

**Town of Needham**  
**Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative Working Group**  
**Minutes for January 4, 2021**

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3PRZZjHC3yE0eZ-rrW5RDdybU0e1R91L>

6:00 p.m. 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](http://www.needhamma.gov). Present were Matt Borrelli, Vivian Hsu, Sue Neckes, Natasha Espada, Marcus Nelson, Jen Howard Schroeder, Jay Spencer, Toyin Fayemi and Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick.

Ms. Cooley talked about draft statements and hoped everyone had a chance to review them. Ms. Cooley then turned the meeting over to Ms. Lisa Smith-McQueenie who greeted the group with wishes for a happy New Year. She started by showing a PowerPoint presentation titled “NUARI Working Group Visioning Session 3.” Ms. Cooley noted that this is not the final product but a something members would be satisfied bringing to the community as a draft for feedback.

Ms. Smith-McQueenie reviewed the work that had been done previously, including a list of the attributes of the vision statement. She outlined options including:

1. “Needham aspires to be a community in which people of different races, ethnic groups, and cultural backgrounds can interact, form friendships, and participate fully in the community's economic, political, civic, education, and cultural life.” Ms. Smith-McQueenie asked the committee if this would rank in the top three. Most agreed it would not. Members said that it seemed very non-committal and spoke more about diversity than racism.
2. “Needham will be a town that strives to be free of structural racism, actively engaged in eliminating racial prejudice and repairing the harm caused by historical racial inequities.” Members agreed this statement would not be in the top three. Members noted that the statement feels negative and vague. It was discussed that the term “structural racism” should maybe be included in a supporting statement. It was agreed that the vision statement needs to be

positive and welcoming, inviting people to the conversation and then the guiding principles would then enable further conversations.

3. “The Town of Needham will engage in the active and ongoing eradication of racial injustice and provide equitable opportunity, acknowledgement and resources for underrepresented racial identities in our community. Our residents, businesses and government will work together to champion efforts that create sustainable transformation in our town with regard to racial equity.” Members said they felt the wording was too vague and could mean anything. It was noted that this is a vision statement, saying this is how we want our town to be, it is not a goal. It would not be in the top three.
4. “Needham will be a thriving town where residents live healthy, fulfilling lives free of racism, racial prejudice and racial discrimination. Town residents will have equitable opportunities and resources, leading to actualized inclusion and a sense of belonging.” Ms. Smith-McQueenie asked if this would be in the top three and most felt it would be. Members proposed removing or changing words like “live healthy: and “fulfilling.” Members suggested including businesses and workers, or maybe one word (community) that would compass all three. This statement is more specific than number three and most members preferred this as a statement.
5. “Needham will work collaboratively and democratically toward a just, equitable anti-racist community.” Members said that they liked statement number four as modified.
6. “Racial equity in Needham means that experiences in Needham are similar for the minority (POC) as well as the majority (White). This ranges from day to day interactions, housing opportunities, policing experiences, employment, and educational opportunities to name a few.” It was noted that this statement is more of a guiding principle than a vision.
7. “Needham will be a town where the color of your skin does not dictate your experiences and there is a united front against racial injustice.” Members felt that statement number four was still better, but there was interest in the first part of this sentence as a bullet.

The last statement was in the form of a paragraph, which members felt was too long. It was agreed that the vision statement should be short and in one or two sentences.

Ms. Smith-McQueenie opened the floor to anyone who had created their own statement and wanted to share for consideration. Ms. Cooley agreed with previous comments about statement number four which most of the committee liked but needed to be modified. Committee members suggested changes to the statement. Ms. Smith-McQueenie updated statement four to be “Needham will be a

community free of racism, racial bias, prejudice, and discrimination. Our residents, schools, businesses, organizations, and government will work together to identify barriers and create solutions, opportunities, resources, and support leading to racial equity.”

Committee members discussed objectives, and goals. Focus areas and priorities were housing, policing, schools, neighbor interaction, interaction with local businesses, diversity on town boards and committees, and diversity of town staff. Some of the bullets from the different vision statements were suggested to be placed under goals and objectives. They decided that guiding principles will proceed goals and objectives. Members agreed that the guiding principles are as important as the vision statement, and said they wanted to take their time making sure the bullet points are correct and will lead directly to the goals and objectives.

8:02 p.m. **Motion by Ms. Hsu that the Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative Working Group meeting be adjourned. Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 9-0 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>