

WHCA Meeting 2 Minutes  
Special meeting

Role Call:

Present: Last, Perno, Flemmig, Hoskie, Patterson, Hamilton, McGee, Bane, Johnston

Absent: Rossi

Introduction of members

Reading of quotes (Morrison, Kendi, ?)

Public Session:

Samantha DeGennaro 97 Holcombe street

Hispanic, Arab Speaking community, need for language resources (intimidated by public speaking) we need to find ways to include them

Mission Statement: tabled, Chair McGee asks us to reiterate why we are here.

Liz: we came together under premise that racism exists. Calls for 4 norms for talking about race: stay engaged, expect discomfort, share your truth, expect and accept non-closure.

Mike: wants collaboration, wants writers to take the feedback suggestions and wants positive environment to work on this, we are saying that BoE has a racist curriculum. Wants diverse curriculum. Wants wording to bring people together. Discussed resolution language: Citizen vs resident, agrees that cancer should be added to public health portion

McGee: agrees with create vs ensure, likes change of citizen to resident, wants to include cancer, all resolutions researched are aggressive. Racism is an institution...by not talking about these things we are supporting racist curriculum. We need to create a curriculum that is representative. Outside of February Black History Month. Exclusionary hiring. Cites Boe Teacher demographics: 1 Asian, 16 Latino, 17 African American, 526 White teachers. Cites numbers for City employees: 4 Asian, 11 Latino, 22 African American, 311 white. Racially diverse town, teaching force and work force do not reflect that. Disappointing, frustrating. We are here bc we care about our community.

Perno: Against "exclusionary practices", WHPD hiring practices not exclusionary. Blind application process. wants that language out because of minority recruitment work WHPD has done.

McGee: exclusion refers to specific system

Bridgette: supports the resolution in general but finds language divisive. She called BoE, Fire Dept, was told Allingtown had no black men pass the test. We have to fix that. Minority recruitment. How are they defining that statement. Perception is key. Write something that people of West Haven can read and understand. Called Neil. Equal opportunity employment

effort, diversity work has been done. Writing a whole new practice to try to recruit. They advertise in places that help them recruit minorities. Do we know how many applicants apply and are rejected?. Sounds like we are accusing departments. Shared resolution with those she trusts: prosecutor, teacher, sons who objected to the language.

Brandon: Never met a racist that said they are racist. Never met anyone who said they disagree with diversity. Yet, problems persist. Racism automatic emotional response, despite diversity, the problem remains. Racism is a problem but I am not responsible for it. Racism needs to be actively called out. Persisted. Language sounds accusatory because it has to be. Data has been stated. We don't have the representation. Inequities have sustained. How are we going to fix it? How are we giving people something to point to? Union contract: 11 admin should be of color. We don't have one. We know Chasms exist. We need to call them out explicitly. Historical reality of 400 years that has subjugated black people. If we can't be anti-racist, why are we here? Mentions the diversity liaison hire at high school. Novel effort. Not enough for the entire system. Huge minority groups in WH. Can't be job of one person. What support is being provided. Sites disproportionate disciplinary rates data by race. Diversity is comfortable. We are here because there is a problem. Collaborative.....community needs to be challenged. Mitigate for historical reality. Hence a pointed resolution.

Liz: appreciate need to make doc palatable for buy-in. Insulting to say WH residents won't be able to read/accept this. What would happen if we were not defensive, but rather asked: what can I do? Anti-racist curriculum is pedagogical. A push towards change. Not an insult to WH BoE. It is happening elsewhere. Other resolutions are pointed. This is hard to talk about. Policies vs people. Addresses Perno's aforementioned policies. Perhaps those policies could help other depts. Need more diverse teacher force. Research shows students do better with representative teachers. Wishes her kids had teachers that look like them. Thinks resolution should be collaborative. Writers should consider the audience, but certain words need to remain.

Lee: Applauds McGee, thankless task for no money...seeking positive resolution. Question of motivation. Says he is part of city hiring. Cites Perno's recruitment. Shares 1947 Jackie Robinson analogy, wants diverse workforce, we may be leaving qualified players/human resources on the bench. Does not want doc to be a feel good document. Psychiatric Dsm included to be declared mental disorder. Goal oriented resolution. Mentions his perspective as white male, doesn't want to discuss hiring practices with POC if there hasn't been a diverse process. Resolution should be positive: We need more diversity because.....not saying we are racist. I want to be viewed as someone who is not racist. Effect change. We don't want to leave anybody on the bench because that would make WH a better place; everyone can feel good about that. Perhaps include annual reports re:hiring, etc. How did you get the word out? We want to feel good. Public health, public safety, park and rec, public work. Use reports to start asking the important questions. Effectuate change. We want people like me, when we face you, to feel good. Boe: we are clearly leaving valuable resources on the bench. Are we documenting processes? I want resolution to affect how we deliver resources.

McGee: Desire was to be collaborative. Desire was to work together. My work in ensemble and community engagement lends to that. This was a task people ran from. Try understand rather than defensiveness. Some who reached out asked questions in desire to move forward. But Silence from those I serve with. Knows there is an idea that she is holding on to the doc, rather than hanging on to the idea. Thanks Johnston for help.

Mike: resolution is important. Thank you for putting it forward. Looked at others city resolutions, they are similar. But.....we have to have those conversations after passing the resolution. Everyone needs to be comfortable. We need to be able to get departments in the room to work with us. Some language might discourage that. Res must say we have a problem. How do we fix it? Bring departments together. What can we do better? Don't want to put a doc out that is accusatory. Let's ask the questions rather than accusing. Suggests search Committees. Likes Hamden resolution bc it is not accusatory. Let's pass resolution then pull groups in to have tough conversations.

