

Longmeadow Coalition for Racial Justice

Meeting Minutes Thursday, February 4, 2021

Arrangements for remote participation by Coalition for Racial Justice members and members of the public are being made in accordance with Governor Baker's Emergency Order Modifying the State's Open Meeting Law.

Participation in this meeting was done remotely via Zoom.

Task force members present: Bisrat Abebe, Kathleen Allen, Mara De Maio, Neena Grover, Charlotte LaForest, Ryan McCollum, Lauren Rollins, Michelle Tom, Zach Verriden

I. Call to order

Chair Zach Verriden started recording the Zoom. The meeting started at 7:02pm.

II. Roll call

All task force members present except Neena Grover, who arrived a few minutes late.

III. Public comment

Hearing none, Zach closed public comment.

IV. Approval of minutes from last meetings (12/10/2020 and 1/7/2021)

Ryan McCollum, who wasn't present at the last meeting, mentioned that he's on the board of a couple of the organizations we discussed, so he offered to help connect with them if we needed to.

Charlotte LaForest moved to approve the minutes. Ryan seconded. The roll call vote was all yeas. The minutes were approved as presented.

V. Discuss/review: Identify methods or areas to promote racially equitable hiring and promotion

Zach shared his screen to show a spreadsheet that task force members added to as homework between the last meeting and this one. The homework was to list ideas to "identify methods or areas to promote racially equitable hiring and promotion," as charged in our Coalition's founding document. We each explained the meaning of and reasoning behind our suggestions, and as a group discussed the ideas.

Many of the suggestions were related to each other, so we tried to group them together in categories, which would ultimately help make the list more readable and understandable. A mildly rearranged list follows:

- Review/improve recruitment/hiring/training/retention policies.
 - Propose the Healing Racism Institute of Pioneer Valley come in to undertake a Policies and Procedures Audit.
 - Assess demographics of town employees (begin tracking if not already done); identify areas lacking in racial diversity. Perhaps do a historical survey of town employee demographics for added context.

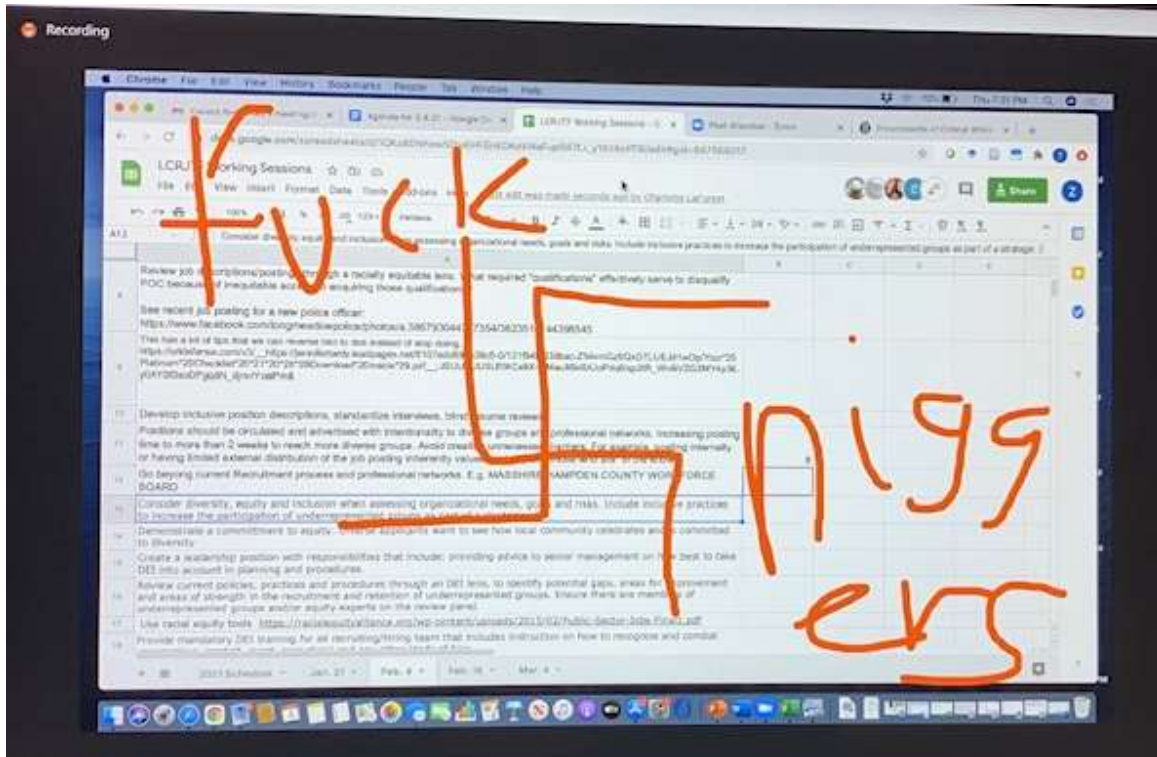
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- Consider mandatory training specific to anti-racism, equity and social justice for all town employees (consider phases and expansion to citizens and external governmental service providers) that might be ready-made to supplement regular meetings.
- Review job descriptions/postings and the hiring process through a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) lens.
 - Use racial equity tools. What required "qualifications" effectively serve to disqualify POC because of inequitable access to acquiring those qualifications? Respect experience vs education.
 - Develop inclusive position descriptions, standardize interviews, blind resume reviews
 - Positions should be circulated and advertised with intentionality to diverse groups and professional networks, including majority BIPOC communities and schools, even those outside the greater Springfield area.
 - Add to previous list of potential collaborators [MassHire Hampden County Workforce](#), which could help with recruitment, and [Karuna Center](#), which works with international groups.
 - Increasing posting time to more than 2 weeks to reach more diverse groups. Extend and expand search timeline if diverse pool of applicants not received in initial round.
 - Ensure there are members of underrepresented groups and/or equity experts on the review panel.
 - Avoid creating unnecessary barriers. For example, posting internally or having limited external distribution of the job posting inherently values seniority and those who are "in the know." Is an exclusively online application process a barrier or opportunity for people?

