

ALL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Selectman Tim Kaelin
Asst Town Administrator Becca Meekins
Hamilton Soriano
Mary Leach
Virginia Simms George
Mariam Ibrahim
Shika Holland
Lauren Bailey-Jones
Diedra Wrighting

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

Becca Meekins, Assistant Town Administrator with the Town of Northborough welcomes the committee and opens the first meeting of the Northborough Diversity & Inclusion Committee Meeting on December 3rd just past 7 PM.

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020, orders suspending certain provisions of the open meeting law 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 live streamed but will not have an option for public participation. People interested in viewing this meeting live can visit the Northborough You Tube live videos link which you can find on the town's website.

INTRODUCTIONS:

Ms. Meekins – works for town of Northborough and has been in Northborough for two months. Prior to being here, Ms Meekins was with the Town of Grafton. Ms. Meekins is originally from Vermont.

Selectman Tim Kaelin – looks forward to working with everyone. Excited about the work ahead and believes we will be able to put something together that is positive and will have a long lasting impact on the community. Selectman Kaelin extended his appreciation to all of the committee members for taking part in this and investing in the community.

Mr. Soriano – a Northborough resident for five years. Also serves on Board of Trustees for the Library. Very heavily involved in the town. Has felt very welcomed. Feels hopeful in the changes that are coming with this new committee.

Ms. Ibrahim – grew up in Northborough, graduated from Algonquin in 2019, and is currently a Sophomore at Simmons University studying Public Relations and International Relations. Excited about the work we can do for our town.

Ms. Simms George – originally from Virginia before moving to Northborough 30 years ago. Ms. Simms George is married to Town Moderator, Fred George. Ms. Simms George chair’s the Personnel Committee in Northborough, was a Library Trustee, and is a former Chair of the Community Affairs Committee. Ms. Simms George is an HR professional by trade. Ms. Simms George is representing the Council on Aging and is very committed to the community.

Selectman Kaelin adds Ms. Simms George was very helpful in establishing the statement on Black Lives Matter.

Ms Leach – a Northborough resident for 20 years. Mary is a REALTOR and prior to real estate worked for Lexus of Northborough where she was very involved in Diversity training.

Ms. Bailey-Jones - serving as representative from the Northborough School Committee. This is Ms. Jones’ 3rd year on the committee. Ms. Jones is a middle school science teacher, serves on a similar committee that focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and is involved in the Coalition for Equity in the Northborough Public Schools.

Selectman Kaelin thanks Ms. Jones for her hard work on the School Committee.

Ms. Holland – a Northborough resident for 18 months. Ms. Holland is very excited to be part of the group. Ms. Holland is a marketer by trade. Looking forward to making our community more inclusive. *Also a Golden Girls fan! Thank you for being a friend!*

Ms. Wrighting – has lived in Northborough for five years. Ms. Wrighting grew up in California before coming to Massachusetts 20 years ago. Works at Northeastern University directing the office of faculty development. A lot of her work touches on making the faculty more diverse creating a climate that is welcoming and equitable for everyone. Ms. Wrighting is on the Coalition for Equity with the Northborough Southborough Schools.

Selectman Kaelin adds that in his professional capacity he owns a consulting firm and is also President of a Diversity and Inclusion Consulting Firm working with Global 500 companies. Selectman Kaelin has a professional and academic background in this field.

APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE OFFICERS:

Ms. Meekins explains process to appoint Chairperson, Vice Chair, and a Clerk.

Ms. Meekins nominates Selectman Kaelin following his offer to take on role of CHAIRPERSON.

Ms. Meekins conducts roll call:

Mr. Soriano: Aye	Ms. Wrighting: Aye
Ms. Leach: Aye	Ms. Holland: Aye
Ms Simms George: Aye	Ms. Bailey-Jones: Aye
Ms. Ibrahimi: Aye	

Ms. Meekins: For VICE CHAIR, is anyone interested in that seat?

Ms. Ibrahim: I'm happy to go for that position.

Ms. Meekins: I move that we appoint Mariam for VICE CHAIR of the Northborough Diversity & Inclusion Committee.

Selectman Kaelin: 2nds

Ms. Meekins conducts roll call.

Mr. Soriano: Aye	Ms. Bailey-Jones: Aye
Ms. Leach: Aye	Ms. Holland: Aye
Ms. Simms George: Aye	Ms. Wrighting: Aye

Ms. Meekins: The final position is the CLERK position.

Ms. Leach: Happy to do it.

Ms. Meekins: Moving to appoint Mary to Diversity & Inclusion Committee's CLERK

Selectman Kaelin: 2nds

Ms. Meekins conducts roll call.

Mr. Soriano: Aye	Ms. Bailey-Jones: Aye
Ms. Ibrahim: Aye	Ms. Holland: Aye
Ms. Simms George: Aye	Ms. Wrighting: Aye

OPEN DISCUSSION:

Ms. Meekins hands meeting over to Committee Chair – Selectman Kaelin.

