

CITY OF BEVERLY
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

BOARD OR COMMISSION: Community Conversations on Equity & Racial Justice
DATE: August 5, 2020
LOCATION: Held virtually over Zoom
PANEL: Abu Toppin, Naisha Tatis, Gabrielle Montevercchi
HOSTS: Mayor Michael Cahill, Stephanie Bilotti
OTHERS PRESENT: Leah Jones, Julie Flowers, Todd Rotondo,
Chief John Lelaucher
RECORDER: Sarah Scott-Nelson

Mayor Cahill welcomes attendees to the first Community Conversations on Equity & Racial Justice at 6:30 p.m. and gives an introduction, stating that the Human Rights Committee is already in place, and that Beverly City Council has recently declared racism a human rights issue. Abu Toppin speaks about the importance of having hard conversations about inequality so that we can recognize and address the problems. Naisha Tatis speaks to the inequalities in schools and the need to change the system so that we do not set up black students for failure. Gabrielle Montevercchi speaks to the focus of Beverly schools to address racial inequalities this upcoming school year.

Norrie Gall speaks about the lack of understanding about diversity in schools, noting that Beverly has only one black teacher. Gall also mentions the disproportionate disciplining of black students. Gall asks what the schools are doing to support black students this year in the short term as well as the long term. Montevercchi replies that Beverly schools are working towards attracting leadership which looks like their students. Mayor Cahill adds that schools have also begun training on implicit bias.

Kathleen Young, teacher and educational mediator, speaks about youth peer courts, which are designed to keep kids out of the juvenile justice system, as well as the need to change the culture of schools and involve students in dialogue. Toppin speaks about his perception while growing up, stating that he never saw any black people on TV, but saw them being portrayed only as criminals. Toppin states that when this is the only narrative you receive, you begin to believe it. Tatis speaks about the lack of education about Black history beyond Civil Rights in the 60s, as well as the targeting of certain students by campus police enforcement.

Lauren Torrez asks how we can create greater diversity in Beverly. Mayor Cahill replies that a new masterplan for Beverly is underway, which addresses the need for housing for all demographics. Carrie Veritas, high school history teacher in Malden, comments that her High School started implicit bias training a few years ago, but asserts that this is just step one. Kristen Shapiero states that she supports more affordable housing as a positive step forward.

Carrol Rein agrees that recognizing implicit bias is a long process and states that systemic racism makes collective racism a default. Tatis speaks about the need to take responsibility for our own

beliefs as we age and evaluate what we have been taught. Jeffrey Matton thanks the panel for these discussions, stating that they are crucial for Beverly.

Kara Duggan speaks about the need for disabilities to be brought into this conversation as well, as black individuals with disabilities are doubly disadvantaged. Jen Wallace asks about the potential ID requirement for voting. Mayor Cahill states that this will not be a requirement in Beverly and refers Wallace to another city official. Caja Johnson thanks the panel for their words and comments that a new curriculum is in the works for Beverly. Johnson also states that she wants to see more support from the Police Department in Beverly.

Joan asks about the funds allocated to Department of Racial Justice, stating that she wants to see that go to the hands of black people rather than into the hands of white people trying to help black people. Mayor Cahill states that he will keep this in mind as the funds are further allocated. Lauren Demarco expresses her appreciation for the diversity in Beverly compared to Hamilton-Wenham as she moved her kids a few years ago.

Hannah Bowman asks about diversity data for Beverly. Mayor Cahill states that he wants Beverly's workforce to more accurately represent what the city looks like. Cahill also said that there are only four women in the Beverly Police Department and none currently in the Fire Department, but Beverly is actively working toward accommodating female firefighters in Beverly.

Mayor Cahill comments on the theft of the BLM flag outside of City Hall, stating that this flag pole was designed for temporary flag displays. Joan speaks about the need for a permanent spot for the BLM flag as it relates to all of us. Joan states how she has been discouraged by the vandalism of BLM signage. Toppin expresses his desire to make people uncomfortable in order to precipitate difficult but necessary conversations about racial equality.

Tatis comments that the fact that the BLM flag was stolen speaks to the lack of protection and representation for people of color in Beverly. Tatis states that while she is glad that it is there and hopes we can find a permanent place for it, she is discouraged by the lack of protection for the flag as a symbol of the black community.

Dominic speaks about the need to view equity as a triad of opportunity, access, and inclusion and growth. Tatis comments on her readings in Black Agenda on the chain of disadvantage from redlining previous generations which in turn prevents people of color from being able to provide for their families.

Cahill concludes the meeting at 8:40 p.m. and requests written follow-up statements from any attendees who wish to contribute to be sent in before the next session.