

Diversity & Inclusion Committee Meeting Minutes March 25, 2021

The Diversity and Inclusion Committee (D&I) met on March 25, 2021 at 7 pm.

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

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

Absent: none

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

John Coelho 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.

Chairperson's Opening Meeting Statement

A clarification regarding the Committee's freedom to operate was discussed. According to the Resolution, (attached) the Committee must advise the Township Committee at least twice annually, on opportunities to continue to promote and build on harmony among Township residents. The Committee will plan an initial meeting presenting a strategic plan and proposal to the Township Committee with recommendations for engagement. Thereafter the initiatives would be supported by the D&I committee and the Township will be informed as per resolution. However, if there are events or initiatives that require funding, approval from the Township will be required consistent with other committees in town.

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

Joan Bannan made a motion for approval of the minutes. Ana Duarte-McCarthy, seconded the motion. There were no objections. The meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Introduction to Three Work Streams Report by Each Group

- a) **Framing the Committee's intent (the "what"): the approach to further strengthen the Township as an exceptional welcoming place to live.**

Workstream members outlined their draft of the Framing document.

The Committee aligned on the current draft in principle. Suggestions were made to further clarify the Mission statement and Objectives which will be refined.

Action Items:

Statement of “what is diversity” will be further defined by the Framework group and included in the updated version.

b) Outreach (“who”): Comprehensively identify and compile an inclusive listing of all associations/groups across the Township.

Workstream members compiled an adaptable spreadsheet of a broad range of organizations within the township, with identified points of contact personnel for future engagement. In some circumstances, designated representatives were not available. Additionally, other organizations (e.g. Community in Crises) that have reach into Bernards township but are not located in Bernards were included. The Committee made note that not all communities were represented, including, among others, underrepresented minorities, and people with disabilities. Additional suggestions were made regarding other opportunities for outreach (e.g. newly forming organizations, existing student groups, linking to upcoming events in town.)

Workstream members proposed the need to raise awareness of the D&I Committee and role within the community. Creation of a distinctive logo & branding themes for the Township site and/or attire were considered enabling broader awareness when engaging with residents at events, which would in turn elicit and support deeper engagement with the community.

c) Community Engagement (“how”): the approach; forums and indicators of success of the recommendations.

Workstream members reported marked progress in that groups and individuals had already reached out to Committee members (GSA, PEC, Asian Am Club).

They proposed developing a brief “sentiment survey” issued by the Township for a baseline understanding of resident’s perspective on questions related to the strengths and areas for improvement related to diversity, equity and inclusion, with potential further narrowing of inquiry to individual characteristics, where permitted.

The greater D&I team discussed the need to appropriately define terms (e.g. diversity) for the public to uniformly interpret survey questions. Workstream members felt that in-person engagement to advocate with different groups were more likely to increase the level of survey responses as opposed to only direct mail which historically reported low responses.

The Committee highlighted the rapidly planned upcoming “Rally & Vigil to Protect Asian Lives” on May 27th in downtown Basking Ridge enabled through members of the Committee as an opportunity to express solidarity and advocacy, which had gained support from the Mayor and Municipality.

Action Items: Group would finalize survey, and also include validated “community engagement” metrics.

Public Comment

Public comment was invited, and Mr. T. Edelstein, Ms. N. D’Andrea, Ms. S. Yu, Mr. C. Smith & Ms. C. Santini offered their observations to the Committee.

Mr. Todd Edelstein suggested having Committee members wear name tags or the same color for the Vigil on Saturday for greater awareness. He noted the potential challenge accessing the Meeting Zoom format obtained through the Municipal Clerk and suggested the meeting ID should be readily available.

Ms. Nancy D'Andrea complimented the Committee's discussion and suggested engaging the LGBTQ Advisory Board of Somerset County for additional suggestions or as a contact. She suggested ideas such as flying Pride Flag for Pride month, tables at events, and speaking at the Vigil on Saturday March 27th.

Ms. Shannon Yu one of the organizers of the "Rally & Vigil to Protect Asian Lives" sincerely thanked the D&I Committee for their receptivity, responsiveness and offered the Chair the opportunity to speak at the event which was respectfully referred to Mayor Fields and Committee Joan Bannan.

Mr. Cody Smith commented about outreach to Ridge High School students and about locating the Zoom link to the Committee.

Ms. Catherine Santini acknowledged the Committee's steady progress and recommended that the library be considered as a location for future programs and engagement as it has been recently used for similar events.

Unfinished Business

Team members discussed the possibility to align activities, engagement with recognized "Celebration Months" (e.g. Women's History, Pride, Black History, Hispanic History) and consider various months to highlight diversity.

With no further business, the Committee adjourned with the next meeting scheduled for **April 29, 7pm** with members of the public invited to attend via Zoom.

Any member of the public is encouraged to reach out to the Committee via this forum or directly to Committee members to voice opinion and/or suggestions.

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