

Diversity & Inclusion Committee Meeting Minutes February 25, 2021

The Diversity and Inclusion Committee met on Feb 25, 2021 at 7 pm.

The Committee met in conformity with Resolution [2020-0234](#). (attached)

Present: Debbie Ablordeppey, Joan Bannan, (Township Committee Representative), Sophia Chadda, John Coelho (Chairperson), Jane Conklin, Nancy Cook, Sofia Fernandez, Ana Duarte-McCarthy, Goutham Puppala, Patrice Whitehouse.

Absent: Stacy Irvine sent her regrets

Chairperson John F Coelho welcomed the Committee, which stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

A motion for approval of the January Meeting Minutes was requested by the Chair.

Ana Duarte-McCarthy made a motion for approval of the minutes. Joan Bannan, seconded the motion.

There were no objections.

The meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Ana Duarte-McCarthy read a public statement regarding the rules of order as follows:

Adequate notice of this meeting was posted on the Bulletin Board in the Municipal Building, 1 Collyer Lane, Basking Ridge and on the Township website. Public Comment will be accepted at all meetings.

Speakers for Public Comment must state his/her name and address for the record and will be limited to 5 minutes each. Cooperation in adherence to these rules of order will ensure an orderly and respectful meeting.

Observations and Reflections

Each Committee member was then invited to share reflections from the previous meeting:

Clarification of previous remarks was made regarding positive examples of inclusivity from different faiths during the Annual Holiday Tree lighting celebration.

Reinforced the intent of the Committee to focus on dialogue, mutual respect, and outreach.

The Committee members aligned around the need to begin to focus on drafting core recommendations to the Township Committee by mid-year after research and developing a proposal.

Workstream Proposal

The Chairperson recommended creating three smaller working groups organized around key pillars:

- a. Framing the Committee's intent (What) The approach to further strengthen the Township as an exceptional welcoming place to live.
- b. Outreach (Who) Comprehensively identify and compile an inclusive listing of all associations/groups across the Township.
- c. Community engagement (How) The approach, forums and indicators of success of the recommendations

The Committee members shared thoughts regarding the workstreams and ideas to consider. These included:

1. Obtain a baseline of the current state of the community to further strengthen Bernard's Township as an exceptional welcoming place to live.
2. Data needs from municipality included understanding current demographics, diversity trends.
3. Learning about Bernard's Township unique "culture" and an opportunity to understand the "pulse" of the community through reviewing existing surveys (e.g; **Vision 2020**)
4. From records, it was noted that the Township enjoyed a diverse population; the degree of interaction and integration could be studied further.
5. This information would help determine commonalities that would define the core values of the community. It would also identify potential opportunities for improvement.
6. For gaining deeper insight, it was suggested to thoughtfully assess existing online forums of community groups with a realistic but balanced framework.
7. It was recommended to tap into established institutions, organizations for their input including, for example Ridge High School clubs & societies and Ridge Oaks Senior Housing and Veterans Housing.
8. Lastly, existing examples of successful models of societal engagement were noted including International Day at Mt Prospect Primary School; future engagement could include acknowledging and highlighting neighbors in a "storytellers" series and celebrations of culture at Charter Day in coming years.

The Committee members volunteered to work offline in each workstream with the intent of sharing their progress at the upcoming March 25th meeting.

The following members are associated with each workstream:

- a. **Framing the Intent:** Debbie Ablordeppey, Sofia Fernandez, John Coelho.
- b. **Outreach:** Nancy Cook, Sophia Chadda, Goutham Puppala, Patrice Whitehouse
- c. **Engagement:** Joan Bannan, Jane Conklin, Ana Duarte-McCarthy, Stacy Irvine

Chairperson would reach out to Stacy Irvine regarding participation in one of the workstreams.

Public Comment

Public comment was invited, and Mr. T. Edelstein and Mr. C. Smith offered their observations to the Committee.

Mr. Todd Edelstein informed the Committee of his opinion on meeting procedure and that public notice should be read first in order. He voiced concern regarding public access to the Zoom format obtained

through the Municipal Clerk and that the previous meeting could not be found on the Township YouTube channel.

He also noted from experience that previous Township surveys had resulted in a very low response rate and may not accurately reflect community sentiment.

The Committee noted his suggestions.

(Chairperson's note: per Municipal practice, only Township Committee, Planning Board, and Board of Adjustments are held on camera and recorded)

Mr. Cody Smith voiced concerns regarding surveys and active engagement of Ridge High School students as it could potentially create conflict between youth and their parents. He shared a recent example related to the cap and gown color selection at Ridge High School.

The Committee noted his concerns.

With no further business, the Committee adjourned with the next meeting scheduled for March 25, 2021, 7pm with members of the public invited to attend via Zoom.

**Submitted by Sofia Fernandez
On behalf of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee**