

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Selectman Tim Kaelin
Asst Town Administrator Becca Meekins
Mary Leach
Virginia Simms George
Mariam Ibrahim
Shika Holland

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Hamilton Soriano
Lauren Bailey-Jones
Diedra Wrighting

OPEN AND WELCOME FROM MEETING HOST, Assistant Town Administrator Becca Meekins:

Selectman Kaelin welcomed the committee for their second meeting of the Northborough Diversity & Inclusion Committee Meeting on January 7th just past 7 PM. Becca Meekins followed with provisions of the open meeting law.

Ms. Meekins: Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020, orders suspending certain provisions of the open meeting law General Laws Chapter 38 Section 18 in the Governor's March 15, 2020 order, imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place this meeting will be conducted via remote participation. No in person attendance by members of the public will be permitted. This meeting will be streamed live but will not have an option for public participation. To view or listen only, please visit the Town of Northborough's web page which will bring you to the Town of Northborough's You Tube link.

OPEN DISCUSSION:

Selectman Kaelin moved the committee vote to accept the minutes of December 3, 2020, meeting.

Virginia Simms George asked if pursuant to open law if the minutes can include as much detail where the document is discoverable and also asked if everyone's vote needed to be recorded.

Selectman Kaelin responded that his understanding is the notes are to capture the significant points of the discussion and spirit of the meeting not necessarily to capture verbatim dictation. Selectman Kaelin confirmed everyone's vote needs to be recorded individually.

Ms. Simms George moved the Committee vote to approve the December 3, 2020 meeting minutes.

Ms. Meekins seconded motion. Roll call was taken as follows:

Ms. Ibrahim: Aye	Ms. Simms George: Aye
Ms. Leach: Aye	Ms. Meekins: Aye
Ms. Holland: Aye	Selectman Kaelin: Aye

The meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

Selectman Kaelin addressed the monthly Police Report distributed to the committee and referenced page 3 regarding ongoing hiring process. The Chief has made it a priority to diversify the police department and is including Fred George in this process. The safety of the community and his department are a top priority. The Chief has shared with Selectman Kaelin that diversity makes his officers safer. There are many steps that are state mandated that candidates need to get through to get on the department and often that is where the hiccups come in, such as the Physical Assessment Test. The Physical Assessment Test is out of the town's control and rather is controlled by the state.

Ms. Holland asked if the step to pass the Physical Assessment Test can be taken again or is the candidate provided feedback if they fail the test. Is there an opportunity to bring them back?

Selectman Kaelin does not know and will follow-up with the Chief.

Selectman Kaelin asked the committee what questions do we need to answer for our report to the Board of Selectmen? How can we make Northborough more diverse because we can have diversity without inclusion? How do we make our community more welcoming to people of different backgrounds?

Ms. Leach added the committee had touched on good points on recruitment during our last meeting for the police and fire departments as well as the town hall, and this is the foundation. But we also need to ensure our current residents feel welcome and included. How do we make those who are already living here feel more welcome and included?

Ms. Simms George added we have opportunities for D&I training, seminars, or workshops for people to understand some of the issues a community will face. Once we work on some of these things, we will get more people to look at Northborough because they will see we are encouraging diversity.

Selectman Kaelin added being an inclusive community is the biggest way that we can attract and be more welcoming to those of different backgrounds.

Ms. Leach asked are there business owners who are in a minority group who we can get involved in our efforts?

Selectman Kaelin responded that is going to be a key point for our recommendation to the Board. It's not only the residents, it is the small businesses, the large businesses, everybody we can get involved.

Ms. Leach asked what is the best way to approach that?

Selectman Kaelin suggested Karen Chapman, Corridor 9/495 Chamber of Commerce and will reach out to invite her to a meeting as a guest. We can ask her about programs to help minority or woman owned businesses who would like to open in Northborough. How can we help to make that happen? Education,

training, and communication are huge pieces of this. Are we doing enough to include everyone in town? Are we including enough people with the decorations we are putting up in town? It is part of the culture of the community.

Ms. Leach asked if the signage in the center of town is used to recognize different holidays celebrated by different cultures.

Ms. Simms George responded no. The sign is managed by the Lions Club. To post something, we need to submit a request.

Selectman Kaelin added he knows the people who run the Lions Club and they are wonderful. Feels the Lions Club would be happy to participate.

Ms. Leach asked if there is a cost involved.

Ms. Simms George responded no, it is free.

Ms. Leach asked again about what are the main questions that we need to answer?

Ms. Simms George emphasized we need to look at both diversity and inclusion. We also want to look at gender issues.

