks that participants not discuss politics or political affiliations, both from a local and national perspective.

The first participant was Bertha Tang from 22 Pleasant Street. They asked about the disability aspect of the committee's efforts. Bertha mentioned that there are asphalt sidewalks in their neighborhood that are old and buckling. The sidewalks are narrow, not flat, and the edges are crumbling. They asked whether it was within the committee's power to recommend a repair schedule for sidewalks which are necessary for those that require mobility assistance. Bertha also asked a question about Northborough's public transportation. They asked about whether there was a plan to expand the current WRTA service to more generic public transportation and busing infrastructure?

Tim Kaelin thanked Bertha for their comments. He stated that the infrastructure concerns were certainly on the committee's radar but also recommended that residents reach out to the Master Plan Implementation Committee which is also working on a town wide infrastructure plan. Becca Meekins mentioned that the DPW has taken step to develop a sidewalk inventory and improvement plan. That plan is in the beginning phases now. The goal is to develop a long-term plan, considering several data points, for replacing and building new sidewalk infrastructure throughout town.

The next participant was Kriti Singh at 44 Davis Street. Kriti asked about whether the committee had investigated expanding options for cultural activities and events for those with an Indian background. Kriti mentioned holidays including Diwali which is celebrated by people of many different religions. Its more cultural than religious. Kriti shared a personal story about her child that she experienced in the Northborough Schools. She explained that when children are exposed to different cultures at a young age, they are more adaptable to change and differences.

Tim Kaelin mentioned to Kriti that the committee has been discussing expanding celebrations in town for more diverse cultures. The committee has been working with the Community Affairs Committee on developing a diverse calendar of events for upcoming seasons. Kriti thanked the committee and reiterated how important it was to expose children to all different cultures and celebrations. Mariam Ibrahim thanked Kriti for her sharing her personal experiences and that she felt very moved as a member of the South Asian diaspora. Becca Meekins also thanked Kriti for her thoughts and let her know that the Recreation Director is currently working on creating space in town for a cricket pitch and the committee will continue to support that endeavor.

Leslie Rutan of 22 Hemlock Drive was the next participant in the listening session. Leslie is a member of the Board of Selectmen and thanked the committee for creating this opportunity for folks to participate and interact directly with the committee. She hopes that the committee will create more opportunities for direct discourse in the future. Leslie mentioned that she has been working with Tim Kaelin and would like to expand the holiday festivities to be more inclusive of other cultures. She asked the committee how

we could get information on the different cultures that are represented in town and offered recommendations to get more information from residents using social media, or more traditional media and forms of outreach. Tim Kaelin mentioned that the committee has been having that discussion on an ongoing basis when discussing ways to get the word out. Leslie Rutan thanked the committee again for their work.

Yoon Mee Zhang of 30 Bartlett Street was next to speak. Yoon Mee and their family are new to town. They shared negative experiences that their son had at a previous school. The school provides a handbook to all parents at the beginning of each school year that explains how incidents of bullying and harassment will be handled during the year, but it is frightening for parents of minority children to bring up these types of issues with other parents for fear of being ostracized. Tim Kaelin thanked Yoon Mee for telling their story. Tim explained that the committee spoke to Gregory Martineau and Rhoda Webb who is with the Coalition for Equity group at the schools. Tim encouraged Yoon Mee to watch the joint meeting with the Superintendent where there was a lot of information about what the school is doing regarding equity in the schools.

Valeria Schmidt of 20 Dennis Circle was the next participant. Valeria asked about Columbus Day and whether the committee had considered recommendations to change Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. Valeria asked about the name of the committee and whether the committee has thought about changing the name to include equity or something else. Tim responded that yes, the recommendations will include a name change. Valeria stressed the importance of publicly sharing the stories that the committee has heard in this listening session. There is an overwhelming narrative that Northborough is an inclusive community, but the experiences from people of color that we've heard from tonight show that perhaps that is not entirely true. Valeria suggested some sort of anonymous forum where stories and information can be shared. Tim Kaelin mentioned that the committee would be willing to investigate the possibility of an anonymous forum or something similar.

Virginia Simms George mentioned that many years ago, the Community Affairs Committee suggested a festival of nations. Tim mentioned that it will be challenging to have different events for each unique group, but how can we put together an event that encompasses all cultures. Virginia mentioned that many years ago the community Affairs Committee had a similar event held in the Town Hall gym. Shika Holland brought up a recommendation made on the Facebook page, but to celebrate diversity in April for Diversity Month. Virginia Simms George mentioned that the Community Affairs Committee also does the Town Cleanup in April. We will need to speak with them about scheduling something for the future.

Yoon Mee Zhang of 30 Bartlett Street reentered the group. She mentioned that it may not be a good idea to put all the underrepresented holidays together into one event. She recommended that the town could reach out to community members within those groups to organize those events with the backing and support of the town. Tim Kaelin agreed with Yoon Mee's thoughts and had discussed with the Community Affairs Committee perhaps reaching out to diverse community members for assistance with planning those diverse events so that they are authentic. Virginia Simms George mentioned that these things take time and that for the committee to do them correctly, they may not be able to be implemented right away.

Other Business Before the Committee:

Becca Meekins informed the committee that the Fire Department has worked with the Town Administrator’s Office and the union to develop a policy that would remove some of the existing financial barriers for prospective firefighter/paramedics. Becca informed the committee that the town will now provide funding for half of the cost to attend paramedic school for prospective firefighter/paramedic candidates. This new policy has already proved to be helpful as we have recently collected applications for two vacancies and have received double the number of applications compared to the prior recruitment. Virginia Simms George asked about the diversity of the candidates. Becca responded that we moved two female applicants to the first round of interviews.

Diedra Wrighting joined the meeting at 8:07 p.m.

Tim Kaelin thanked everyone who participated and worked at the table at Applefest. Shika Holland mentioned to the team about the “Meet the Team Mondays” campaign on Facebook and asked the group to provide her with the photo and information for the postings. The group was all on board and will get Shika the information she needs.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion to adjourn made by Virginia Simms George

Motion seconded by Mariam Ibrahimi

Roll call as follows:

Ms. Meekins: Aye	Ms. Simms George: Aye
Ms. Leach: Aye	Ms. Ibrahimi: Aye
Ms. Wrighting: Aye	
Ms. Holland: Aye	
Mr. Kaelin: Aye	

Meeting is adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

by Becca Meekins
Northborough Diversity & Inclusion Committee