

## **Minutes, West Tisbury Task Force Against Discrimination Meeting August 1, 2023**

**Approved at September 12, 2023, meeting**

**Present:** Alexandra Pratt, Ted Jochsberger, Susanna J. Sturgis, Terry Kriedman, Loren Ghiglione

The **minutes** for the June 6, 2023, meeting were **approved**. (The Task Force didn't meet in July.)

Arielle Faria's resignation from the Task Force was accepted with understanding and regret. It prompted a discussion of how to interest West Tisbury residents in joining the Task Force.

### **How should we go about attracting potential members?**

Could town administrator Jen Rand put an announcement in the paper? Susanna pointed out that the openings are listed on the town website. She believes that personal contact is more important than the usual channels. Loren said that both are important. Both he and Terry learned about the Task Force from ads in the *M.V. Times*. **Susanna will check with Jen to see whether the TF can be included in ads. She'll also ask Jennelle G. if she's interested and also ask Cathlin Baker if she knows people in her congregation.**

### **Land Acknowledgment Statement**

Town moderator Dan Waters had hoped to address the meeting, but he had a conflict and so emailed his comments to Susanna, who shared them with the group. They are appended to these minutes. Loren recommended going to the Wampanoag nation to find out how they feel about this. We agreed that this was a good first step. **Loren will contact the tribe (tribal council) to see what they think.** Ted agreed with Dan that we can't speak on behalf of the town, only on behalf of the Task Force. Susanna expressed reservations about land acknowledgment statements in general because they quickly become rote, like the pledge of allegiance to the U.S. flag. Alexandra suggested bringing it up to the group that's beginning a town visioning process.

### **Follow-up on Town Hiring Practices**

Do we want to pursue the idea of a town diversity officer, suggested by Leon Brathwaite in a conversation with Loren earlier this summer?

West Tisbury doesn't have an Human Resources department and probably won't in the future. Alexandra pointed out the difficulty of creating a new full-time position. Loren added that it is also difficult to add duties to an existing position. Alexandra said that when library employees want to raise an issue, their first step is to discuss it with Alexandra, the director. The next step would be the Library Board of Trustees, and after that probably the selectboard. **Find out from, e.g., the selectboard more about the grievance procedure for other town employees.**

Susanna noted that the MV Branch of the NAACP's Legal Redress Committee is a resource for people of color, not just in employment and not necessarily involving violations of the law: it played a role in the 2021 Chilmark summer camp incident. We might want to consider being a conduit for people who are having problems, for instance by compiling a resource list of

individuals and organizations. Loren suggested that retired people with DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) experience might be interested in doing some of this work as volunteers.

### **Seeing White on MV (SWMV)**

Seeing White on MV was launched in the fall of 2022 by several members of the Racial Justice and Human Dignity Committee of We Stand Together / Estamos Todos Juntos. It was based on the 14 episodes in the [Seeing White podcast series](#). The organizers developed questions for each episode, relating the subjects to past and present Martha's Vineyard. They are now hoping to expand the program's reach by encouraging organizations and individual groups to sponsor it. Susanna is interested in organizing a SWMV 2.0 group and asked if the TFAD would be willing to sponsor it. She would do the organizing work. Alexandra said the library would be available as a location. **Susanna will put together proposal for library and other TF members.**

### **Announcement**

Susanna said that the Political Action Committee of the MV NAACP is planning a forum on microaggressions to take place in mid-November. (She is on both the Political Action Committee and the MV Branch's Executive Committee.)

The meeting was adjourned at about 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susanna J. Sturgis  
Recorder

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### **Text of Dan Waters's email about land acknowledgment statement, 7/30/23**

I'm familiar with the purpose and general content of a Land Statement. The MV Museum uses one at the start of every event, and I think it's a great gesture of raising and maintaining awareness of where our country came from.

That said, I hope the Task Force will be careful about precisely what it recommends to the West Tisbury Select Board. A municipality is different from a private nonprofit like the NAACP, Northwestern University, or the MV Museum, where the board of directors is understood to speak for the organization and its staff. Townspeople are not the employees of the Select Board.

I would have no problem asking the West Tisbury Select Board to deliver a Land Statement at the start of their meetings, *on their own behalf*. I wouldn't even really object if they wanted to make such a statement (again on their own behalf) at Town Meetings. However, please be careful about asking anybody to say words that represent the town as a whole. Speech is highly personal behavior. This is a bigger can of worms than asking for the Pride flag on the town flagpole.

It boils down to what it feels like in practice. In my short tenure as Town Moderator, my most nagging concern has been the fear that someone will insist on saying the Pledge of Allegiance at the start of Town Meetings. One year, a Cub Scout in uniform actually showed up minutes before the start of the meeting, ready to lead the Pledge. (He got a firm “no” and has not been back.) My argument against the Pledge, and against a prayer of any kind at Town Meeting, is that Town Meeting is our one chance to speak our hearts as individuals. Being asked to mouth words (or maintain stony silence) during a recital of presumably shared beliefs runs counter to that fundamental principle.

We definitely DO have our rituals: The Poet Laureate’s poem, and the reading of the names of the deceased. But those are both highly personal, much like the majority and minority views that get expressed during the course of a Town Meeting. They fit, somehow.

So, when discussing the Land Statement, please ask the Task Force to give special thought to WHO would deliver the statement, and on behalf of WHOM. Be especially leery of crafting a warrant article requiring a Land Statement. (Imagine watching your wording get amended on Town Meeting floor to include the Pledge and/or a prayer.)

I am mostly asking the TFAD to consider the practical implications of what they might propose, and the history of unintended consequences that sometimes flow from a perfectly well-meaning idea.