

Minutes, TFAD Meeting, May 3, 2022, 5 p.m.
West Tisbury library meeting room
APPROVED on June 7, 2022

Present: Omar Johnson, Susanna J. Sturgis, Loren Ghiglione, Brad Cortez, Alexandra Pratt, Ted Jochsberger (via Zoom).

The minutes for the April 19 minutes were **approved**.

Open Meeting Law (OML) clarification

This TFAD meeting was posted as an in-person meeting with the location given. The Zoom link wasn't provided until after the agenda was posted. After consulting Tara about OML requirements, Susanna reported that this was OK but that only in-person attendees can be counted toward a quorum.

Follow-up on anti-racist training in Chilmark

Susanna said she hadn't had the chance to follow up with Mike Hugo, director of policy and government affairs for the Massachusetts Association of Health Boards, which is facilitating this training. She will do so before our next meeting.

Omar asked if this was something that would be taking place only in Chilmark. Susanna's understanding is that this is a pilot program and may eventually be available for use elsewhere.

What role should the TFAD play in town hiring decisions?

Omar asked what we are *allowed* to do. What kind of input can we have?

Loren noted that the West Tisbury fire department had hired someone about whom sexual harassment claims had been made. He said that men in power often seem more tolerant of other men committing harassment. Accusations of harassment can be a "red flag" in such cases.

Ted urged caution. He said he wasn't familiar with this particular case but believes it should be proven "beyond a shadow of a doubt" before action is taken. If Oak Bluffs fired this person, we should at least express concern, e.g., in a letter to the hiring committee.

Susanna wondered if there was a public process around this hiring. She learned about it from the newspaper after the individual had already been hired in West Tisbury.

We agreed that we should clarify both the process in this case and what our role should be in general. We will invite Cindy Mitchell, the selectboard member who was most instrumental in developing the Diversity Statement that led to the forming of the TFAD, and someone from the personnel board, possibly board administrator Maria McFarland, to speak at a future meeting. Our next scheduled meeting is on Tuesday, June 7. [*SJS note: IIRC Omar agreed to ask Cindy about this.*]

Update on board & committee survey

Loren reported that the response to the survey about diversity on town boards and committees was somewhat disappointing. Of the 10 responses, 4 were from town employees (not board/committee members); all were white, and their ages ranged from 50s to 80s. One respondent suggested a possible member for the TFAD. We don't have email addresses for board and committee members, so the survey that to go through their respective chairs. We don't know whether all chairs passed the survey on to their members. Discomfort with online technology might also have been an issue.

We do have mailing addresses for board/committee members so Loren proposed sending the survey out via USPS. Based on a guesstimate of about 6 members per board/committee, with some duplication, he believes that the cost of doing this will be about \$200. This would include labels, postage, and envelopes with return postage. The TFAD doesn't have a budget. Omar volunteered to ask the selectboard if the town will pay for it. Loren said he was willing to cover the cost if the town won't.

Loren also noticed that we're still listed as Diversity Task Force on the town website, not as the Task Force Against Discrimination.

Report on Pride Month planning and flag raising in Oak Bluffs

Susanna attended the April 26 Oak Bluffs selectboard meeting dealing with the town's proposed flag policy and the issue of raising the "Progress Pride" (PP) flag and the Juneteenth flag on town flagpoles. She reported that the MV NAACP, which is co-sponsoring both LGBTQ+ Pride activities and celebrations of Juneteenth (which is now a federal holiday), was well represented at the meeting. It is working on both events with the Oak Bluffs Association, which includes about 130 Oak Bluffs businesses and which was represented by its vice president, Sofie Green.

The issue at hand was whether the town should fly the PP flag during all or some of Pride month (June). The town has four flagpoles, including one in Ocean Park. At the outset, selectboard perspectives ranged from "only U.S. flag and POW MIA flag should fly on town flag poles" to legal concerns, especially in light of the U.S. Supreme Court decision that had just come down overturning a Boston city government's decision not to fly a Christian flag at City Hall. The SCOTUS decision affirmed the Christian group's right to have their flag flown. Concern was expressed about a hypothetical scenario in which Nazis wanted to fly their flag from town flagpoles.

By a vote of 4 to 1, the selectboard decided to fly the PP flag from June 1 through 14.

Omar asked how you tell someone (e.g., the hypothetical Nazis) that you won't fly their flag. An important point is that government speech isn't covered by the 1st Amendment. Government bodies have the responsibility of deciding what flags to fly. Susanna thinks it's important for a town to have guidelines so that its decisions won't seem arbitrary.

Ted referred to the 1977 SCOTUS decision giving the Nazis to march with swastika flags in Skokie, IL. The ACLU represented the Nazis. *[SJS note: As it turned out, the Nazis didn't march in Skokie; they marched in Chicago instead.]*

Recap on Two Steps Forward Against Antisemitism webinar

Susanna talked about getting towns to observe International Holocaust Remembrance Day in January. *[See the two sample letters in the attached PDF of webinar handouts, which also include a working definition of antisemitism.]* Rationale given at the webinar was that some studies show that as many as two-thirds of young adults don't know what the Holocaust was. The point was made that antisemitism is often the canary in the coal mine, that antisemitic discrimination and persecution that precedes other forms of discrimination and persecution.

New Business

Two event possibilities were raised:

- A reprise of the “What Makes West Tisbury Tick?” program put on in the winter of 2017, featuring elected and appointed town officials and describing the structure of town government and how to get involved. A good time to do this would be early winter, when nomination papers become available for town offices and people are starting to think about town meeting and town elections.
- An in-person version of our Zoom event from fall 2021.

The meeting was adjourned at about 5:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susanna J. Sturgis
Recorder