

**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](http://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=>