

Longmeadow Coalition for Racial Justice

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 15, 2020

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Task force members present: Bisrat Abebe, Kathleen Allen, Mara DeMaio, Neena Grover, Martin Hernandez, Rev. Charlotte LaForest, Ryan McCollum, Lauren Rollins, Michelle Tom, Zach Verriden

Also present: Town Manager Lyn Simmons, Select Board Chair Tom Lachiusa

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.

Introductions

"De facto chair" Ryan McCollum called the meeting to order at 6:05pm and briefly went over the agenda. He then had all those present introduce themselves and give a little personal and professional background information.

Rules and Regulations Overview

Town Manager Lyn Simmons also introduced herself, then proceeded to give an overview of the rules and regulations of being a public body, including administrative instructions, how to run meetings, in particular during this special exception period related to COVID-19 (e.g. all votes must be done by roll call), and more extensive guidance on open meeting law.

Q&A Follow-up

In the follow-up Q&A period with Lyn and Select Board Chair Tom Lachiusa, many task force members had questions about how to comply with open meeting law. How, what, and when we are allowed to communicate with each other? Martin Hernandez noted that with this group we'll be talking about things that affect our work and personal lives, so how broad or specific could our conversations be with each other outside of the group? Lyn and Tom advised that relevant conversations between just two task force members are fine, but keep in mind that the contents of the conversation could easily spread and become public if or when we talk about the conversation with someone else. They stressed that we need to make sure the public has an opportunity to comment on topics, so they should first be put on a meeting agenda. We should limit our outside conversations to procedural matters, rather than state any opinions that would be more appropriate to bring up during a meeting.

When asked how frequently the task force should meet, Lyn said that was for us to decide. She did remind us that the document that created this committee recommended bringing a report to the Select Board by March 31, 2021. Ryan asked whether the committee was done after we produced the report. Tom responded that after we submit our report, the Select Board will make a decision as to the group's future. Some temporary committees become permanent, or it's possible that spin-off groups could be created that might work independently from the town. Neena Grover suggested that a few months isn't enough time to do this important work, and that the committee should be a permanent one. Tom

challenged us to give the Select Board a compelling reason to keep the group going. Make sure the work we do isn't getting done by other committees.

Kathleen Allen asked if we had any budget, to which the answer was no. Mara DeMaio asked whether we needed to submit progress reports before March. Tom said we could contact him if we want to give an update, and he would add it to the Select Board agenda. Ryan asked if they had any advice on speaking with the press. Lyn recommended that the chair be the point person so the committee has one voice and one message. If we do end up speaking with the media, she requested that we give her or Tom a heads up.

Tom Lachiusa took time here to introduce himself and explain his hopes for our task force. "In this world there is avoidable and unavoidable pain. We can't help unavoidable pain. But the avoidable pain is the pain we cause to other people that we shouldn't. That's really a moral issue. When I look at racial injustice, a lot of it is pain that we can avoid. I'm hoping you'll focus on that kind of thing...The town has been doing some things to increase diversity, to teach the young people that the rest of the world isn't like Longmeadow. I'm hoping that you'll come up with policy suggestions for the Select Board that we could debate and vote on to help Longmeadow prepare for the new millennium. I want to be a town that everyone enjoys living in."

Selection of Officers

Ryan made a motion to select a committee chair, vice chair, and clerk. Martin seconded.

Michelle Tom, mentioning her organizational skills from her professional field, volunteered to be clerk. *Ryan moved to nominate Michelle Tom to be clerk, and Martin and Kathleen seconded. A roll call vote produced a unanimous 9 yeases and 0 nos (Bisrat Abebe left the meeting earlier).*

Neena Grover suggested Ryan would be a great chair. Ryan declined due to limited bandwidth but said he would nominate himself as vice chair if someone else stepped up to be chair.

Rev. Charlotte LaForest offered that she has lots of experience running these kinds of meetings and is very familiar with Robert's Rules, and could therefore do the chair job. But she was careful to note that she is "by no means the most knowledgeable or experienced in these areas." She was also mindful that she is "a religious person in town." Ryan didn't think a chair "needs to be the most well-read person on racial justice. I think the person should know how to run a meeting. Keep us on task."

Citing his positive experiences with this person, *Martin nominated Zach as chair.* He thinks "he would bring experience, is very prudent...I feel comfortable with him speaking with the press, he's analytical, takes into account many different aspects. His work would make him an awesome chair." *Lauren Rollins seconded.*

Zach said, "I'd be happy and humbled to serve. The only pause is that I'm relatively new to Longmeadow so I don't know local context." He was also hesitant because "there's a lot of power in having a person of color as the chair and not necessarily having a white male."

Because a number of people said they couldn't volunteer to be chair because they were busy, Mara asked if it would be better to have co-chairs instead of a chair and vice chair, so people could share the

responsibility. Ryan thought the chair and vice chair would probably end up functioning as co-chairs, but believed there should be one formal person in this setting.

Martin asked if we were allowed to vote for officers at this time, and did we have a quorum because Blsrat had to leave. Ryan noted we should have 6 people for quorum, and so began the *roll call vote on Zach Verriden to be chair, to which there was a unanimous round of yeses.*

Ryan then nominated Charlotte LaForest to be vice chair. Martin and Kathleen seconded. There was no further discussion, just straight to a roll call vote of a unanimous 9 yeses.

Setting the date for the next meeting

Newly elected chair Zach Verriden said he would put together a Doodle poll and Google form to ascertain preferences on dates and frequency of meetings. *Ryan moved to have Zach send out that message. Martin seconded. Zach's roll call vote produced a unanimous 8 yeses (Neena left the meeting after we completed the vote for officers).*

Other business

Lauren thought we should get a scope of what the Coalition for Racial Justice might discuss, which could inform how frequently we want to meet. Zach said he'd put together a draft proposal. Martin requested that we get started in earnest sooner rather than later because of the amount of work he foresaw wanting to get done before March. After a little more administrative housekeeping, *Martin made a motion to adjourn around 7:30pm. Ryan seconded. Roll call vote was 8 yeses, 0 nos.*

Respectfully submitted,
Michelle Tom, clerk

Approved as presented, 10/29/2020