Selectman Kaelin thanks the committee and reviews the committee charge approved by the Board of Selectmen. The first is offering opportunities for community engagement. Selectman Kaelin shares challenge/concern with Zoom format. Suggests over next few months, committee think about how we want to engage the public (in person, outdoor meetings, Zoom). Selectman Kaelin asks committee for thoughts/suggestions.

Ms. Holland asks if the thought is that we might be able to get some initial insights via Zoom and get more input over the summer when we can meet with more individuals? Or are we going to hold for all insights until summertime?

Selectman Kaelin responds for now we hold off on in-person. Asks Ms. Wrighting about climate studies at Northeastern adding climate studies are surveys that attempt to capture some of the emotions/sentiments. If we choose that path, we could construct questions as a committee and ask the town administration to share and then we share ourselves on social media. Gather information, make some decisions, and get some direction.

Ms. Wrighting responds they use climate surveys at Northeastern and adds the larger the group you reach out to, typically the smaller the response rate. If you're just focusing on a department, everyone is invested. You've already been able to drum up the excitement to get the results and having those results come to some kind of change. But if you just blanket and send out to everyone, not everyone is invested. Ms. Wrighting asks about school district surveys and those response rates. In the spring just as we were transitioning to remote, Ms. Wrighting did a number of focus groups on Zoom to try to gain information about interviewing faculty virtually. There were several late searches that had to pivot to online interviewing and then they were anticipating that their entire interview process for next year would be online. They wanted to learn from them and roll that information out broadly so people could organize their searches. They had a great response. Everyone they asked agreed. They were able to quickly find a time. They wrote a script, asked the question, open response.

Selectman Kaelin: Your point on focus groups is great. Excellent point. Selectman Kaelin is hopeful we will get a lot of interest in what we are doing and hopeful that if we put out a call that we are looking for public input or if we have a public session that we get more than two or three people. We had 18 people apply for the committee. He is hopeful we will get 18, 20, 25 people that want to participate. That level is just too much for a Zoom meeting.

Ms. Wrighting: So you are thinking more a Town Hall type of format?

Selectman Kaelin: When there are Board of Selectmen meetings and there's an issue people are passionate about, they come, they make comments, it's a give and take environment. Makes it easier.

Ms. Wrighting: That type of interaction sounds very fruitful.

Ms. Bailey-Jones: There are webinar settings for Zoom that the School Committee uses where attendees can raise their hand then be promoted as a panelist to speak. Depending upon whether the committee decides to have a back-and-forth conversation or if it's simply a comment. Zoom may not be as limiting as it could be because people are so use to Zoom now.

Selectman Kaelin: I don't think we need to make a decision on that tonight, however, it is important and something we will need to think about. Surveys, town halls ... what's the best way to engage the community?

Mr. Soriano adds he is on LinkedIn and made people aware of what we are doing. Had an outpouring of messages from people in Northborough indicating that's something they want to be involved in. Using the social media platform to reach people could be very useful.

Ms. Ibrahim agrees and adds it's important to get the youth involved.

Ms. Wrighting adds these engagements can form a survey. Once you have some information/material, surveys are easier.

Ms. Bailey-Jones asks Selectman Kaelin: In terms of timeline, how often will our goals be re-evaluated? Will this committee be the same members every year or changing? This information will be helpful.

Ms. Simms George asks how frequently are we going to meet? What is the strategy of organizing ourselves?

Selectman Kaelin responds: We have meetings scheduled once a month. As we move forward, if we want to add meetings, we can, as long as it's okay with Ms. Meekins and other scheduling items. If we want to meet twice a month to meet our goals, I'm okay with that.

Ms. Simms George: Can we settle on Thursdays?

Selectman Kaelin: Yes, monthly meetings will be on Thursdays. But if once a month is not enough, for example, the first Thursday we meet and then the 3rd Tuesday. Just might be different day/time. Our main charge is to deliver recommendations to the Board of Selectmen in 12 months. One of our recommendations could be that this committee needs to be a permanent part of the committee structure in town. For this first step, it made sense for the committee to have a set life span with a specific tangible output at the end. As far as the recommendations for the Board of Selectmen, that is why I shared that Creed model. It is a structured way for us to move forward.

Ms. Bailey-Jones: To summarize, it sounds like we are collecting data, probably most qualitative data, reaching out to the community, talking with people in our town, finding out what our community needs, then presenting to the BOS for long-term goals. Is that pretty comprehensive?

Selectman Kaelin: Yes, like during the interviews. Many people mentioned their kids in the school system. And, Mariam, you know this better than anybody since you just went through the school system most recently. Are there issues that need to be addressed at the schools? Is it the culture? Curriculum? Student body? Teachers? Are there things at the schools that need to be addressed? Some of the recommendations we make will be how it impacts the schools. By using the Creed model, we address the schools. Then when we make our presentation using a tangible model. This is what we want to achieve, and this is our recommendation on how to achieve it.

Ms. Simms George: When you were doing your interviewing, did anything stand out? People who were new to town or in town for a while? Were there concerns you can share with us?

