

Needham Unite Against Racism Working Group

6:00 p.m. December 21, 2020 Via Zoom

Agenda

Under Governor Baker's emergency "Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law G.L. c. 30A, S20", issued March 12, 2020 and in effect until termination of the emergency, meetings of public bodies may be conducted virtually provided that adequate access is provided to the public.

To listen and view this virtual meeting on a phone, computer, laptop, or tablet, download the "Zoom Cloud Meeting" app in any app store or at www.zoom.us. At the above date and time, click on "Join a Meeting" and enter the meeting ID 85676401528 or click the link below to join the webinar: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85676401528>

1. Approval of Minutes November 16, 2020 & December 7, 2020
2. Schools: Presentation from Superintendent Dan Gutekanst re: REAL Coalition ([http://www.needham.k12.ma.us/equity/real_coalition#:~:text=REAL%20COALITION%20\(RACE%2C%20EQUITY%2C,in%20the%20Needham%20Public%20Schools.\)](http://www.needham.k12.ma.us/equity/real_coalition#:~:text=REAL%20COALITION%20(RACE%2C%20EQUITY%2C,in%20the%20Needham%20Public%20Schools.)))
3. Review of NUARI Draft Schedule & Deliverables
4. Review of Special Town Meeting Article 17
5. Discussion about Prioritization of Public Comments from the Select Board's July Listening Session
6. Preparation for January 4, 2021 meeting

Town of Needham
Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative Working Group
Minutes for Monday, November 16, 2020
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85676401528>

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 Sue Neckes, Natasha Espada, Vivian Hsu, Ramin Abrishamian, Marcus Nelson, Toyin Fayemi, Jen Howard Schroeder, Dennis Zhang, Jay Spencer, Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick, and Assistant Town Manager Katie King.

Ms. Cooley thanked Mr. Abrishamian and the Needham Diversity Initiative for the Summit that occurred over the past weekend. They had over 300 participants who listened, learned, and discussed issues of race in Needham.

Ms. Cooley introduced Ms. Lisa Smith-McQueenie as a diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant to lead the working group in creating the vision statement. Ms. Cooley thank everyone for completing the survey that Lisa sent to them to give her an idea of what each member was thinking.

Ms. Smith-McQueenie greeted the group and started by showing a PowerPoint presentation titled "NUARI Working Group Visioning Session". She started the discussion with expectations and agreements. She asked if anyone had anything to add to the list of agreements. Ms. Cooley commented it was a great place to start.

Ms. Smith-McQueenie talked about vision statements, which she said should provide inspiration, purpose, and direction, state current and future objectives, serve as a guide to decision-making, align with the philosophy and set of goals, and be heavily informed by communities of color impacted by institutional and structural racism. Ms. Howard asked if we are working on a vision statement for the group or the town? Ms. Smith-Queenie answered that it is for the Town and that the charge is to articulate a recommended vision for racial equity in Needham and guiding principles that will inform future actions.

Ms. Smith-McQueenie went on to talk about the survey and how many members were spot on with regards to why a vision statement is needed and shared a few responses. Ms. Espada asked what is the difference between a mission statement and a vision statement? Ms. Smith-McQueenie said that a vision statement is where you want to be, and should be aspirational, and inspirational. A mission is why you exist.

Ms. Smith-McQueenie asked the group what they would identify as the values of Needham. Mr. Abrishamian replied education, family, organization, and orderly living conditions. Ms. Espada added community.

Ms. Smith-McQueenie asked what should be explicitly stated?" Some of the responses were racial equity, embrace, commitment, together, and diversity. Her next question was "What would racial equity look like in Needham?" She said that keywords included policies, procedures, practices, norms, housing and educational opportunities, employment, accepted, welcomed, able to succeed, removal of barriers and hurdles. Mr. Nelson agreed with many of the keywords. Ms. Espada stated that it's about inclusivity and a feeling of belonging, and also an awareness of what biases are and how they are preventing us from changing the structural systems. Ms. Neckes asked about the phasing of what is going into a vision statement versus some of the other aspects of the work. Ms. Smith-McQueenie said that the vision statement is where you want to be, the strategy, objectives and tactics are how you get there.

The next survey question was "What the group envisioned a 'New' Needham should be" and Ms. Smith-McQueenie read one of the descriptions. She said that she will wait for everyone to complete the survey before tweaking the finished vision statement.

