

Diversity & Inclusion Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
July 29, 2021

The Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (D & I) met for their first in-person meeting on Thursday July 29, 2021.

The meeting opened at 7pm.

The Committee met in conformity with Resolution 2020-0234.

Present: Debbie Ablordeppey, Sophia Chadda (via Zoom), John Coelho (Chairperson), Jane Conklin, Nancy Cook, Sofia Fernandez (via Zoom), Patrice Whitehouse, Joan Harris (Township Committee Representative)

Excused: Stacey Irvine, Ana Duarte-McCarthy, Goutham Puppala

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

Chairperson's Opening Meeting Statement

Noted communication from Mayor acknowledging receipt of mid-term report and that Township Committee is reviewing the report and recommendations and will respond when they have the opportunity.

At the most recent Township Committee Meeting Committee-woman Joan Bannan formally requested that the recommendations be placed on the agenda for public discussion.

A motion for approval of the May Meeting Minutes was requested by the Chair. Motion made for approval of Minutes and seconded by committee members. Meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Committee Discussion

Reflections on recent Township events (Asian Rally, Summer Social, Farmstead Arts events, County LGBTQ session) and ideation for next phase.

-S. Chadda began by noting external feedback was generally favorable – however *needed greater awareness* so that more residents realized the existence of Committee.

-S. Fernandez concurred and reported positive mentions of Committee.

-N. Cook offered a recommendation to request the mayor to introduce the D&I Committee at one of her monthly Meet-the-Mayor series to expand community awareness and raised a central question related to articulating the Committee's Purpose and that *there needed to be more focus* to be able to respond to our role for the community.

-D. Ablordeppey cited a favorable response and excitement from her personal interactions including connecting individually. She cited importance of *"engagement as a core purpose"*.

-J. Bannon suggested adding photos of Committee members to the landing page for ease of identification, and tools such as educational events with recommended speakers sponsored by the D&I Committee.

-J. Conklin who originally received the resident communication related the Asian Rally, felt the outreach to date had been valuable. She noted that it was good that the town and county all came together to work with the community to make this happen and that there were speakers from all levels of government and was impressed with the students who spoke about their experiences and vision. She also suggested the D&I Committee post various events on our website that highlight events in both the town and county so that people who are interested in learning about diverse groups and/or connecting with groups can attend so they may feel connected, *recognizing it may take time to build identity, connection, and relationships* across groups. Finally, she acknowledged the benefits of Zoom remote meetings for the D&I Committee to address potential remote accessibility issues and that it presented an opportunity for the Township Committee for those who might not be able to physically attend.

-P. Whitehouse reported residents were happy to see Committee at the BRIC event and noted positive feedback and exchange from existing and new residents to township; “family-oriented” perception of township and did not receive any reports of problems. She also noted Committee members role from future early outreach *may be to coordinate requests to appropriate Municipal Committees* as done for the Asian Rally.

-J. Coelho concurred with collective feedback and recommended an idea for organized groups to share their learnings with those starting out. Example: Basking Ridge Indian Community (BRIC) given their organizational maturity could host a best-practice session open for others. Reminded Committee to continue to ideate around engaging and supporting isolation of the elderly by bridging interaction with youth groups remotely.

Actions:

- J Conklin volunteered to take the lead and reach out to other Committee members to facilitate and coordinate best-practice session. Possible venue Community Center.
- Committee agreed to recommend a calendar of the federal government months recognizing heritage to post on the D&I Committees landing page.
- As an action, finalize One-Community database and prepare a draft introduction letter requesting permission to post all entities and contact information and facilitate networking of groups.
- Committee endorsed J. Bannon’s suggestion for a booth at the Somerset County Diversity Festival on Oct 9, 11.30am – 4:00pm on Grove Street in Somerville, NJ with an action for the Chair to pursue appropriate permit, insurance and planning by Aug 13. Request for digital photos of Township events to be viewed on laptops or posters at Festival.
- While in-person meetings have resumed, Zoom will also continue to be used for D&I Committee meetings to address access concerns.

Public Comment

Public comment was invited.

Mr. Todd Edelstein appreciated the first in-person session and the Committee’s general efforts.

Mr. Cody Smith inquired as to the timing and disclosure of the recommendations made to the Township Committee.

With no further business, the Committee adjourned with the next meeting scheduled for August 26, 2021, 7:00pm.

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: J. Coelho on behalf of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee