

Town of Needham
Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative Working Group
Minutes for February 28, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IyojJFjI1kM&list=PL3PRZZjHC3yE0eZ-rrW5RDdybU0e1R91L&index=2>

Members Present: Ramin Abrishamian, Marianne Cooley, Natasha Espada, Vivian Hsu, Liz Lee, Jen Howard Schroeder, Jay Spencer
Members Absent: Toyin Fayemi, Marcus Nelson
Staff Present: Kate Fitzpatrick
Guests: Beth Pinals, Nichole Argo

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

Chair 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. She 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. Update on Town Boards, Committees and Commissions with respect to adoption of the vision statement

The Conservation Commission has adopted the vision statement.

Two NUARI members attended a meeting of the Permanent Public Building Committee (PPBC) who agreed to adopt the vision statement. They want to strategize how they could do it before they adopt.

It was noted the PPBC had concern the vision statement was political.

Members acknowledged committees are in agreement to work toward the goal of the vision; they are strategizing how they can commit.

2. Needham Resilience Network – Nichole Argo and Beth Pinals, Needham Diversity Initiative

Ms. Argo and Ms. Pinals launched the Needham Resiliency Network this week.

Overview of the Needham Resiliency Network:

- An efficient, effective, collective rapid response apparatus for scenarios such as identity based harm.
- Calls have been handled by the Human Rights Committee and Needham Diversity Initiative. Over the last 18 months, there was a resurgence in calls.
- A Network workshop of 51 people had much interest in building this apparatus.
 - There are significant declines in mental health nationally and locally.
 - Workshop revealed mistrust of civic groups, the Town, and Police.
 - In line with national trends, Needham saw an increase in reported hate incidents.
 - Needham has stepped up with supportive initiatives like NUARI.
 - Needham suffers from the negative outcomes of structural defacto segregation.
 - Do people know their neighbors? If not, it's hard to understand or work together.
 - Some Needham initiatives feel they work in silos and are unaware of what other initiatives are doing in Town.
- The Network examined which groups are most resilient.
- Experts say for the next 2 decades, communities will face challenges that cannot be conquered such as weather and climate stressors, pandemics, cyber-attacks.
- Literature describes how to structure a team of responders who work to prevent future stressors.
- The Needham Resiliency Network was developed to break down silos, promote cross-group understanding, and improve social cohesion.
- Create a template where you have all major stakeholders, official and unofficial, including all identity groups at that table.

The Network's goals are:

1. Highlight and come together around our shared local interests and values.
2. Create a space to foster genuine relationships between individuals with diverse lived experience and group membership.
3. Gain skills to build the capacity to disagree while maintaining trust and cohesion.
4. Create a communications infrastructure that increases the group's awareness of all the efforts made to create civic trust and well-being, improve equity, and eliminate discrimination.
5. Establish a protocol for community response that can be drawn upon as a resource whenever local events warrant it.

The Network is measuring impact, will evaluate rigorously, and prepare a case study that can be used by other communities.

Every group present at the March 3rd Workshop will be representative of the racial mix of those who live and work in Needham. There will be community mapping for liaisons to bring conversations back to their networks as well as relationship building strategies.

Resiliency Network model:

- Target learning elements for the first two years are inclusion, welcoming, and equity). These will evolve over time.
- Groups to align opportunities, assets, risks that require foundation themes.
- Bring everyone on board with a common language.
- Bring in local experts to talk to people for short 15-20 minute segments.
- Breakout groups for discussion. Share back with the larger group.
 - Build relationships, connection of shared values
 - Work of the Network

Summary:

The Network will maintain goals and a framework. People will work within that framework. There will be voting for big theme changes.

The Network has liaison partners: Voices in Unity and At My Neighbors Table. The Network can support discussion. The value to the Town is in the Network and its people.

Resiliency Network and NUARI agreed to discuss intersection between the two groups and whether the NUARI taskforce ends or will have a role that changes.

3. Plan for providing education and guidance to Town boards and committees and community organizations – report of subcommittees.

Members discussed how the Education Subcommittee can communicate to committees that haven't yet adopted the vision statement and principles.

What the Town is doing:

- Set a foundation for a leadership team to train boards and committees. Begin with pilot projects then move to operationalize the vision.
- Trainers/consultants to engage boards and committees so they're not alone.
- PPBC asked how contracts are awarded.
- DEI training specialists have more work than they can do in 10 years.
- The Town is interviewing candidates for a DEI consultant.
- DEI funds in the Town Manager budget must be approved at Town Meeting.

High points of the 2/3/22 meeting of the NUARI Education Subcommittee were shared with NUARI members. Notes will be circulated to members.

4. Discussion of “Glossary” Project

Members discussed:

- Obtain the glossary used by the Resiliency Network
- Include the voice of Needham high school students
- Reflect what is happening in Needham schools and community
- Includes definition meanings or concepts for NUARI guiding principles
- Ms. Lee and Ms. Howard-Schroeder volunteered to be a Glossary Subgroup
- Members will send suggested terms to Ms. Fitzpatrick

5. Community Conversations Update (March 1st, April 5th, May 17th)

Members were invited to educate the Town's Community Ed class around CRT.

Ms. Cooley and Ms. Howard-Schroeder will be at the first Community Conversation table tomorrow evening when they expect 70-80 participants.

The Police Chief will deliver a report to the Select Board on March 22.

6. Next Meeting Date - April 4, 2022, May 23, 2022

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

7:13 p.m.

Adjourn

Motion:

N. Espada moved to adjourn.

Seconded:

V. Hsu

Roll Call Vote:

R. Abrishamian, yes; M. Cooley, yes; N. Espada, yes;

V. Hsu, yes; L. Lee, yes; J. Howard Schroeder, yes;

J. Spencer, yes

Motion Carries:

7-0