The next slide titled "Language" showed a list of words, and she asked if they were appropriate and if there were any to be removed or added. Mr. Abrishamian commented that the only positive word listed was inclusive, and he would add words like unity and harmony. Dr. Fayemi agreed with Mr. Abrishamian that more positive than negative wording should be used. Mr. Spencer wanted to talk about adding the word 'behavior', some behaviors being offensive and individuals' not knowing it. Ms. Smith-McQueenie suggested that be part of the guiding principles. Ms. Hsu was concerned about using language that can constitute labels as opposed to action words that you might want in a vision statement. She suggested adding the word belonging. Mr. Abrishamian suggested adding the word community. Mr. Nelson suggested welcoming instead of belonging. Ms. Neckes commented that white supremacy is a strong word, maybe it should be privilege. Mr. Spencer suggested maybe entitlement. Ms. Espada suggested entitlement and superiority of the majority.

Ms. Smith-McQueenie provided some examples of vision statements from some towns, cities, and one state, and asked for comments. Dr. Fayemi, Ms. Hsu, Ms.

Espada, and Ms. Spencer said that they were too general. Ms. Hsu asked if the vision statement was for the group or for the Town. Ms. Espada asked if there is a vision statement that currently exists or is this the first? Ms. Fitzpatrick responded that there isn't a Town wide vision statement and this vision statement was intended for racial equity. Dr. Fayemi said a lot of the language is good and that you could take pieces of the sample statements and make it appropriate for Needham.

For a group exercise, Ms. Smith-McQueenie asked each member to write a one sentence vision statement for Needham. The next slide gave an example. After a brief time, each person was asked to read their rough draft statement. The next exercise was in the format of a bullet list and each person was asked to write a bullet based on the category assigned to them with a racial equity lens. The list included Social, Cultural, Local Businesses, Law Enforcement, Housing, Community, Education, Economic, Diversity, Town Hall, Employment, Governance. After spending about five minutes writing, each member read what he or she wrote for their category. Ms. Smith-McQueenie asked if everything on the list should be mentioned in the bullet format. Ms. Espada agreed that they should. Dr. Fayemi believes the vision statement should be short. The mission statement should have the longer bullet format. Ms. Cooley, Ms. Espada, and Mr. Spencer agreed with Dr. Fayemi. They discussed the merits of having a short one sentence vision statement versus a longer more detailed vision statement. Ms. Smith-McQueenie will wait for everyone to send their surveys and the exercise answers so she can have a better gauge as to which one will work for Needham.

Mr. Abrishamian stated that he is still confused as to the mission of this group. Ms. Fitzpatrick answered with the five bullets that the Select Board asked the committee to consider: to articulate a vision for racial equity in Needham, to establish protocols and practices for getting community feedback and setting up communications structures, and to go review and prioritize recommendations that have been made to the Board. Ms. Cooley agreed with Ms. Fitzpatrick and added that the reason this group was organized was to make a difference in Needham with where we are with racial equity and set some priorities and make some achievable goals in those areas that are most critical to what the group identifies.

Ms. Cooley commented that the folks here in this group are so committed to making a difference and trusts that this group is going to hold us accountable to making a difference.

Ms. Espada asked how long Lisa will be working with the group. Ms. Cooley stated she will be with us at least through the vision statement. Ms. Cooley then thanked Lisa for helping as this was quite the challenging first step. Lisa thank everyone for their participation and trusting the process.

Mr. Nelson had one last question which was if the group makes a recommendation to the Select Board, will the group hear back what they decide, either way? Ms. Cooley believes it's a collaborative process because the Select Board is going to

want to understand what the recommendations are and the impact on such things as the budget or what human capital resources might be required to make things happen. So, there will be discussions with the Select Board as these recommendations come forward.

**7:31 p.m. Motion by Ms. Espada that the meeting be adjourned.
Second: Mr. Nelson. Unanimously approved 9-0 by roll call vote.**

Next meeting to be on Monday, December 7.

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

<http://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=99&Type=&ADID=>

Town of Needham
Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative Working Group
Minutes for December 7, 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, Toyin Fayemi, Jen Howard Schroeder, Dennis Zhang, Jay Spencer, and Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick.

Ms. Cooley asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Abrishamian made a motion to approve the minutes and Mr. Borrelli seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved 11-0 by roll call vote. Ms. Cooley welcomed back Ms. Lisa Smith-McQueenie, a diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant to follow up on trying to come up with a vision statement for the Town. Ms. Espada asked if this group is a Select Board committee or is this an independent committee? She also wanted to know if there is an overarching plan for this group and if there is a plan for the year and a goal that this group wants to achieve. Ms. Cooley said it is a committee that is charged with making recommendations to the Select Board. She is working with Ms. Fitzpatrick, Ms. King, and Mr. Borrelli to come up with a calendar to achieve the goals that this group has set out to do.

