

**RECEIVED**

By Karen Wilber at 9:41 am, Apr 12, 2021

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Selectman Tim Kaelin  
Asst Town Administrator Becca Meekins  
Mary Leach  
Hamilton Soriano  
Diedra Wrighting  
Mariam Ibrahim  
Shika Holland

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Lauren Bailey-Jones  
Virginia Simms George

**OPEN AND WELCOME FROM MEETING HOST, Assistant Town Administrator Becca Meekins:**

**Selectman Kaelin** welcomed the committee to their March 4th meeting just past 7 PM. Becca Meekins followed with provisions of the open meeting law.

**Ms. Meekins:** Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020, orders suspending certain provisions of the open meeting law General Laws Chapter 38 Section 18 in the Governor's March 15, 2020 order, imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place 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 but will not have an option for public participation. To view or listen only, please visit the Town of Northborough's web page which will bring you to the Town of Northborough's You Tube link.

**OPEN DISCUSSION:**

**Selectman Kaelin** initiated roll call for attendees present.

Ms. Ibrahim: Present	Ms. Holland: Present
Mr. Soriano: Present	Ms. Leach: Present
Ms. Meekins: Present	Selectman Kaelin: Present

**Selectman Kaelin:** First order of business is to approve Meeting Minutes.

Motion to approve by Becca to approve February 4 minutes as presented. Shika seconds. Roll call vote:

Ms. Ibrahimi: Aye

Mr. Soriano: *Not present at 2/4 mtg*

Ms. Meekins: Aye

Ms. Holland: Aye

Ms. Leach: Aye

Selectman Kaelin: Aye

**Selectman Kaelin:** Introduces guest speaker from the Y Joseph Heiland. How can we work together with the Y.

**Mr. Heiland:** Provided overview of the local Boros branch. They are a non-profit with fitness offerings as well as child watch, child care, and seniors programs such as the Silver Sneakers program. Joe they can help us distribute resources to the community. Through their social media marketing, they can be helpful in disseminating the survey and implementing changes that come up as a result of the survey. Offers space for public trainings, panels, events, etc. They have tables and chairs available as needed. Would like to offer more action-based activities related to D&I and coordinate events and speakers on some of the diversity needs in the community.

**Ms. Leach** agrees the facility at the Y could be very useful for training.

**Ms. Holland** asked what social media platforms they have a presence on. And could we tap into their database for emails?

**Mr. Heiland:** Doing their best to stay up to date with social. They use Facebook and Instagram the most. They also utilize You Tube to promote classes. Joe does not know if the membership database would be available. But they are happy to include something such as the survey within their communication, newsletters, etc.

**Ms. Meekins:** Asked Joe what the Y is doing around diversity and inclusion?

**Mr. Heiland:** More education based. Y-USA comes up with much of the material that is distributed by the different associations. There are national events that take place such as Healthy Kids Day. Y-USA would say how they'd like it to be run then push down to the individual associations. They are always running food drives for those in the community who are in need. He does not feel they are doing enough around diversity and inclusion.

**Ms. Meekins:** Sees potential partnership with the Y such as their pool and our Senior Center. How could we get the Seniors to the Y to make use of the pool, for example?

**Mr. Heiland:** They want people to feel comfortable there and do not want people to feel excluded based on race, etc. Would like help making sure people know about the resources at the Y. There are lots of things going on but it's not enough to spread the word themselves.

**Ms. Leach:** Mentioned the kids in the community. They are our future. Asked if Joe sees anything coming up over the summer such as with camps where they could tie in diversity and inclusion. Asked Joe if he sees any kind of activities that would embrace that?

**Mr. Heiland:** They want to do more with that. If a partnership became available, yes that would be wonderful and they would be totally on board to promote something like this.

**Ms. Leach:** Mary emphasized the need for education from our children up to our seniors. Perhaps the Y could bring in guests over the summer (to the summer camps) to share stories/experiences related to diversity, inclusion, and equity with the children.

**Selectman Kaelin:** The human element is missing. Building relationships that are a little different is an enormous part of this. Empathy is a huge part of this. Having shared experiences with people, such as sitting down and having lunch with someone, goes a long way. Is there a way to use the Y (local, regional, and national) programs to be a conduit for people to get that human connection. Perhaps *Urban Y meets Suburban Y. Rural Y meets Suburban Y*. This could open dialogue. Diversity is not just skin color. One grew up in the city, one in the mountains ... a different view on things. Using the Y to get the reach and human element so people can “shake hands”.

**Mr. Soriano:** How do we integrate and give a voice to the people who are unheard? How do we share our experiences that we’ve been a part of?

**Ms. Meekins:** Does the Boros Y have a relationship with other Y’s in the region such as Worcester?

**Mr. Heiland:** There are six branches inside of Central MA – a couple in Worcester, Greendale, Leominster, Montachusett. We have centralized leadership. We are not immediately connected with Y of Greater Boston, but we have immediate connections in the area. A great thing about the Y is you get a lot of people letting guards down and forming relationships even as simple as being in a class and people will wonder if you’re not at class next Tuesday, is everything ok. Or swimming every week and the person who swims in the next lane isn’t there one week. People are forming friendly and unique relationships. We can spread that sense of community to others who are not part of the Y. The goal is not to bring more members to the branch but to have a positive impact on the community.

