

Diversity & Inclusion Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
April 29, 2021

The Diversity and Inclusion Committee (D & I) met on April 29, 2021.

The meeting opened at 7pm, included a Closed Session.

The Committee met in conformity with Resolution 2020-0234.

Present: Debbie Ablordepey, Sophia Chadda, John Coelho (Chairperson), Jane Conklin, Nancy Cook, Sofia Fernandez, Stacey Irvine, Ana Duarte-McCarthy, Goutham Puppala, Patrice Whitehouse

Absent: Joan Bannan (Township Committee Representative)

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

Chairperson's Opening Meeting Statement

Excellent progress had been made on the three work-streams by each group with open dialogue, receptivity and clear deliverables.

A motion for approval of the March Meeting Minutes was requested by the Chair. Motion made for approval of Minutes and seconded by committee members. There were no objections. The meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Final discussions on three work-streams by each group

Chairman reported that that the D&I Committee would be presenting their recommendations live to the Township Committee on June 15, 2021 with a pre-read submitted ahead.

a. Framing the Committee's intent (the “what”): The approach to further strengthen the Township as an exceptional welcoming place to live.

After finalizing Vision and Objectives, work-stream members considered input to further refine the definitions of Diversity, Inclusion and Equity set forth below:

Diversity is the representation of our varied personal characteristics and identities* collectively *and* as individuals. We seek to proactively engage, understand, value, respect and draw on a variety of perspectives. We believe solutions can be achieved by affirming our similarities, as well as by finding value in our differences.

Inclusion nurtures a culture of belonging by actively inviting the contribution and participation of all.

Equity seeks to support fair treatment, impartiality, and equality of opportunity to information and resources based on an environment built on mutual respect and trust.

*race/color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, thinking and communication styles, among others.

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

Work-stream members discussed a re-organization of this comprehensive list with a new subheading for key contacts of each organization ensuring the Township can deepen their access and communicate with these groups. Further, the various groups would be better informed to connect and engage with each other, and foster collaboration as we emerge from the pandemic.

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

The Committee discussed further refinement of a proposed brief “sentiment” survey to establish a baseline of adult resident’s perceptions

related to strengths and areas for improvement to build on. Suggestions included incorporating definitions (listed earlier) regarding Diversity and Inclusion into the survey as reference. Other suggestions included open fields to allow residents completing the survey to write in their core values.

The group was receptive to the suggestions and observations on simplifying the language to garner interest and for maximum public comprehension.

Additional ideas for broadening community engagement were proposed, including:

1. Unique branding/logo was further discussed that could graphically enhance the existing motif on the D&I landing page on the Bernards Township website and create an art competition to design one similar to those held at the Environmental Center..
 2. Post a monthly calendar recognizing heritage on the D&I Committees landing page;
 3. Record brief vignettes on video from the public related to their heritage and backgrounds to build awareness of town's rich fabric of diversity
 4. Explore means to allow further access for those homebound to attend and engage in certain township meetings and events live, where appropriate and recognizing the length of different meetings, enabling a less isolated, better informed and engaged community.
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Committee member Goutham Puppala was tasked with researching different survey platforms to improve the resident participation in the proposed survey, which could be standalone or part of the annual Township survey.

His study revealed:

- that paid platforms such as SurveyMonkey and SurveyGizmo allow for greater security and the ability for open ended questions.
- Google Forms is simple to use, free and enjoyed overall good user experience.
- Google Forms responses to survey questions are captured in an excel spreadsheet.
- multiple choice questions are used but preset responses could be created.

- a survey link could be readily posted to various sites such as social media, and the township website for forwarded via email to ensure broad dissemination.

It was recommended that Google Forms was the preferred option for the survey platform if the Township had an existing account.

Public Comment

Public comment was invited.

Ms. Nancy D'Andrea commented on Somerset County LGBTQ Advisory Board's recent event. A further comment was made regarding public attendance & participation at Township Committee meetings.

Mr. Todd Edelstein commented on a demographic question in the survey and further on attendance & participation at Township Committee meetings.

Mr. Cody Smith echoed Mr. Edelstein's comments regarding a demographic question in the survey and further commented on in person presence at Township Committee meetings.

With no further business, the Committee adjourned with the next meeting scheduled for May 27, 2021, 7:00pm to finalize their presentation to the Township Committee.

Unfinished Business

Follow up with Mayor Fields and Committee Representative Joan Bannan regarding the presence of D&I Committee members at Meet-the-Mayor Series event for Asian American residents. The Committee noted the overall positive feedback from the Asian Rally and when conditions permitted considered planning an event for Veterans and Seniors who were isolated and disproportionately affected over the pandemic.

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: Patrice Whitehouse on behalf of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee