

Approved: March 1, 2021

**Select Board Meeting: February 19, 2021**

**Present: Freiman, Ulfelder, Olney, Sullivan Woods, Aufranc**

**Also Present: Jop, Frigulietti**

**Warrants approved: none**

**Meeting Documents:**

1. Agenda

**1. Call to Order**

Ms. Freiman, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:04 am online.

Ms. Freiman announced the meeting was being streamed live on Comcast channel 8 and Verizon channel 40 and by Wellesley Media and recorded for subsequent viewing on the cable channels or at [wellesleymedia.org](http://wellesleymedia.org).

**2. Citizen Speak**

Chief Pilecki joined the meeting.

Ms. Lanza joined the meeting. She stated she had received a racist letter and noted the discussion on social media regarding the incident. She stated she believed sharing the letter would create productive conversation about racist incidents and create a community that encourages people to come forward.

Ms. Antonelli of Wellesley Avenue joined the meeting. She stated she believed the Board and other civic leaders should investigate the legitimacy of the source of information before having town wide discussions including on social media. She stated she believed the alleged source of the letter should have been contacted before being named publicly.

Ms. Freiman stated that the Select Board had no role in the identification of any letter writer and added that all speakers were told the agenda was not about the letter. Ms. Freiman stated that the agenda had been purposely narrowed to allow the Board to discuss its response to incidents of racism in Wellesley and not a broad conversation. She reminded all speakers again that the meeting was not an opportunity for campaigning or to discuss the upcoming Town election.

Ms. Sanchez joined the meeting. She briefly reviewed her experiences with World of Wellesley. She stated she believed the Board had a role in addressing all bullying or racist incidents brought before them. Ms. Sanchez stated all committees had a responsibility to address these issues.

**3. Announcements**

Ms. Freiman stated that the agenda had been narrowed to avoid additional animosity around these issues. She added that in 2016, the then Board of Selectmen had adopted a Tolerance Pledge and read it for the record: "The Wellesley Board of Selectmen reaffirms its position that Wellesley is a town that highly values diversity, dignity and respect for all individuals. Wellesley strives to be a welcoming town; therefore, the Board opposes expressions of hate, intolerance and discrimination. The Board encourages the entire Wellesley community to continue to exhibit caring and supportive actions in support of our diversity." Ms. Freiman stated that the number of racist incidents had increased nationwide and had been widely discussed in Wellesley. She noted the many incidents discussed on social media.

Ms. Freiman stated that at the Board meeting on Monday (February 22<sup>nd</sup>), the Board would be holding a discussion with Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and others regarding current initiatives to develop a Racial Equity Municipal Action Plan (REMAP). She noted that Wellesley had not been awarded a grant for the REMAP program but was moving forward on its own while also developing a civil discourse initiative. She added that the Board wants to discuss steps that could be taken immediately and hoped the Board would be able to announce specific actions at its meeting on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Ms. Frigulietti reiterated that the office had applied for the MAPC REMAP grant but had not been selected to participate. She added that she and Ms. Jop had been working on an alternative process to institute a town wide REMAP program including interviewing potential consultants and reviewing what other towns had adopted. Ms. Frigulietti stated that a task force would be assembled based on advice from consultants adding that she had also been working with Ms. Olney on a civil discourse initiative that would be discussed further.

Ms. Olney stated that she has been exploring a civil discourse initiative to help the community have more open and inclusive conversations particularly regarding controversial issues. She added that other towns have developed initiatives to address a decline in civility and public engagement. These initiatives use facilitated dialogues to bring people together to discuss topics with the goal of improving understanding rather than reaching agreement. She stated that the Town had received two grants that would allow for 10 members of Town staff and 10 members of the public to be trained in facilitating these challenging conversations. Ms. Olney noted the dates of the trainings would be March 11 and 12. She stated those trained would be asked to participate at least once a year in facilitating such conversations. She noted that on March 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7pm an introductory public webinar would be offered to learn from communities that have already launched civil discourse initiatives. She stated that on April 6<sup>th</sup> a facilitated dialogue on “Coping with COVID” would be held, during which participants will be invited to discuss how they have been affected by the pandemic. Ms. Olney added that dialogues would be held in the future on other topics, including possibly race and affordable housing.

#### **4. Discuss the Board’s Response to Recently Reported Racist Incidents in Wellesley**

Ms. Freiman stated again that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Board’s response to incidents of racism in Wellesley and anticipated the Board would be asked this during the discussion on Monday evening.

Ms. Sullivan Woods proposed engaging with the social workers and HRS regarding best practices when witnessing instances of bullying or general lack of respect. She noted that overall, people want to be treated with kindness and understanding. She stated that the pandemic had frustrated and interrupted daily lives making it easier to be unfriendly. Ms. Sullivan Woods added she believed the social workers and HRS could assist the Town in putting together helpful reminders to residents for what they can do to help diffuse incidents and offer support to those affected. Ms. Aufranc stated it would be helpful for people to know where they could go and what they could do when confronted with situations of racism and bias. She added that working together as a municipality to build a robust plan to help the Town move forward was an important step in addressing these charged topics. Ms. Olney stated that acknowledging the incidents, and realizing that incidents of racism had been occurring for many years was an important step to working on a solution. She noted that the Board and the Town should be aware how many in the community had suffered from these racist incidents. Ms. Freiman stated that many residents and groups had been discussing racism in Wellesley while other residents do not believe it is a problem. She stated a challenge remained educating and organizing residents to join in the solution.

