

## **Minutes, WT Task Force Against Discrimination, May 11, 2021 (Approved June 1, 2021)**

**Present:** Omar Johnson, Susanna Sturgis, Loren Ghiglione, Terry Kriedman, Rev. Cathlin Baker

At Omar's request, Susanna agreed to send out meeting agendas. She'll do this early enough to comply with Open Meeting guidelines.

### **Approve minutes**

With a minor correction, the **minutes for the April 6 meeting were approved**. Susanna will send the approved version to the town clerk. *[SJS note: This was done on May 17.]*

We discussed the name of this group: Are we the Diversity Task Force or the Task Force Against Discrimination? Susanna said noted that words were important, but that what we decide to do matters more than what our official name is. *[SJS note: This discussion was resumed at end of meeting.]*

Cathlin noted the "dynamic tension" between "for" (diversity) vs. "against" (discrimination). How will this affect our future work -- will we be seen as *for* certain things or *against* certain things, or both? She's interested in "operationally this might look like for the town."

Terry brought up the matter of "board of selectmen" vs. "select board." *[SJS note: At the Special Town Meeting that immediately preceded the Annual Town Meeting on May 18, we voted to change the name of the "board of selectmen" to "select board."]*

### **Address request to revise mission statement**

After a lengthy discussion of possible revisions to the "Diversity Statement from the Board of Selectmen," we concluded that it's up to us to decide how to implement it. As Cathlin put it, the Diversity Statement "is not our mission statement. We can come up with our own statement about who we are, how we operate, and what we offer to the town."

Terry asked if this meant that our task was only to respond to complaints and concerns. Susanna said she thought our mission was broader than that: that "one of our first tasks should be making ourselves known in the community and asking people what their concerns are. There's nothing to stop us from being proactive." Loren said he was also interested in being proactive, not in waiting for people to come to us.

As an example of the kind of thing we could do, Susanna referred to a recent [Martha's Vineyard Times story](#) about how the Martha's Vineyard Diversity Coalition had raised the money to fund implicit and unconscious bias training for the island's police departments.

Omar said that he believed we were going to get to that point once we "get passed where we're at right now." He agreed that we need to take the emphasis off the beginning part of the Diversity Statement and "concentrate on what that last paragraph is telling us to do. We are a

separate entity that has the power and the ability to implement things as we see fit, and I think we can determine what those are.”

Cathlin agreed and added that in her “little community,” the WT Congregational Church, they’re dealing with a lot of these same questions and trying to figure out how to handle concerns when they come up, e.g., when people experience racism within the congregation. “I know from my parishioners that people experience discrimination in housing and these are real issues.” She wants us to be prepared, that “when we say ‘we are here,’ we will hear peoples’ concerns and experiences.” We need to figure out we do with those concerns.

Omar asked about ways to address this, perhaps a questionnaire, or some kind of grievance process where individuals can submit their concerns anonymously. Cathlin has been researching the many ways there are to deal with this. They all have their pros and cons.

Omar suggested that a place to start might be learning what people are thinking and feeling -- what the problems and concerns are.

### **Discuss Ideas for First Project(s)**

Susanna suggested that we might aim toward a public event at the library, after the summer, to introduce this task force to the West Tisbury community and invite feedback, suggestions, problems, etc.

Loren noted that when people start making complaints, we need to have a mechanism to deal with them -- where do we refer them, etc. Susanna agreed: we could identify existing resources and be able to refer people to them. Terry said that it’s probably not our job to research these complaints or concerns, but we should know how to connect people with those who can help.

Loren expressed skepticism about whether existing resources would be responsive enough to deal with problems.

Cathlin noted that it’s likely there would be an array of concerns, with different needs. We could be able to refer people to, for instance, mediators and legal aid as well as formal grievance procedures.

### **Other Business**

Terry asked about the distinction between *systemic* and *systematic* racism. Both words appear in the select board’s statement. Susanna noted that the two are definitely different, and Loren suggested that we ask the select board to change *systematic* to *systemic*, which is probably what was meant.

What’s our name?? Omar asked if we could agree on a name to call ourselves. The select board’s Diversity Statement calls us the Task Force Against Discrimination. After some discussion, we agreed to go with it.

Suggestions for summer activities:

- Research best practices of other towns of similar size, seasonal communities, etc.
- Learn more about what's gone on in West Tisbury
- Find out about books, films, etc., that we could benefit from as a group
- Come up with ideas for our fall program

The meeting was adjourned at ca. 6 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susanna J. Sturgis  
Recorder