

**Racial Justice and Equity Commission**  
**Thursday, December 16<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting Minutes**

**Attendance:** Amo-Mensah Amofa, Alina Bricklin-Goldstein, Deb Carroll, Tracy-Ann Johnson, Barret Katuna, Dave Peniston, Sue Oppenheimer, Lillian Tanski, Jen Wang

1. Public Comment: should any members of the public be present and wish to speak, they are welcome to do so it this time. Comments will be limited to 2 minutes per person.
2. Draft report review
3. Timeline: meeting schedule and tasks to be handled in the interim
4. Update on focus groups
5. General updates on RJEC efforts

No public comment

**Draft Report Review**

DC: RE: report. At what point do you go from written to visual? What's the balance between # of direct quotes vs. aggregate?

JW: GB provided some of that summary data, I assume that was using some analytical rigor.

ABG: to some extent yes, but I felt I was lacking information on housing until reading verbatims, then felt like had a lot.

DP: still having trouble finding verbatim responses in Google Drive

DC: are people still feeling like they want to work more on the info?

ABG: I'm still feeling discombobulated about what should go in report. Didn't realize GB also working on a report.

DC: would like to bring this to Mike and his team, with the RJEC's permission. They'd absolutely help us put the report together.

DP: think that's a great idea, they've got expertise. Maybe we can review 2 sections each session eg Policing and Education.

ABG: Are we in a place where we can discuss recommendations for each big area before we even send off to Mike? I think we largely have enough information to form some recommendations and to the extent the focus group data alters or adds to recommendations, we incorporate that.

**Discussion of recommendations**

Affordable housing

DC: we do have the state mandate

ABG: how specific can we be, given other efforts going on? Based on our data: comments talking about multi-family, not having it concentrated in one area

LT: We can say offer to provide guidance to AHSC. Additionally, shouldn't forget we're looking for this Commission in helping with institutional role in addressing these issues in town. Affordable housing proposals are coming up, town plan etc - there will be conversations. If they follow past forums in our town, may be at times hurtful to residents of diverse backgrounds. There will be instances when we need to ensure people's voices will be heard.

DC: clarification: when you talk about educating, do you mean helping public understand exactly what AH is?

LT: yes, like what numbers look like, things we all know and still persist. Eg neighborhoods with more AH don't have higher crime rates.

JW: Housing is necessarily a regional issue. To what extent can/should we address housing with a regional context. There are alternative models on the table like Fair Share promoted by Open Communities Alliance.

ABG: agree with Jen and Lillian, but is that within our scope?

DC: agree. What recs are we making based on data vs. lived experience? They will be directed by both, kind of impossible for it not to. My dad spent 25 years as project manager for Habitat for Humanity - understand that program and how homebuyers qualify for mortgages etc. But have no idea what those numbers looked like in CT or Glastonbury.

BK: I agree Alina and yes, totally agree Jen ... more education to the community is definitely what I think we should recommend

LT: I think we shouldn't allow our recommendations to be dependent solely on data, and we shouldn't ignore our own observations.

TJ: Education is crucial. Connecticut is by far one of the most segregated states in the nation.

ABG: I think Tracy-Ann's approach is a good one, if we are going to make recommendations on things we KNOW, because we read about it, lived it, etc. we should include those sources. The duration of the wait lists, the income thresholds for affordable housing, etc.

LT: Should amenities near gha neighborhoods be reviewed and upgraded?

TJ: Some of the conversations in focus groups will tie into this. For many people of color, it's fear that come with moving to places like Glastonbury. Some of that fear is realistic fears. Even comments from members of community: there was commentary on just that.

JW: Housing is just the tip of iceberg. It's getting bodies here. But if their parks are the most outdated and not feeling safe in community spaces.

DC: yes there's a difference between offering housing vs. offering community. Welles Village has tremendous community programming - fantastic - but wonder how much extended community does anything.

LT: Also expand (maybe more financial?) support with private groups for help with home repairs/yards?

TJ: The town should get involved with the housing implementation. Programs such as First time homeowners programs, HUD, Good Neighbor Next Door home ownership programs etc. Doing field study. Searching for homes in town. When I speak with individuals: "towns like Glastonbury don't get involved in programs like that."

DC: median priced homes stay on market very briefly compared to more expensive. There's an interesting article in NYT real estate section about homeowners of color staging their homes to sell.

LT: Do we want to get into recommending review of density limits/lot sizes on zoning or is that too far into the weeds?

JW: that is "how" which I don't feel is within our scope, that's what AHSC is doing / that will be in AH plan. But we can provide some recommendations like that for education purposes for our audience which is different than the AH plan?

LT: Agree but we can make the recommendation for Town Council to look into it.

ABG: review of barriers to more affordable, more diverse, and more low income housing

### **Education:**

TJ: Hot topics eg CRT: it's one of the more heated discussions at board meetings etc. Wondering what our thoughts are on having more historical recommendations? Not just for administration but for parents as well.