Ms. Smith-McQueenie let the group know that this was the visioning session, part two. She has made significant progress and has the meat of what is needed and now it just needs some seasoning. The agenda for this evening's meeting is to review the task and agreements; desired racial equity vision statement attributes; revised language bank; group exercise; sample statements/drafts; focus areas, and next steps. The group talked about the vision statement for the Town and decided that this groups statement should tie to the Town's vision statement. The group went over the list of Agreements, and then talked about the vision statement for racial equity in Needham and what should be explicitly stated.

Ms. Smith-McQueenie asked for feedback. Mr. Borrelli commented that he would rather see a more general statement, and not one that feels negative. Mr.

Abrishamian thinks it is a pivotal statement and it explains why we need to do a lot of other items on this list. Mr. Spencer said that the point spoke to him the most. He doesn't think all these items will solve everything. He thinks it makes a statement to say that this group is serious in addressing the issue. Ms. Howard said it is strong, but the community is telling us that it is ready for a strong statement. Ms. Espada said that one thing that is discouraging is the acknowledgement. It is important and at times can be discomfoting but that is because we are growing, and if we don't have it, it will invalidate the work we are doing. Ms. Cooley thinks the group should trust the process and work with Ms. Smith-McQueenie. Ms. Neckes asked what are the boundaries? Are we trying to limit this to race or to be more encompassing of other groups? The members agreed that the focus for this particular group should be about race and racial equality.

The group took another look at the language bank. It has grown to include privilege, entitlement, positionality unity, harmony, oneness; implicit bias, intolerance, discrimination, behavior, attitude, anti-racist, belonging, inclusive/inclusion, welcoming, community, diversity, identity, restorative justice, healing, reconciliation, race, racism, and racial equity.

Mr. Borrelli said that if we are going to have a Town-wide statement it is going to start to get political and he would want to watch using words that connote a negative feeling. Ms. Espada feels there should be an education component as she still has implicit biases that she didn't know she had. Dr. Fayemi noted that people who don't want to hear it, will use whatever words make them most comfortable. He really wants people to listen to the statement. Ms. Smith-McQueenie said that maybe they should consider some comment about education. Perhaps the statement should be short and concise that pulls everyone in and then have stronger bullets.

The working group members were tasked with writing a sentence using at least six words from the language bank. Ms. Smith-McQueenie asked how the exercise felt and how each person arrived at the words that they chose. Mr. Spencer said that using words like privilege can be introspective. Ms. Hsu said the words are aspirational in many ways. The words have solid definitions for each of us, and there are a lot of concepts to think about. Ms. Espada expressed that many of the group members are putting themselves in a situation where it is uncomfortable and where uncomfortable conversations are happening. She wants to be sure the things that are said are meaningful, because if not, then nothing will change. She said it isn't easy being in the minority in Needham. She thanked the group for being able to speak in this forum.

The working group viewed sample draft statements and then discussed the pros and cons of each of them. Ms. Smith-McQueenie asked them to think about explicit language and what they want the vision to be. Ms. Cooley noted that Chief Schlitter was present to talk about policing, but due to time constraints asked him to participate in a future meeting so the group could continue its work on the vision. The working group reviewed different versions of a visions statement. The group

felt that the vision that was in paragraph form was strong in language but could be lengthy to read through. Members suggested using wording from the paragraph and changing the format to make it more appealing to read. Ms. Smith-McQueenie then went over some areas of focus that were identified by the group as priorities. These include housing, policing, schools, neighbor interaction, interaction with local businesses, diversity on Town boards and committees, and diversity in Town staff.

The group then viewed samples of values/guiding principles. Ms. Smith-McQueenie encouraged the group to review all the material to help them determine what kind of vision statement to recommend. She said she would want to meet again with Ms. Fitzpatrick, Ms. King, Ms. Cooley, and Mr. Borrelli to talk about next steps and if there is a need for her to continue working with the group. She thanked the group for continued participation and input and asked that they send her the sentences that they came up with. Ms. Cooley thanked Ms. Smith-McQueenie for her time and said they would love to have her continue but need to figure out how to do that. She appreciates everyone's time and efforts.

7:38 p.m.

