

Minutes, WT Task Force Against Discrimination, June 1, 2021 APPROVED July 20, 2021

Present: Omar Johnson, Susanna Sturgis, Rev. Cathlin Baker, Alexandra Pratt, Bradley Cortez, Terry Kriedman, Loren Ghiglione

Omar called the meeting to order at 5:02.

The minutes for the May meeting were approved by all. *[SJS note: The approved minutes were sent to Tara, town clerk, on June 8.]*

Research on other task force approaches

Susanna mentioned the work done by the M.V. Diversity Coalition in arranging the implicit bias training for the island police departments. This is an approach we might consider in the future. Susanna has emailed them to learn more, and also the Racial Justice & Human Dignity Committee of We Stand Together / Estamos Todos Juntos (WST/ETJ). She will report back when she learns more. Other groups to be contacted include the Social Justice group at the [M.V. Hebrew Center](#), Black Lives Matter, and the [M.V. Branch of the NAACP](#). *[SJS note: I am working on contacting the latter three groups too.]*

Loren reported that the town of Andover last year announced its intent to form a division within town government to focus on diversity and inclusion. He's willing to follow up if we're interested. He also noted a [New York Times story](#) about how the U.S. Air Force is using virtual reality headsets to raise awareness about suicide and sexual assault. Participants reportedly found this had a bigger impact than conventional methods. Virtual reality is also being used to explore scenarios around diversity and inclusion.

Alexandra said that the West Tisbury library had an Oculus Rift virtual-reality headset and has had positive feedback on the use of it to raise awareness on different issues. The drawback is that these are expensive, so the library only has one.

Cathlin found a [project in Bainbridge, WA](#), comparable to ours but further along. Marblehead also has something similar. She also came across the "[Racial Conflict Guide for Municipalities](#)" from the Community Relations Service of the U.S. Department of Justice. It isn't dated. It identifies the sorts of things that create tension and suggested ordinances to deal with them. *[SJS note: The date seems to be January 1991. While tracking it down I came across the more recent "[Responding to Racial Tension in Your City: A Municipal Action Guide](#)" from the National League of Cities. Not sure of its date either but it's after 2016.]*

Diversity training activities at the WT library

Alexandra, the library director, reported that the Massachusetts State Library System has been focusing this year on diversity/equity/inclusion training. The library sponsored the showing of "[I'm Not Racist . . . Am I?](#)" a documentary made by Point Made Learning about high school students who spent a year "getting to the heart of racism." This was available for online viewing by both students and the general public, and was followed by facilitated discussion. The library has done training with P-FLAG Boston on LGBTQ issues and awareness and intends to do more.

At the end of June, June 23 and 28, the library is sponsoring two training with Boston-based [Wee the People](#), focusing on parents, educators, and others who work with young children. These are free and open to the public. Susanna noted that during the pandemic she participated in a good discussion group on racism and antiracism led by Elliott Bennett of the library staff.

Involving young people

Omar emphasized the importance of activities that involve young people. “We need to reach our youth,” he said. “Let’s keep that in mind.”

Loren mentioned a teacher at Island Children’s School who’s effective working with very young children. He can contact her if we want to follow up.

Brad said that he and the police department work directly with the WT School and the Charter School. He’s in direct contact with the principal and the director and would be happy to reach out to them to see what they’re doing.

Cathlin said she has a 13-year-old and a 16-year-old and knows they’ve been engaging with these issues. She raised the possibility of bringing all these groups and individuals together to find out what they’ve been doing.

Susanna mentioned her work as an editor with Lynn Ditchfield on [Borders to Bridges](#), a curriculum that is starting to be tested in Vineyard schools. (Lynn is a retired MVRHS Spanish teacher.) It focuses on immigrants and immigration but deals with a lot of these diversity and inclusion (etc.) issues.

Open discussion

Omar said we need to start planning for the public event in the fall. Alexandra reported that the current size limit for groups in the library is 20 but that may increase in the fall. Other venues may be possible, e.g., the WT School, the Charter School, the Ag Hall, or the Grange Hall.

Susanna brought up the proposal to fly the Progressive Pride flag at town hall. It grew out of a subcommittee of NAACP MV. She expressed concern about the timing, especially that there’s been little discussion of the underlying issues. She had spoken with Arthur Hardy-Doubleday, the new president of the MV NAACP branch (he’s a gay man of color who grew up on the island). He emphasized the importance for younger people of seeing affirmation of their sexuality. *[SJS note: The WT selectboard supported the proposal at its June 2 meeting. The selectboards of all other island towns have done likewise.]*

The meeting adjourned @ about 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susanna J. Sturgis
Recorder