**Ms. Holland:** How can we help to push out the survey?

**Mr. Heiland:** We can send it out for you. Send us an introduction you’d like us to include.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Will coordinate next steps with Becca to get Joe the link. Thanks Joe for joining the meeting and acknowledges some great potential to work on shared goals together.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Next on the agenda is to discuss survey. We had 421 engagements with the survey with 79% completion rate – 325 completed surveys. Exceeded his expectations for first week and a half. Will keep open until March 11<sup>th</sup>. If the Y is going to share, we can just keep open longer as responses keep coming in. The more responses we get, the lower the margin of error. At 325, we are at about a 6-7% margin of error which is pretty big. But for our purposes, it’s pretty good. If we can get over 500, that will shrink the margin of error quite a bit. Not only do we want more engagement with the survey to get thoughts, but the number of responses helps with strengthening the data that comes out of the survey.

**Ms. Leach:** Asked if Tim reviewed any of the survey responses.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Tim has been reading through the comments and one thing he didn’t think of is people would be able to make comments about anything they wanted to. Some of the comments are not relevant. He’s taken some of them out because there’s no need to have the responses in our data set. A lot have answered demographic information which will be very helpful. We could add the response of “I Don’t Know” to a future survey.

**Ms. Meekins:** Do we want to extend the deadline if we are going to reach out to the Y? We don't want to shortchange the population that they serve.

**Selectman Kaelin:** There's no hard stop. We can extend for another week.

**Ms. Leach:** Would it make sense to send the town email out again?

**Ms. Meekins:** Was planning to share again on the Facebook page.

**Ms. Holland:** It's usually one week after a survey goes out that we would see a bump with results. Perhaps we could coordinate with the distribution of the Y's newsletter.

**Selectman Kaelin:** We have flexibility. If we missed the Y's March newsletter and we need to keep survey open until April 15<sup>th</sup>, we can do that.

**Ms. Leach:** Do you want committee members to complete the survey? And also, does it recognize if someone tries to complete the survey twice?

**Selectman Kaelin:** It records the IP address so it cannot be completed from the same IP address.

**Ms. Soriano:** Hamilton did complete the survey. He felt the survey was good and felt comfortable answering all of the questions.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Thanks everyone on the committee for their help with the survey. Next, we need to finalize medium and long-term objectives and assign members to do some research into each objective and provide progress reports at upcoming meetings. When we present to the Board of Selectmen, the objective you've been working on should be ready to present and be implemented. Education and Training is an important part of this. External and internal (town staff).

**Ms. Leach:** Mary asked about the committee on diversity within the Northborough Southborough school district and what their agenda is as she's not seen anything about it yet. Would like to learn more about what their objectives are and if we can help reach the K-12 community.

**Ms. Holland:** They do have the committee. Who could we invite to a meeting?

**Ms. Ibrahim:** Mariam agrees she'd like to learn more about what's been going on with the committee. Agrees would be a great guest at a next meeting.

**Ms. Leach:** Perhaps Lauren and Diedra could help us with this.

**Ms. Meekins:** Lauren may have that connection. Becca offers to follow-up with Lauren to get something on the schedule.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Just confirming the question, are you asking what our committee can do to impact or what they are doing?

**Ms. Leach:** Both. I feel our responsibility is to address the entire population of Northborough. I thought we were told that K-12 would be handled by the committee through the schools. But it is now March, and Mary adds she's not seen any results from the survey that was sent out to the schools.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Tim agrees. Feels the work does need to include education in our school age kids. We just need to be aware of the scope that we have with this committee. We need to report to the Board of

Selectmen and they will then make the decision on whether to move forward with things, or not depending on the different variables. The Board of Selectmen does not have any oversight over the schools. So if we make a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen related to the schools, they do not have the ability to follow-through on the recommendation. But we could have collaboration with the committee. That's a conversation that is worth having. It's local government. There are lanes that everyone has to stay in, and our lane does not include schools.

**Ms. Leach:** Thanks Tim for the clarification.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Asks if anyone has any additional objectives to add to our list.

**Ms. Meekins:** We've discussed police, community policies, flags, rainbow crosswalks. What other things have come up that we should focus on or research further? What best practices are other communities doing?

**Mr. Soriano:** Housing comes to mind. Let's increase the percentage we need to have in Northborough. Is there a different way to do it? Housing is the first thing that comes to my mind when Hamilton thinks of Diversity & Inclusion.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Becca, we need to think through that. Unsure if that is in the Board's scope.

**Ms. Meekins:** Housing includes many different entities such as the Housing Authority which is a federally managed agency which we have a relationship with but the town has no oversight over. There is a subsidized housing index that our planning and development dept is responsible for maintaining and updating. There's 40B housing which is subsidized housing. There are thresholds that must be followed. It can get muddy quickly. Hamilton and Becca will discuss offline as there's too much to cover in the meeting.