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

Second: Ms. Hsu. Unanimously approved 11-0 by roll call 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>

Upcoming NUARI Meeting Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic(s)</u>
December 7	Vision Setting w/Lisa Smith-McQueenie
December 21	Schools: Presentation from Superintendent Dan Gutekanst re: REAL Coalition Review of NUARI Draft Schedule & Deliverables Review of Article 17 Discussion about Prioritization of Public Comments from the Select Board's July Listening Session
January 4, 2021	Vision Setting: Share final draft and discuss next steps.
January 11	Law Enforcement Part 1: Initial discussion with Police Chief Schlittler
January 25	Public listening session on Vision Statement, Law Enforcement & Education Discussion about Prioritization of Public Comments from the Select Board's July Listening Session
February 8	Law Enforcement Part 2: Briefing on Tidwell Report (if available) & Pending Legislation on Police Reform
February 22	Housing: Overview of Zoning and Housing Policy
March 8	Town Staff DEI Efforts – Rachel Glisper, Director of Human Resources Boards & Committees
March 22	Community Interactions Discussion on final report Discussion about WG Charge Item 2: How to engage BIPOC residents and others who have been marginalized due to their race or ethnicity? Discussion about WG Charge Item 3: Communication structures to ensure the sustainability and accountability of the Initiative.
April 5	Public listening session Review of Working Group recommendations to date
April 12	Final review & approval of report to Town Meeting
May & June	Next Steps

The Needham Unite Against Racism Working Group is charged with:

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.
5. Making recommendation to the Select Board about future action.

DRAFT

FALL 2020 WARRANT ARTICLE CITIZEN'S PETITION:

Article __: To see if the Town will adopt the following resolution, or take any other action related thereto:

RESOLUTION TO REQUEST A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF SYSTEMIC RACISM IN NEEDHAM, PARTICULARLY IN REGARD TO THE CORE ISSUES OF RACIAL PROFILING, PUBLIC SAFETY, AND HOUSING, WITH AN UPDATE ON PROGRESS MADE TOWARD COMPLETION OF THE STUDY TO BE PROVIDED PRIOR TO THE 2021 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING INCLUDING, IF WARRANTED, RECOMMENDATIONS OF ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN BY THE TOWN OF NEEDHAM TO ADDRESS THESE CONCERNS, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO, THE POSSIBLE APPROPRIATION OF FUNDS AT A FUTURE TOWN MEETING AND ADDITIONAL RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE COMPILED AND PROVIDED IN A TIMELY FASHION TO FUTURE TOWN MEETINGS.

WHEREAS, since the murder of George Floyd there have been demonstrations and other public activity in the Town of Needham in support of police reform and in support of the victims of police violence, leading to the initiation of the town's Unite Against Racism Initiative;

WHEREAS, Town Meeting believes incidents of racism have occurred and continue to occur in Needham;

WHEREAS, the Town of Needham should thoughtfully consider the testimony of those who have been affected by racism;

WHEREAS Town Meeting wishes to study actions that may be taken to improve the life experience of Black, Indigenous, and all People of Color (BIPOC) in Needham;

WHEREAS, Town Meeting understands law enforcement has historically been directly or indirectly tied to the perpetuation of discrimination and systemic racism;

WHEREAS, reimagining public safety has become a focus for our surrounding communities;

WHEREAS, the oversight of Needham Police, including but not limited to policies and practices concerning the use of force, hiring, firing and arbitration and discipline, as well as activity tracking, performance measurement, and ease of accessing information may require revision and clarification;

WHEREAS, alternative and more effective and appropriate approaches to the current police use of force policy are available;

WHEREAS, qualified immunity provides public safety officers nationally with such broad protections that they are rarely punished for unconscionable and apparently illegal actions;

WHEREAS, the Equal Justice Placard Program has been adopted by businesses throughout Needham and is affixed in the Town Hall;

WHEREAS, Needham housing and zoning policies have historically been directly or indirectly tied to perpetuation of discrimination and systemic racism;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT town officials and staff, perhaps through a new Citizens Committee, a newly-empowered Human Rights Committee, or a new working group, to be determined in whole or in part by the Select Board of the Town of Needham, Massachusetts, conduct a review of the effects of systemic racism in Needham and, if warranted, present to the 2021 Annual Town Meeting and subsequent Annual and Special Town Meetings specific warrant articles aimed at improvement. The review shall include evaluation of:

- Racism experienced by people in Needham;
- Discussions with the Town Committee Chairs to understand the role of racism within their areas of responsibility;
- Police oversight and accountability, including but not limited to qualified immunity, use of force policies, training (de-escalation, crisis intervention, legal education, diversity/inclusion), hiring and firing, arbitration and discipline, activity tracking, performance measurement, and ease of publicly accessing information;
- Evaluation of alternative police policies such as those offered by Campaign Zero;
- Racial profiling in public spaces;
- Expansion of the Equal Justice Placard Program through all Needham Town buildings; and
- Housing and zoning policies.