

Minutes, WT Task Force Against Discrimination, March 1, 2022, 5 p.m. APPROVED April 19, 2022

Present: Omar Johnson, Loren Ghiglione, Susanna Sturgis, Alexandra Pratt, Brad Cortez, Terry Kriedman

The minutes for the February TFAD meeting were approved.

Draft letter to West Tisbury boards and committees

Loren shared the draft with Jen Rand, town administrator, and revised with her suggestions in mind.

We discussed this in some detail, with particular focus on questions about race/ethnicity, age, and sex/gender, and on ways to both bring “new blood” into town boards and committees and to make them more reflective of the town as a whole. The revised draft, attached, reflects our revisions.

The point was made that, although many of the town’s board and committee members serve in several capacities, the Task Force is unusual in that most of us don’t. Three of us (Omar, Alexandra, and Brad) are town employees.

TFAD counterparts in other towns

Loren emailed other towns to find out if any of them have a counterpart to the Task Force. The answer seems to be no. Some said that if problems arise, they can be referred to the personnel board. At least one town thought it was a good idea and why don’t we encourage other towns to form task forces like ours.

YouTube channel update

Susanna hasn’t had time to set this up yet, but she does now have the recording of our November 2021 event on her computer. At our last meeting we agreed that rather than have our channel open to the public, one would have to have the link to access it. The possibility of spam and harassment seems to be high with anything dealing with discrimination and related issues. *[SJS note: I still haven’t moved on this -- it’s been an insanely busy few weeks -- but will get to it soonest.]*

Incidents of possible harassment or threat

Susanna brought this up after reading about the apparent harassment of the Oak Bluffs health agent, which led to her resignation. That seems to have been related to the bitter ongoing fight over the prospect of using artificial turf on some MVRHS athletic fields. Susanna is concerned because it sounds like the harassment of public officials (especially election workers and those involved in public health), school boards, and educators across the country over issues ranging from masking and vaccination mandates to alleged election fraud to teaching about race and racism in the schools. She believes it’s something we should keep an eye on.

Omar said that the former OB health agent has very quiet about her experience, but he knows of a board of health member in that town who had his tires flattened and who suspects it might have been related to the public controversy.

Loren raised the question of West Tisbury's hiring of a fire department employee who had a history of sexual harassment complaints. Tisbury had previously declined to hire this individual. Omar asked what we could do about it. Loren said he wasn't sure. Neither are the rest of us, but some of us are curious about how the decision was made to hire this person. Loren suggested asking the selectboard what our role should be in a case like this. He is willing to follow up with Cindy Mitchell, selectboard member.

Omar will be on vacation when our next meeting is scheduled (April 5) but will leave instructions for us. *[SJS note: We later decided via email to postpone our next meeting to Tuesday, April 19; skipping the 12th because that's the date for West Tisbury's annual town meeting, which will start at 6 p.m.]*

The meeting was adjourned at 6 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susanna J. Sturgis
Recorder