**Ms. Holland:** Are there policies that we can review that the town abides by to determine systematically if there is opportunity for us to implement change. Is it perhaps on the town web site? We could spark some new ideas to address current challenges.

**Ms. Leach:** Within the PDF that Becca sent out, the communities highlight definitions of Diversity, Inclusion, Equity. Perhaps these could be added to the Human Resources manuals within our town departments/entities.

**Ms. Meekins:** The Fire Dept, Police Dept, and the town proper each have their own policies. Step 1 would be figuring out where we are now and next step where do we want to be. Becca could distribute the policies. We just don't want to bite off more than we can chew. This is where a DE&I consultant could assist. How do we manage that balance?

**Selectman Kaelin:** When we had Chief Lyver, there were things within the Police Dept policies that he shared that seemed like good places to start for change, i.e. tattoo policy. That appears to be a straight forward change. We will have a similar conversation with the Fire Dept Chief. As we have conversations with department heads in our community and ask the right questions, they will probably be open to say what they are open to see change. It will eliminate the need for us to spend hours and hours reading policy manuals. Tim is hesitant to get into the policy of Human Resources because there are labor agreements, etc. Everything in them is negotiated. Unsure how easy it would be to change something

we see given the nature of employment people have with the town. When the department heads share their ideas, we can then see how we can assist.

**Ms. Wrighting:** Should we have a set of questions we ask everyone?

**Selectman Kaelin:** A template would be very helpful. We could send the questions ahead of time to help them prepare.

**Ms. Wrighting:** They may even bring data with them to support what they are sharing. Diedra offers to go back and look through the meetings to prepare questions.

**Selectman Kaelin:** It's not only department heads in town but conversations with other committees in town. Those conversations will be very helpful and give us some direction for recommendations to help improve some of the activities, events, holiday celebrations, etc. in town to make those more diverse. Tim received an email from Virginia. Virginia would like to take one one aspect of the training. Does anyone else have any interest? Does anyone else have interest in researching training options?

**Ms. Meekins:** A recommendation will be to keep this committee intact to drive that process since we've done all this work to date. Also wanted to touch on Unions. Every change that we are recommending has to be considered by any Union it will impact and any change to code would have to go to Town Meeting before it can be implemented. This is just the very beginning of this process.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Tim believes that the recommendations that we make need to be impactful and relatively simple to implement.

**Ms. Wrighting:** Can you share a bit more on the training?

**Selectman Kaelin:** Internal training is the town staff, departments, hiring and recruiting practices. Do town employees need to take unconscious bias training, etc. External training would be things like guest speakers, etc. outside of the employment of the town.

**Ms. Wrighting:** Diedra expressed interest in working on training.

**Ms. Meekins:** We want to see what other communities are doing as best practices. Trying to figure out how we can incorporate those practices into our local community.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Asks how do we extract as much from a relationship with the Y as we possibly can.

**Ms. Meekins:** ADA is another big piece of this from a municipal perspective. There are a lot of legal and ethical reasons for us to think about accessibility. And there are grant opportunities to pursue around accessibility. Becca offers take this on.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Next item on our agenda is to review DE&I plans from other communities. Becca did an amazing job getting this information together.

**Ms. Meekins:** Wanted to provide these to get an idea on the range of options out there. DE&I plans are intended to be tailored to a community's needs. From these, we can figure out where are the places where we should be most focused. From there, we can draft a scope of work. This will help form a strategic plan for a Consultant (policies, procedures, ADA accessibility, training, etc.).

**Ms. Leach:** Offers assistance to Becca with reviewing the plans.

**Ms. Meekins:** Will follow-up with Mary.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Next agenda item is to discuss regularity of meetings and would like to be sure the date/time works for most of the committee most of the time. Confirms everyone is now good with Thursdays. Recommends meetings every two weeks. One meeting per month is with a guest (30-60 minutes depending on scope/level of detail). The 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of month will be for discussions like we are having now following up on objectives. Asks for feedback.

**Ms. Meekins:** Realistically with all of the guests we'd like to bring in, we really do need to meet twice a month and receives agreement from the committee members present.

**Selectman Kaelin:** Do we need a vote on this?

**Ms. Meekins:** No, we do not need a vote. Becca asks if 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday works. Receives agreement from the committee members present. Will let Virginia and Lauren know.

#### **ADJOURNMENT:**

**Ms Meekins** moved the Committee vote to adjourn.

**Selectman Kaelin** seconded the motion.

Roll call taken as follows:

Mr. Soriano: Aye	Ms. Leach: Aye
Ms. Holland: Aye	Ms. Meekins: Aye
Ms. Ibrahimi: Aye	Ms. Wrighting: Aye
Selectman Kaelin: Aye	

Meeting is adjourned at 8:46 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

by Mary Leach

Clerk, Northborough Diversity & Inclusion Committee

#### **Documents referenced during the meeting:**

Town of Northborough D&I Committee February 4, 2021, Meeting  
Minutes Community DEI Plans