

Commission for Diversity and Tolerance

Meeting Notes

November 22nd, 2016

RAN Library

Special meeting with Superintendent Viccaro

Attendance: Tom Getz, Sheila Trieff, Beth Horne, Peter Blaiwas, Kat Preftes, Kathleen Shaw-community, Maureen McQuillan, Judy Lacroix, Benjamin Resnick-clergy liaison, Shawn Flaherty, Tommy Furlong, Judy Lacroix, Rose Robinson, Caroline Walsh

Guests: Sergeant Howard Adams, NBPT Police Dept, and Superintendent Susan Viccaro

Public: Lisa Furlong, Brenda Marshall, Adam Kowal, Afroz Khan, Ahmer Ibrahim, Nancy Harrington, Danielle Holmes, Deb Maas, Karina Moltz, John Feehan, Rev. Martha Hubbard, Beth Sayre-Scibona, John Sayre-Scibona, Rev. Ross Varney, Elizabeth Goullard, Beth Platow, Dr. Hazem Mahmond, Dale Pinkam Cavanaugh, Katie Gravelle, Andi Egmont, Sandhya Douglas, Kate Hubbard, Linda Mae Lucas, Lukas Phipps, Stephanie Walsh, Eliza Bobek, and Ellie Davis

Call To Meeting 7:00P.M.

K. Preftes read the mission statement and elaborated that the CDT (now HRC) responds to incidents and provides advocacy.

She shared statistics from the Southern Policy Law Center, which show an increase in hate incidents and crimes nationwide.

She listed three objectives for the meeting:

- Discuss incident at High School with Superintendent Viccaro and plan a response
- Determine if there is interest in a community response to the uptick in hate incidents and crimes nationwide.
- Discuss a possible school response

Public Comment: The public was invited to speak with a goal of limiting the comments to 20 minutes.

Comments are reflected below:

Andi Egmont spoke on behalf of Youth Services staff. They are interested in being involved and providing support. The Youth Council looked at Youth Assets and determined that NBPT youth are high in social competency and peaceful conflict resolution. The council is hoping to pair High School students with 4-5 grade students to act as role models.

Sandhya Douglas witnessed an assembly at a K-8 school in JP where the students were allowed to express their fear. She recommended that the schools find a way to allow the youth to give voice to what they are feeling.

Adam Kowal expressed a desire to reach out to parents

John Feehan, YWCA Executive Director offered support and shared that core to the mission of the YWCA is “eliminating racism”.

Rev. Martha Hubbard the priest at St. Paul’s would like to see a partnership between houses of worship, schools and other organizations.

Ellie Davis of the YWCA expressed a desire to bring more people to the table.

Deb Maas shared that her adopted kids experienced prejudice. She would like to see mixed affordable housing.

Amher Ibrahim offered a positive spin saying that the door is opened to people saying that prejudice was already there. The discrimination is now opened up so it can be addressed.

Afroz Khan mentioned that she and Ahmer are Muslim.

Katie Gravelle shared that a facebook page has been created which is called “Human Rights Advocates of Newburyport”. Its mission is to advocate for the Human Rights of residents.

Eliza Bobeck, an education professor shared that teachers are overwhelmed and need help in assisting students with their feelings fear and anger. She also suggested that we give students open sharing time and explore what it means to be a mostly white community.

Lukas Phipps a student at NHS suggested that we make our support for welcome for all to be loud and clear.

Rev. Ross Varney minister at Belleville Congregational Church offered that ignorance created fear and hostility.

Public comment was closed at 7:35 P.M.

Debrief by Superintendent Viccaro

There have been three incidents since the election. The school district is simply a reflection of society. Children mimic what they see/hear and don't understand what the consequences might be. We need to find a way forward together. The recently put together Clippers values are on the school website and are helpful to address the current climate.

The incident, which led to harassment, began with a student sitting during the pledge of allegiance. It was determined that the student was harassed. Consequences were provided. Parents are involved.

She hopes to have Michael Eatman ~~SP??~~ Come back. He worked with the senior class on their reading of Coates book *Between the World and Me*. She has reached out to him to see if he can come in and work with the leadership team.

Lukas Phipps a NHS student shared that he has spoken with Principal Parent about a possible forum/dialogue during the X block segment on whether you should stand during the pledge.

Shawn Flaherty shared that he felt this was an ongoing start as a proactive outreach to the community.

Peter Blaiwas asked Sergeant Adams about appropriate responses to bullying.

Sergeant Adams responded. Officers are trained on how to provide a compassionate safe space. Schools can only do so much. This needs to be a community wide response. He indicated there has not been an uptick in hate in Newburyport.

Sgt. Adams also described an effective "upstander" technique, "say what you see". That is, saying out loud what you witnessing during an incident of hate/harassment/bullying, in order to draw people's attention to the incident and assist in diffusing it.

Judy LeCroix mentioned participating in a cultural-diversity training at the department of corrections that might be a useful tool for the community.

Beth Horne suggested a community-wide forum and education on the Muslim faith.

Tom Getz mentioned the No Place For Hate community group in Salem, MA and will provide Sargeant Adams with a contact.

Kat Preftes asked Superintendent Viccaro if there is way to involve parents and offered that the CDT/HRC would do research for a possible March event.

Rose Robinson shared that at Governor's Academy the students were provided with a post-election forum.

Lisa Furlong, RAN Principal, shared about the work the Middle School is doing with Facing History and Ourselves. Their website has great post election materials:

<https://www.facinghistory.org/post-election-support-difficult-conversations>

Beth Horne suggested a community-run brainstorming meeting in early December to plan for a future community forum. Those present interested in planning the event signed up. A copy of the sign up sheet is attached. The hope was to make a broad segment of the community feel included with the intent of bringing as many as possible to the table.

Action takeaways:

- CDT/HRC to research ways to support the schools
- A community forum will be planned by key stake holders
- CDT/HRC meets December 1st.

Public Comment reopened.

Dr. Mahmood asked Superintendent whether the police were involved in the recent incident. She responded that they were. It was determined not to be a hate crime but it was brought and discussed with the AG's office.

Dale Cavanaugh who lives in Amesbury wondered about a collaborative effort.

Elizabeth Goullard wondered about having someone from "Black Lives Matter" come and speak.

Deb Maas described a need to provide affordable housing for the city in order to be a city that truly actively welcomes minorities.

Ellie Davis spoke about educating about our White Privilege.

MEETING ADJOURNED 9:00 P.M.