Mara de Maio showed us a list of "immediate actions leaders must stop in order to increase diversity" from [Jennifer Tardy](#), a consultant for job seekers and recruiters, who suggests things like "STOP posting job descriptions that are ineffective in attracting candidates from historically underrepresented backgrounds," and "STOP granting promotions based on unwritten rules to success." Mara thought the negative framing of this list could be turned around to be more positive. Charlotte saw themes like a step-by-step guide for the hiring process and promotion and retention tips.

Zoom Bomb

At this point, around 7:30pm, several new people with mostly anonymous screennames and no video cameras on invaded the meeting with the intention of being offensive and disruptive. They said offensive and hateful comments and hijacked the screen share and Zoom's annotation feature to write "f*** n*****" and draw a swastika.



Screenshot of Zoom bomb.

After a couple of minutes of this abuse, meeting co-hosts Charlotte and Zach were able to remove the Zoom bombers and report them through Zoom. Lauren Rollins said she might have recognized one of the screennames as the name of a real person she knows. Ryan suggested adding an agenda item at the end of the meeting to talk about what happened, and we all agreed to move on with our work for now.

Returning to the list:

- Include inclusive practices to increase the participation of underrepresented groups as part of a strategic plan. Planning process strategies should include people from underrepresented groups.
- Create a leadership position with responsibilities that include: providing advice to senior management on how best to take DEI into account in planning and procedures.
- Demonstrate a commitment to equity. Diverse applicants want to see how local community celebrates and is committed to diversity
 - Include explicit inclusion statement in every job posting and on town website
- Develop quantitative and qualitative metrics to measure progress and opportunities.

Regarding creating a leadership position, we acknowledged that it would be a heavy lift. We briefly discussed that in a case of having no budget, including the recommendation of creating an oversight committee instead. Some argued that such a committee would place an undue burden on the shoulders of underrepresented people without paying them, something that already happens in other settings when the few BIPOC in town are expected to represent and advocate for themselves in every environment and activity.

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We agreed that oversight was important, and if the town also agrees then they should put some resources behind it in order to ensure accountability.

Kathleen Allen made the suggestion that if other towns going through similar process, maybe a regional position could be created, and we can contribute to the regional position.

Zoom Bomb Reactions

Reaching the end of our list of suggestions, Zach returned the conversation to the Zoom bomb and opened the floor to discuss our reactions and what we should do about it.

Ryan emphasized that we need to make a public statement as soon as possible because this is exactly the work our task force is supposed to be doing. We need to call out this racism, and the people who did it can't be let off the hook by excusing it as just the work of dumb kids. Folks in town and surrounding towns need to know what happened.

Bisrat added that this is an opportunity for people in denial to see this type of violence. It's not just happening in DC or the Deep South. It's happening in Longmeadow and happening all the time.

Ryan motions to make a public statement to the press, and to include the recording of this meeting. Lauren and Kathleen seconded. Roll call vote: all yeas.

Zach said he'd draft a statement and send it around to us. Mara took a photo of the screen during the Zoom bomb to include. Zach asked Ryan to help with the distribution to the press. We agreed to make the statement public by tomorrow morning, and not to go on social media until the statement is out.

VI. Adjourn

Michelle Tom motioned to adjourn. Kathleen seconded. The roll call vote was all yeas. The meeting adjourned at 8:32pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Tom, clerk

Approved as presented, February 18, 2021