Selectman Kaelin agreed it needs to be inclusive including the elderly and handicapped. How do we do a better job with that?

Ms. Meekins added one of the words that comes up a lot lately is "equity". Getting everyone on the same level so they have access to all of the programs. There are a lot of little changes we can make that will have a big impact. As we make small changes, more people will become interested. Such as flying the pride flag in June. An easy thing to do.

Ms. Simms George suggested if we tie this in with what Mary said and we go to the Lions Club and indicate we want to recognize June as Pride Month, this could be very useful with our efforts.

Ms. Meekins added her office is working on a Town Common Policy. They have received requests from different members of different religious communities and have just said no to everything. Perhaps it is time to revisit this. If we are going to put lights on a tree, maybe we should also think about having a menorah, too. These are little recommendations that can go a long way.

Ms. Simms George asked Becca if is this something this committee can help with? That could be a good place to start. The Common wants to do a ribbon cutting.

Ms. Meekins indicated there is a draft of the Town Common Policy that can be distributed before the next meeting for discussion at our next meeting.

Selectman Kaelin added there's also Black History Month. Thinking ahead to our presentation to the BOS next winter, these are easy wins. If we start our recommendations, this is step one – easy things just a phone call or an email away. Then we expand on those. Part of the recommendation will be to keep this committee in place. We will need a committee like this to aid with implementation of some of the recommendations (communication, training, etc.). We start with easy to implement/easy wins then move to larger things.

Ms. Simms George recommended the list put out by the government which recognizes diversity months/days. They are all listed. We could use this as a start.

Ms. Holland added as we begin to get the word out, we can start to get business owners on board. Perhaps they display the logo showing this is an inclusive place. It will grow and highlight what our team is doing.

Ms. Leach suggested we reach out to Middle School students to create a logo/symbol to represent our D&I efforts.

Ms. Simms George added that at our last meeting, we discussed we do not need to focus on the schools. They have a diversity committee, and they are doing their work. We need to focus on things such as recruiting and training in town hall, making people aware of what the inclusion and diversity issues are. Added she likes the idea of using the sign and developing a policy for town common. I think the schools are doing their work. We can pass the suggestion on to the school representatives.

Selectman Kaelin added to Mary's point this is similar to what we do with Assabet Valley students for building projects in town. This gives the students an opportunity to participate in a real world experience. Agrees the idea to have a logo available for businesses to put up would be terrific.

Ms. Simms George mentioned the Town of Burlington is hiring a Director of Diversity, Inclusion & Equity (paid position). A lot of towns are coming up with committees and leaders since the George Floyd incident.

Ms. Meekins shared an article in the magazine *Public Management*. One question the article asks is: "What advice do you have for small local governments trying to create an equitable and inclusive environment?" It adds, don't ask how do I attract diverse talent or how can I increase diversity in my organization. Instead ask what it means to be inclusive of other races, cultures, and perspectives. It's not about seeking answers externally. It's about looking inward and performing organizational analysis."

What are we not doing that we should be doing? What is it that this group has some control over? Implementing training, hiring tactics, hiring through different mediums, etc. Can the schools be a resource for us. The schools are likely doing things that the town is not doing. Added, unsure if the Northborough schools are doing anything.

Ms. Simms George added the Northborough Southborough Regional Schools began a Diversity & Inclusion Committee and asked Mariam if she is aware of anything.

Ms. Ibrahimi responded she does not know anything about it but knows people in it. Offered to reach out to find out what conversations they are having. She added, when we ask ourselves, how can we attract more diversity, we fall more into performative things. We need to look at what we can do for the people who are living in Northborough. That will show we are a diverse town.

Ms. Simms George asked how do we reach people in our community? Applefest is an event that brings people out.

Ms. Holland asked if there are opportunities for us to host a women owned market/event to bring people together. Farmers markets typically bring diversity. People may be more interested in something like this where people are supporting a cause.

Ms. Simms George responded there is the annual craft fair at Melican in October. And there is Applefest which mobilizes the town for three days. There was discussion on a farmers market. There is opportunity. Maybe we reach out to the Community Affairs Committee for their thoughts.

Ms. Holland suggested we each come up with two ideas and it could ultimately be what we represent. This is great brainstorming, but we need to begin getting something on paper.

Selectman Kaelin responded this is excellent for the committee's next meeting agenda to recap on short term and discuss mid- to long-term goals.

Ms. Holland added we could potentially do a shared source such as Google docs but we would need to ensure we are following open meeting law.

Selectman Kaelin asked Becca does Google docs violate open meeting laws?