Selectman Kaelin: I didn't hear anything during the interview process that was overtly negative. But you did hear a lot of people with concerns about their kids. They want to leave something behind for their kids that is diverse and inclusive. That's what I want. That's why I'm doing this. I'm doing this for my kids to grow up in a world that is open, caring, and embraces everybody. One thing that stuck with me was during the interview process was from Mary being a real estate agent and how do we make our community more welcoming to people who want to move here. What do people actually see when they drive through town? And look at our school systems? What are they seeing?

Ms. Leach: I hear it often with families coming from other communities. You do not see the priority of diversity driving down the street in town. Mary's kids went through the Northborough school system. At that time, there was a cultural fair at Melican where families brought in a certain food dish. But we can do so much more starting in the schools. Where are the windows of opportunity? Where are the opportunities to add more multi-cultural events? We have the wonderful veteran banners all through town. Maybe we could do something similar.

Selectman Kaelin: That's a perspective I have never thought of. Everyone brought great perspectives, but that really struck me. I grew up in Northborough. My family moved here in 1977.

Ms. Meekins: Diedra and Lauren, you mentioned that the school committee or district has some sort of Diversity council that is already actively doing this kind of work to impact the school district. Is that accurate?

Ms. Wrighting: Nod yes

Ms. Bailey-Jones: Nod yes

Ms. Meekins: The scope of this committee is to make a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen. The Board of Selectmen does not manage the schools. The school committees do. Perhaps it would make sense when we are further along to have a meeting with that group. I don't want to spring this on the school committee if they are already doing this kind of work. Will our work impact the schools? Ms. Meekins also addressed recruitment. Are we getting candidates who are diverse? Ms. Meekins states, right now, the answer is no. Across the board, no. We have no people of color in our public safety divisions. We have no women in our public safety divisions.

Ms. Simms George adds: Or anybody working at Town Hall who is a person of color.

Ms. Meekins: We are actively recruiting for police officers. I had interviews this past week. There were no women and no people of color in the candidate pool. That means nobody even applied. How do we market ourselves as a community who values diversity? We have to figure out a way to pull these people in. To make these people see that this is a community they want to be a part of.

Ms. Simms George: What avenues do you recruit through? There are organizations where you can target advertising and try to identify candidates that would be willing to take your jobs. You have to consider that source.

Ms. Meekins: Absolutely. The other side of it is training for staff. That is something we have direct control over. What training can we require? What should we require? Those are two things I want this committee to focus on.

Ms. Simms George: That's something we talked about, Tim, when we were drawing this up. Training. Put everyone through at least basic training using the conscious and unconscious training model.

Ms. Leach: I've looked at several school websites throughout the state and there are not many that mention diversity and inclusion on their home page. We are one of those that does not. The Town of Wayland does a nice job. We have 32% of homes in Northborough with children. If we have a Diversity committee involved in our schools today, it would be so great to see that on our web site. Ms. Leach suggests adding something to the home page of the district web site to show this is a priority.

Selectman Kaelin: These should all be part of our recommendations in 12 months. We absolutely need to avoid piecemealing so we do not slow the process down and build up resentment versus offering a comprehensive report at the end.

Ms. Meekins: Can I make a recommendation. We are looking at schools, town/government, and community. I think that those are the three focus groups we will have. Are there people that have interest? A more data driven recommendation will be most effective.

Selectman Kaelin: Once we organize the ideas and have a sense of the scope of what we want to accomplish we can make a determination on meeting once a month or twice a month.

Ms. Simms George: I don't want us to get too bogged down and going in the wrong direction. Maybe there is data with the town's planning that they just finished. Maybe there is some data there that can help us.

Selectman Kaelin: Agree. As a brand new committee, it's going to take us a couple of meetings to get our footing. I think this has been a great start. Once we organize our ideas and get more comfortable, we'll really be able to start to make some progress.

Ms. Simms George: I chaired the Assabet School Committee. And they are forming a diversity and inclusion council. MASC (MA Association of School Committees) has a minority and diversity committee that works with the school as well. I'm going to become chair of that committee. We do have a connection to the schools through the MASC. We have resources.

Selectman Kaelin closes the meeting asking if there are any thoughts or questions.

Ms. Meekins: A lot of the discussion has been around race which is valuable. I just want to ask, are we talking about all forms of diversity? Disabilities, gender, all of that, right? I don't want to lose sight of that.

Ms. Simms George: We usually talk about "underserved" populations which would take into consideration gender issues. But you are absolutely right. It is not just about color.

Selectman Kaelin confirms that is correct.

ADJOURNMENT:

Selectman Kaelin: We are one of the few communities in the state taking this on which is awesome and distressing at the same time. It should be deeply ingrained in every community. I'm proud that we have a great group of people in town willing to take this on. At our next meeting we will focus on areas. Becca mentioned the three silos. That's a great way to corral everything. Our next meeting will be focused on that as well as making a decision on how often we want to meet.

Committee members are welcome to email Selectman Kaelin with any questions/input before next meeting.

Meeting is adjourned at 8:02 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

by Mary Leach
Clerk, Northborough Diversity & Inclusion Committee