

Town of Needham
Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative Working Group
Minutes for October 18, 2021

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zR1ws8YN2E&list=PL3PRZZjHC3yE0eZ-rrW5RDdybU0e1R91L

Members Present: Marianne Cooley, Ramin Abrishamian Liz Lee, Jen Howard Schroeder, Jay Spencer, Vivian Hsu, Natasha Espada, Toyin Fayemi
Members Absent: Marcus Nelson
Staff Present: Kate Fitzpatrick, Myles Tucker

6:00 p.m. **Call to Order:** This meeting of the Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative working group was convened by chair Marianne Cooley.

Ms. Cooley announced this open meeting is being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker's Executive Order of March 12, 2020 due to the current state of emergency from the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. She noted all public gatherings have been suspended as advised and directed by the Commonwealth. And, as such, suspending the requirement of the open meeting law to have all meetings in a public, accessible, physical location while encouraging and allowing members of all public bodies to participate remotely. Ms. Cooley stated the meeting will not include public comment and the Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative working group and all attendees are convening by Zoom, as posted on the Town's website identifying how the public may join. All supporting documents used at this meeting are available on the Town's website www.needhamma.gov.

1. Approval of Minutes:

a. January 11, 2021	c. March 8, 2021
b. February 8, 2021	d. April 12, 2021

Motion: **J. Spencer moved to approve the minutes of January 11, 2021; February 8, 2021; March 8, 2021; April 12, 2021.**
Second: N. Espada
Roll Call Vote: M. Cooley, yes; N. Espada, yes; O. Fayemi, yes; V. Hsu, yes; J. Howard Schroeder, yes; J. Spencer, yes. None opposed.
L. Lee abstained.
Motion Carries: 6-0-1

2. **Review of the 2020 Census Data – What changed? What didn't?**

Ms. Cooley sent members a graphic from *the Boston Globe* that compared basic racial demographics (ages, education and income levels) in Needham from the census years 2010 and 2020 as well as a State housing map showing

the growth of housing units over the past 10 years. Needham has done well in adding housing units compared to surrounding towns.

Ms. Espada informed members a Planning Board group was created to review affordable housing needs and community engagement. The group is an outgrowth of the NUARI group which targeted affordable housing as a priority. We need to rethink what our plan is for affordable housing and look at how our zoning supports or doesn't support the addition of affordable housing and the rate at which zoning might be able to support it. The Planning Board group will develop vision statements for the Town Meeting. Once they agree, they will publicize their "charge".

Members discussed changes in the census data from 2010 to 2020:

- Population of Black and LatinX persons has almost doubled.
- The population of Black persons is still only 1.4%.
- There were increases in the Asian population, which is promising.
- In 2010, the population of White persons was 89%; in 2020, it is 81.1%.
- There is still a lot of work to do to make Needham more inclusive.

Reasons may include:

- The data may be an overall migration of populations moving from city to suburbs.
- The change was that survey takers were able to identify as multiracial.

Chair Cooley posed one core question for the group's success. What will it take and what will it mean for a Black person to say to a friend, "Needham is a great place to live." What are those barriers, and what would create a community that is attractive in all dimensions?

There are two different directions. There are more groups tackling how to celebrate diversity than how to eradicate racism.

6:24 p.m.

Ramin Abrishamian joined the meeting.

3. Community Conversations on Race/Forums (Select Board), Complaint Resolution Procedure (HRC), and Resilience Network (NDI) Updates

Ms. Cooley said another group has been meeting to talk about community conversations on race. They have set goals and are reframing priorities to come together in a way that they're not off-putting. Met with the Human Rights Committee. The Resilience Network is looking to begin their work in a measurable way with a prestart assessment then a reassessment.

She discussed three possible core topics. If we can create a forum with the Police Chief, a moderator, and another speaker, that will invite people into the conversation. We want to do something similar in the area of housing, and partner with the schools to do a forum around schools. Joanne Allen-

Willoughby will be participating as one of the school voices in the community conversations.

Ms. Fitzpatrick suggested curating a series of one-on-one or a small group to talk about race. NDI (Needham Diversity Initiative) seems prepared with the grant program they're working on to conduct surveys. They possess data on how to have these conversations. NUARI is geared more toward starting conversations through education and hoping those smaller meetings could be sponsored through the work of NDI.

Ms. Cooley said we could convene some affinity groups for small conversations. How do we have those going and then rejoin the groups as a whole?

It's important we don't start with an invitation where people say, "I don't see myself there."

Mr. Spencer asked and noted:

- How will the strategy for a Policing session be structured so there is thoughtful, civil, respectful dialogue?
- Will information be shared in advance?
- We want the session to stay on topic so this leads to fruitful discussion instead of people airing grievances.

Members contributed:

- The idea should be building conversation. Both sides need to engage in actual dialogue.
- Decide which lenses interacting in the community could shape a discussion.

Ms. Howard-Schroeder is struggling with a way to provide education as a way to launch discussions using basic language related to history as a baseline for conversation.

Ms. Hsu concurred. She said need to have shared language (the glossary), and shared understanding about a framework based on history, and acknowledgement about that history even if there's not agreement. She is concerned about not having conversations where people are spoken at and not listened to. Maybe an idea is to have discussion prompt questions. It's important that we re-create work or re-create conversations. Otherwise, it becomes a debate.

Ms. Lee questioned who is being educated, the community participants or the Police? Instead of having forums and panels, should we have a project that mixes groups of townspeople with the Police? They read something and discuss it so you have people working alongside and toward a common understanding. You're asking them to create the common understanding.

Ms. Espada suggested maybe this is where we create the templates for these conversations to happen so that we don't tailor them specific to each group and forget other parts. Checklists are helpful. What are the goals of the meeting? Are we inviting the appropriate people? Are there opportunities for conversational interaction? We need a guide.

4. Update on affiliate organizations and Town Boards, Committees and Commissions – what's next? How do we institutionalize accountability? What is the role of NUARI Working Group?

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

Next Meeting

November 8, 2021

January 10, 2022

Matters not reasonably anticipated by the Chair 48 hours in advance of the meeting - None.

6:48 p.m.

Adjourn

Motion: V. Hsu moved to adjourn.

Seconded: J. Spencer

Roll Call Vote: R. Abrishamian, yes; M. Cooley, yes; N. Espada, yes;
O. Fayemi, yes; V. Hsu, yes; L. Lee, yes;
J. Howard Schroeder, yes; J. Spencer, yes.

Motion Carries: 8-0

A list of all documents used at this Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative Working Group meeting is available at:

<https://www.needhamma.gov/4942/Needham-Unite-Against-Racism-Initiative>