DC: what do you mean by historical?

TJ: eg first Black principal - curious if there have been POC in other roles? Changes to curriculum? Don't want to duplicate efforts of Board. Know Dave is on Committee.

Deb: do you mean we don't want to be making recommendations about curriculum or learning that would replicate the work being done by the Equity and Social Justice Committee? Maybe what we need is asking the BOE of giving us a clearer picture of what kind of evaluation has been done of the curriculum and what changes if any are on the horizon? Just like... can we get the Director of EDI talk to us? Greater public dialogue would probably be a piece of that.

LT: Tracy-Ann, for the survey would this be run by the Town or BoE? I think a town survey to supplement GPS' info could be very helpful.

TJ: I think it should be a collaboration of both.

DP: On Monday we welcomed EDI Director, she gave presentation of work she's done so far. Maybe we could invite her to the next meeting and maybe pose whatever questions we have so there isn't duplication or stepping on anyone's feet, coordinate.

LT: As a parent I'd like the schools to better train teachers in the themes of new curricula items as they roll them out. Sometimes the book is terrific, but the teacher's understanding is not up to the task due to less exposure.

JW: agree

BK: That's a great idea, Lillian.

DC: recs so far... what I'm carrying around isn't what I've heard from the survey, but what I've heard from students, particularly students of color and their experiences in our schools. Education has been a lightning rod in recent years for parents of all political persuasions. What do we as a Commission want to do... talk about student experience...private and public schools have different approaches to curricula. One of my kids doesn't go to GPS - what they're doing in history is a different planet than my other kids. It's really interesting to me what's out there. There are a lot of different ways to approach.

SO: when we spoke with Black in Gbury, one of my biggest questions to them was where do you go if you have a racial incident, where's your safe place to go. The answer was that there wasn't one. The person who did respond said that she had a particular teacher she was close to and could go to, otherwise, the students were coming to me. Would like to recommend a safe person be designated where people with issues feel they can go to get support and help.

DC: that's a great idea. Do we focus on what resources are available to or missing for students and their families right now?

DP: at our last committee meeting, had two students of color that were giving their experiences they were having, whether it was dealing with insensitive comments/jokes/attitudes. Can't remember but think they have some type of racial justice committee at high school. I had made the suggestion: felt it would be too intimidating with 25 members of Committee that perhaps we set up a subgroup and go to group or club that they have and meet with them, I threw my hat in the ring and say I'd be willing to meet with these kids. Don't want to see happen: all of the sudden it's June and you find out all these kids have had these issues for the year and there was never any support group with adult mentor.

DC: that goes back to idea of what resources kids need?

DP: I remember Lillian something along those lines - that POC felt they weren't being heard.

JW: we're a commission of Town Council and not supposed to weigh in on BOE issues. Like housing, suggest we focus more on the outcomes we'd like to see, rather than the "how" we get there? Also Tomahawks...

LT: unlikely to happen that we have direct collaborations. But important to have action items, especially around information gathering that are not necessarily subject to BOE or the Superintendent's willingness to share. Think it won't be an overlap. Maybe with outside group would make it more comfortable for those who have not been comfortable. Somewhat disagree with focusing just on end goals, but to have some tasks / actionable recommendations - to ask Council to fund, to put in place... so we can push the needle to get it done.

TJ: ... survey...? Student Assistant Program - why not include alumni or volunteers that might want to answer the phone etc. Also as far as community events/education - WeHa do town book clubs, conversations around books. Actual sources of healing.

DC: affinity groups can be over powerful/feasible step

JW: kids who don't go to GPS... Increasing open choice seats?

TJ: included that in Conclusion. But Open Choice parents often disenroll after a year b/c of signs of elitism. I was hesitant to enroll my son because he was in a magnet system, he's had great experience but some challenges. Affinity groups would be amazing, should include parents who don't live in Glastonbury. So that everyone can feel they are part of the community. Eg something as simple as a birthday party. Maintaining stability.

JW: So is the recommendation for better retention and support for open choice families?

DC: we had lived in urban area and when we moved here, had never been more sad or more lonely. Spent a lot of time crying b/c couldn't figure out how to penetrate the incredibly well established social groups. Kids were v young - still felt like showed up too late. I'm a pretty easy demographic to fit in here, can't imagine what that's like for a family of color. Students want to see themselves reflected in what they're doing. Whether in teachers, books they're reading, they need to see themselves. Race, sexual orientation, etc. Helps them feel seen.

BK: Wondering how we might think about recommending some kind of teachable moment - talking points for teachers. How do they address the Tomahawk mascot issue the day it happened, how do students who are Native American feel? How does the community come together? At UConn, walked into classroom the day after Donald Trump was elected. How are teachers prepared to address the chatter that's going on in the classroom? With affinity groups: tangibly what would they look like? Protected populations - background checks etc. Can't just have students calling adults without some sort of training in place.

Timeline:

- Next regular meeting is Jan 6. Might be helpful if we can meet before then. Decided on Dec 30.