

Town of Needham
Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative Working Group
Minutes for Tuesday, October 20, 2020
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87400034488>

6:00 p.m. A 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. Present were Matt Borrelli, Sue Neckes, Natasha Espada, Vivian Hsu, Ramin Abrishamian, Marcus Nelson, Olu Ajayi, Toyin Fayemi, Jen Howard Schroeder, Dennis Zhang, Jay Spencer, Assistant Town Manager Katie King, and Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick.

Ms. Cooley welcomed everyone and thanked the members for serving on the Committee. She started by introducing herself and the members of the Committee. The members include, Dennis Zhang, resident; Vivian Hsu, resident, Jay Spencer, owner of French Press & Café; Sue Neckes, School Committee, Marcus Nelson, Human Rights Committee, Dr. Olutoyin Fayemi, Resident; Natasha Espada, Resident, Ramin Abrishamian, Needham Clergy Association, Oluwatoni Ajayi, NHS Alumni; Jennifer Howard Schroder, Human Rights Committee, and Matt Borrelli, Select Board Vice-Chair. Staff to the committee include Katie King, ATM/Director of Operations and Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager.

Ms. Cooley talked about how the group came together and that there is a goal of getting a report to Town Meeting in May 2021. She said the group will probably think about meeting twice a month and intersperse a few public feedback sessions. This is an area of tremendous interest and engagement. She reviewed the charge of the Committee which includes 1.) Articulating a recommended vision for racial equity in Needham and guiding principles that will inform future actions; 2.) Establishing protocols and practices for getting community feedback, with a specific focus on engaging Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), and others who have been marginalized due to their race or ethnicity. Strategies should be identified to keep Needham's racial equity work informed by BIPOC input but owned by Town leadership and the broader community; 3.) Setting up communication structures to ensure the sustainability and accountability of the Initiative;

4. Discussing and prioritizing other recommendations that have been submitted to the Select Board; and 5. Making recommendation to the Select Board about future action.

Ms. Cooley asked if anyone had any specific thoughts on what the group wants to engage with. Mr. Spencer talked about focus areas. He wanted to know when the group will talk about policing or things that have happened in school system, or housing? Ms. Cooley said one of the next things to decide is how the group wants to work operationally, such as full group work or through the use of subcommittees. She proposed to invite the Chief of Police, the Superintendent of Schools, and someone from housing. Mr. Nelson asked about how to address police issues. Ms. Cooley said that the Town has commissioned Natasha Tidwell, to conduct investigative work on the incident involving the police. Ms. Tidwell is looking at procedures and policies as they exist, and the work is expected to be completed in the Fall. She said the group should receive the information first and then have a discussion with the Chief. There is also work going on at the state level which could affect the policing landscape.

Ms. Neckes said that the REAL Coalition has a steering committee and subcommittees comprised of curriculum, policy, recruitment, retention and hiring practices. She questioned how this group will work together and allow the schools, who have a structure in place, to address issues, and allow them to take the lead on things that are in their realm. She doesn't think NUARI is intended to replace the work that has been done in the schools. Ms. Cooley said the group should come up with a list of the different issues to see what the vision is. The group needs to think about how to create the vision it is trying to get to. Ms. Hsu said there is an awful lot of work going on in the community already and she thinks that it would be beneficial for us to say that we are not trying to reinvent the wheel. She doesn't see this group creating a roadmap for the Housing Authority or the School Department. She believes that we should try to provide a centralized resource for information regarding the efforts that have been going on; identify the common lines of work, and convey what we believe to be the Town's mission and values statement with respect to what it means to not have racism in our community.

Ms. Cooley noted that the Lived Experience report will be presented at the next Select Board meeting and that zoom invites were sent to all members of NUARI. She is hopeful that all can join and listen to the work on their initial findings. She also said that each member of NUARI would be invited to a series of Over Zero workshops that will begin in November. Ms. Espada said it would be helpful to find out about all the initiatives happening, and wondered if a shared drive could be created to cut down on emails that are sent back and forth. She said the group should to create clarity and promote accountability. There are people who specialize in this type of work. She asked who is point person for all this work and who are we held accountable to? Ms. Cooley said that the Select Board feels a great deal of accountability as the race equity work is a high priority goal. There aren't dedicated resources right now, and one of the outcomes will be more specific

requests for resources. Ms. Hsu thinks the group should engage with all the businesses in town too.

Ms. Cooley asked whether, with respect to decision making, this group will want to take votes or is it better to go by more of consensus? Should this group engage an external facilitator? Should the group think about subcommittees? Within those subcommittees should it be kept within this group or maybe have subcommittee include some non-group members? Mr. Nelson said it makes sense to have specialists attend for the purpose of teaching and engaging members. Mr. Abrishamian said there are so many issues and a broad agenda, maybe the vision could be issue-oriented instead of process oriented. Ms. Howard-Schroder feels the group needs to develop issue-based items, using subcommittee approach, bringing in facilitators, using a voting method. Ms. Espada agreed, and wondered about the pros and cons of voting versus consensus? Ms. Cooley said she is more of a consensus person. Mr. Borrelli said that he feels that consensus viewpoints are probably better and that they should keep it simple. Ms. Hsu is in favor of consensus and collaboration - perhaps for transparency purposes the group can take a vote on certain things as the need arises.

The group discussed how best to involve the public. The goal would be to have some focused agendas where opportunities are created for public participation. Members discussed whether public participation should occur at every meeting. Ms. Ajayi said that it makes sense to make keep working group meeting separate from public input meetings so at working group meetings time can be dedicated to doing the work and getting input at other meetings. Mr. Borrelli asked if a dedicated email address has been created for this committee? Ms. Fitzpatrick said she will work on this. Ms. Neckes asked if the intent is to have public participation generally or just during certain topics. Ms. Cooley proposed focused feedback according to the topic. Ms. Howard-Schroeder said that perhaps at the time of the specific topics the groups involved can participate as well as the public, so everyone has a chance to be heard.

The group members talked about what days and times work best to meet. It was the consensus of the group to start meeting on Mondays at 6:00 p.m. for about an hour and a half. Ms. Cooley asked that the group try and read all the material Ms. Fitzpatrick sent before the next meeting. This includes the citizen's petition from Town Meeting, the listening session priorities, and the group's charge.

6:56 p.m.

Motion by Mr. Borrelli that the Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative meeting be adjourned.

Second: Mr. Nelson. Unanimously approved 11-0 by roll call vote. Ms. Neckes left the meeting before the vote.

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>