Ms. Meekins responded as long people are not having a discussion over Google docs, she feels the committee may be able to do it. Will research and follow-up.

Ms. Ibrahimi is it a violation if we make it a public document?

Ms. Meekins unsure if it is a violation but will check and follow-up.

Selectman Kaelin added the town just went through the Master Plan process. The Master Plan is a recommendation. There is no obligation for the town to act on anything within the Master Plan. It acts as a guide for the future that is ultimately what residents want the town to look like in the future. The document is complete and is available on the town web site.

We are starting the implementation committee within the next month or two. Selectman Kaelin indicated he will be on the committee and will have an eye toward goals we are trying to achieve here. Listening or participating in the meetings may help us gain an understanding of what this committee can do to help that committee with things that are in the best interest of everyone.

Selectman Kaelin also addressed the regularity for which the committee will be meeting. Once a month is good. Once we have a scope of ideas to work with, we can team up -- two people can work on one idea, another two can work on another idea, etc. We can offer feedback on each team's respective area at our monthly meeting.

Ms. Leach asked about which day we will be meeting as there was some concern with Thursdays.

Ms. Meekins will review the Zoom schedule to see how we can best accommodate all members of the committee.

Selectman Kaelin asked if there is anyone, in addition to Karen Chapman from the Chamber, the committee would like to invite to participate in our meetings. Perhaps the School Superintendent? Chief of Police? Fire Chief? Town Administrator?

Ms. Simms George responded perhaps we begin with the Police Chief. He has been working on this for years. Perhaps he can share his dilemma, and perhaps we can help him as well.

Selectman Kaelin will put together a list for our next meeting of people we'd like to invite. We can include experts from outside of our community and added perhaps Deidra may know of someone at Northeastern.

Ms. Meekins suggested reaching out to a larger city that has a more established diversity department and talk with them. This could help to keep us on track with our scope. Becca will look at towns that have established D&I managers and follow-up with the committee.

Selectman Kaelin agreed this is a great idea adding it would also be great to hear about any mistakes they have made. This would be enormously helpful.

Ms. Simms George added managers or committees. This is a great idea.

Ms. Ibrahim added this would be a great way to learn.

Selectman Kaelin asked if there is anything else anyone would like to discuss in the meeting.

Ms. Meekins responded that in doing research for this committee she found towns are spending money on DEI plans, especially schools. Depending on how far along we get in a year, this is something we may think about recommending. Yes, it will cost money, but a professional comes in, looks at everything, and essentially prepares a master plan on DEI.

Selectman Kaelin indicated he has not been able to find consultants that work for municipalities. There is such an enormous difference between public, private, education, and municipal. The rules are different. This is definitely something for the committee to consider as a recommendation.

Ms. Meekins added there is a government group which is an arm of the International City County Managers Association that focuses on diversity. They may have resources we can tap into. Becca will research and follow-up.

Selectman Kaelin agreed this is a great idea.

Ms. Ibrahim suggested an open forum for people in the community to participate and share what they would like to see in this committee adding perhaps we create a social media page dedicated to this committee to mobilize the community to participate.

Selectman Kaelin asked Becca if there is any reason why we cannot have a Facebook page?

Ms. Meekins responded that social media is subject to public records because we are an extension of a government body. Nothing can be deleted. We must keep records of everything. It subjects us to public records' requests. Someone will have to monitor the page, because again, it is a representation of the town. If it is information gathering, that is something the committee members could do on their own social media pages to leverage where they are already at (number of followers) – versus starting something new and finding followers.

Ms. Leach added she is on the Northborough Moms page and **Ms. Holland** added she is as well. Mary mentioned Liz Nolan does a very nice job of managing that page. Mary and Shika will work together and follow-up with the committee.

Ms. Meekins asked Mariam about connecting with the younger residents in the community. The youth will share a different perspective than the Northborough moms.

Ms. Ibrahimi will reach out to her connections and will follow-up with the committee.

ADJOURNMENT:

Selectman Kaelin moved the Committee vote to adjourn.

Ms. Sims George seconded the motion.

Roll call taken as follows:

Ms. Holland: Aye	Ms. Simms George: Aye
Ms. Leach: Aye	Selectman Kaelin: Aye
Ms. Ibrahimi: Aye	Ms. Meekins: Aye

Meeting is adjourned at 8:06 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

by Mary Leach

Clerk, Northborough Diversity & Inclusion Committee

Documents referenced during the meeting:

Town of Northborough D&I Committee December 3, 2020, Meeting Minutes

Town of Northborough Monthly Police Report

Town of Northborough Master Plan