Perno: suggestion for resolution: make it positive. Change the language. WHPD tries to recruit but not competitive without pension. Inclusion is selling point...what PD can offer new hires. Inclusion vs exclusion. Used to have 500 applicants, down to 200. No pension, low pay. Police occupation not most popular in current protest climate. Change focus of resolution to be on what we want, not what we have done wrong. WHPD Welcomes diversity of applicants. Has had conversations about how to do things better. You'll get a more positive reaction with positivity.

Liz: how to move forward. Would it help to ID all language that makes res not pass in committee? Worried about time.

Brandon: Discussion is necessary. Wants to hear all proposed suggestions/changes.

Bane: The leverage is love and vision, but needs diagnostic. Which is uncomfortable. Diagnostic and love. Doctor metaphor. Enjoyed the dialogue. Problem/solution. We can work through this. Resolution must have diagnosis and inspiring language. They believe WH can rise to this. Attentiveness and engagement. Applauds writers, committee, public members watching. Visionary language could call the city to persevere.

Interruptions from public.....McGee states out of order. Suggests audience members email her ideas since she missed public session opportunity. McGee suggests honoring Brandon's request to hear all suggestions from committee,

Suggestions heard:

Mike: Problem with Exclusion, if anti-racist curriculum exists, I am ok, but suggested diverse.

Liz: basic difference from diverse to anti-racist curriculum is celebratory vs activism. Anti-biased curriculum moves beyond race. Liz's suggestions: climate change/pollution, cancer and air quality. Wants buy in. Not attacking BoE. Shining light on problems. Wants more diverse faculty.

Willing to work on document. Doesn't want to remove words: race, racist, anti-racist. Doesn't object to removing word exclusionary.

Trenee: Encouraged by discussion. Supports language of anti-racist because it shows stance against racism. Feels personal to have that word rejected. Neutrality is a stance that does nothing. Shares story about being teaching artist to illustrate how anti-racist teaching can work with small kids. WH education could do more to encourage students to read multicultural lit. Past and future are important. Analogy/History of A-A not swimming, etc. Urban leagues to teach swimming. First need to identify the problem. Open to changing language.

Robbin: flexible. Unity and community. Change without the taking away integrity. This document is the teeth. Document cannot be untruthful. This hurts. This is a painful conversation for those experiencing racism and those who are asking if they're racist. We have to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. I sat with 2 white males. They wanted to understand more. They said Thank-you for talking to us. Glad West Haven is doing something. We need to keep growing. City has to be open to everybody. Diversity makes America great.

Brandon: perspective on comments. Negativity. Accusatory. Structural problem. We are here within it. Specify anti racist, otherwise complicit. We know the facts exist. We have to be specific. Recommend regarding exclusionary phrase: to mitigate for exclusion. Prevent exclusion. Anti-racist isn't diversity. Diversity is already the goal. No need to list the facts of inequity. They are here. You can't just say it is negative to say anti-racist. We have to be specific. Integrity of doc must remain. Action items are the goals. Already listed. We want to be anti-racist because structurally WH is no different than any other place in this nation.

Bridgette: not defensive, but passionate. Resolution out 2 months ago. Held back feedback because she'd see it again at City Council. On this committee we can disagree. Difference of opinion does not mean lack of support for resolution. Wants to have dialogue. Read multiple resolutions. Huge fan of Hamden resolution and New Britain. Doesn't have a problem with the term anti-racist. Believes the way it is written, the term is not understandable. No intention to insult anybody. Not defensive, but passionate. Mentions having kids of color and having been in relationships with men of color. Has Friends and family. Hears their stories. Mentions daughter's experience in stores being different from her peers. Shares that after George Floyd lost his cried on the phone with Hamilton. Sees and believes racism is a public health crisis. Writing it differently so that the public understands and knows. Suggests "Historically accurate curriculum that includes multiple perspectives for gender, race and culture" Suggests work cited page, Where does your data come from? Revealing sources would make it more credible. Believes people may not understand it. Not about insulting, it's about putting out something that everyone can read.

Fleming: not against the words. Present more positively. We will get more people on board.

Perno: oppose exclusionary policies. He will focus on 2nd page items 1-6. Doc can be read and interpreted many different ways. But he is focused on action items.

Brandon: keep integrity of the document. Data is credible. Proposed: mitigate for the perception of exclusion that could be indicated by the disparities that exist.

Pastor Bane: glossary of common definitions. Palatable and understandable. Residents: we need your trust. We need to build and protect that trust. The more we can make this inviting the better. Offending the mind exposes the heart. Define the word anti-racist in the context.

Robbin: what's next? Are we ready to go on? Revise. Recs considered. Back to committee. Next meeting. When will it go to the council?

Lee: we have to meet to vote.

Brandon: challenge the majority to influence change for minority. How can the minority be promoted?

Decided upon Special meeting. Wednesday 7:00 12/2 129 Bullhill lane (large white building)

McGee:

Sub-committees Assigned:

Education: Liz, Brandon, Trenee

Civil Service: Liz, Carl, Robbin

Community Engagement: Bane, Bridgette, Perno, Brandon

Rule and regulation: Trenee, Mike, Robbin

Closing remarks

Liz: thanks. I know this is hard.

Mike: I want this committee to be successful

Brandon: thank-you. Everybody here because of the reality of history. Not about animosity. We need to listen to the perspective. Adjusting realities.

Robbin: I feel good. West Haven is moving forward. Thank everybody.

Trenee: WH potential, I am grateful for the conversation. Challenging and expansive. Youth focused and youth centered.

Motion to Adjourn: Mike, seconded by Perno

Adjourned: 9:14

Email. Mike Dimassa: special meeting. Email date and space. Gateway Christain Fellowship.