Chief Pilecki described the Natick Rapid Response program called the “Freedom Team”. He stated that the team was formed by community members rather than by a town committee or board. He added that

the team includes the Natick Police Chief, as well as members of the schools, Select Board and residents who are trained in addressing racist incidents or sensitive matters. He noted that the team addresses each unique situation and that resolutions are based on what the victim wants. Chief Pilecki recalled how a recent incident of racism was handled in Natick, adding that due to a hotline, the incident was able to be reported and addressed quickly. He noted the flexibility the team had in working with victims rather than through government or the criminal justice system. He explained that racist incidents may not constitute a crime and described the definition of a hate crime, which is a formal police matter.

The Board discussed the rapid response program used in Natick for addressing incidents of racism and modifications that could be made specific to Wellesley. Ms. Freiman stated the program was appealing as it would provide a safe environment for victims and would allow them to have a voice in the resolution. Ms. Olney noted the flexibility of the program, allowing victims to feel heard and notifying town officials of incidents of racism that do not constitute criminal actions. Ms. Freiman stated that should the Town be interested in adopting a program like Natick's, the program must be multi-ethnic/multi-racial in its composition for it to be effective. Mr. Ulfelder stated that the program provided an opportunity to understand the emotions and perceptions involved in an incident. He added that he believed a diversely organized team would be a challenge in Wellesley but was an important aspect of making victims comfortable coming forward. Ms. Aufranc stated she appreciated the flexibility of the program rather than a standard solution and liked that it was focused on the victims wishes for resolution. She noted the number to call was identified as a "hotline" and not simply a police line which may make residents more comfortable in coming forward. She added that for a program to work in Wellesley, it would require broad support from the various community groups. Ms. Sullivan Woods asked if the program had been successful and expressed concern that some victims may not come be coming forward and relating the incidents in private. She noted recent social media discussions regarding incidents of bias that created more division rather than constructive conversation. Chief Pilecki stated that Natick did not have many reports through the hotline, however, had success in their resolutions. He suggested the program could be modified based on the needs in Wellesley including redirecting a hotline to another town agency. Ms. Sullivan Woods stated if the governmental piece of the program were removed, victims may be more willing to come forward through community resources.

The Board continued to discuss adopting a program similar to the Natick rapid response program. Ms. Freiman stated that if the Board was generally supportive, action should be taken soon. She added that incidents would continue to occur in town if more time was spent on deciding the intricacies of a program. The Board continued to discuss a rapid response program and expressed general agreement that the program should not be a Town committee but an ad hoc group of qualified individuals that may incorporate a few Town officials. Ms. Olney stated that the Select Board had partnered with World of Wellesley in the past and that WOW would want to be involved in the establishment of a program in Wellesley. She noted WOW had hosted the program on anti-racism held over the past weekend as well as other events in the past.

Ms. Freiman stated that given all of the discussions and recent racist incidents, the Board may wish to rethink the "Tolerance Pledge". She added that she had worked to draft a new statement with stronger language. She read the drafted statement for the record: "Wellesley is a town that highly values diversity, dignity and respect for all individuals. As the Chief Executive of the town, the Select Board recognizes its responsibility to make the following declarations: The Board opposes unequivocally any expression of hate, prejudice, intolerance or discrimination toward any individual or group; The Board is committed to engaging the Town on race, equity and inclusion through broad and collaborative public engagement; and The Board denounces any form of racism as a threat to the safety and well-being of the public and calls upon the entire Wellesley community to welcome every resident, visitor, employee and resident student in the Town."

The Board discussed the statement as drafted noting potential for changes in the language for the title and the statement. Ms. Olney suggested that the Board could add a standing agenda item to address any known incidents of bias or racism in Town. Ms. Freiman noted the sense of urgency to move forward on a Board statement and asked Board members to forward any ideas for edits to Ms. Frigulietti during the upcoming weekend and hoped to move towards approval at the next meeting on February 22nd.

Ms. Horner, Co-President of World of Wellesley joined the Board. She read a prepared statement in response to Ms. Sanchez's comments regarding World of Wellesley. She added that World of Wellesley remained welcoming to all residents.

Ms. Biro, Co-President of World of Wellesley joined the Board. She read a prepared statement regarding the organization's work on anti-racism, noting the long standing working relationship between World of Wellesley and the Select Board.

Ms. McIntosh and Mr. Spagnuolo joined the Board. Ms. McIntosh stated they were present as representatives from "Unite Wellesley" and stated their strong disagreement with statements describing their message as racist by other groups. She stated that there appeared to be a general misunderstanding promoted by some about "Unite Wellesley" and welcomed the upcoming civil discourse events, facilitated discussions, and the implementation of a rapid response system in Wellesley.

#### **5. New Business and Correspondence -**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30am

The next regular meeting is scheduled for February 22, 2021 at 6:00 pm online.