

Pelham Anti Racism Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

DATE: 2/22 /2021

Meeting Facilitator: Charlie Lynch

Meeting Note Taker: Roy Regozin

Members in Attendance: Anne Stoddard, Charlie Lynch, Jessie Jean-Louis, Karen Ribeiro, Matteo Ramos-Mucci, Roy Regozin

Members Absent: Joe Davis, Jacqueline Faison, Jake Klar, Dan Robb, Pat Schumm

Additional attendees from the public: Michael Hussin

Opening details: Charlie opened the meeting at 7:05 pm. Roy read the Remote Meeting Script.

The Minutes for the meeting held on January 25, 2021, as revised, were approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

Review new by-law:

It was decided to discuss this matter before discussing the membership survey results. Charlie reported that he had communicated with Bob Agoglia, Chair of the Select Board, to inquire about the process for proposing a by-law. Bob responded that the Committee would send the text of the proposed by-law to the Select Board to be placed on its agenda. If the Select Board decided that it should be considered, it would send the by-law to Town counsel for their review. After that review was completed, the by-law would be the subject of a Warrant Article for the May 8 Town Meeting. To be considered at the Town Meeting, the Warrant Article would have to be finalized by April 7. Charlie said he and Joe would meet to discuss the by-law and submit the latest draft to the Committee for its review.

Karen said the draft was a great start. She offered to capitalize the words in the title. Charlie agreed. Karen asked where the figures came from and what the objective was. Charlie said he had reached out to Salem committees, but had not yet heard back. He believes the numbers came from the Salem by-law. Charlie said that when he and Joe were reviewing Pelham's By-Laws, a number of them appeared to be open to discriminatory enforcement by Town employees. The proposed by-law was intended to prevent this from happening. Karen asked what types of discrimination could occur. Charlie responded that he and Joe had created a list of the places where discrimination could occur, and said that he would place the list in the Google docs folder.

Charlie said he would email the group when he and Joe had posted a by-law on Google docs, and that Committee members should email him to let him know when they posted comments on the draft. Roy said that if the schedule required it, a special meeting could be scheduled to discuss the by-law.

Anne asked whether the Salem by-law was the only one that was found. Charlie said that Joe would know the answer to that question. Matteo asked about the scope of the by-law - what was covered and where could the conduct occur. Charlie said he had questions about who would investigate and enforce the by-law. Matteo asked whether the Town, rather than individuals, would be liable for violations. Roy said he thought individual liability was needed to make the by-law effective. Karen asked whether volunteers would be covered.

Matteo asked whether penalties for individuals would be determined by the Town Meeting. Charlie said the by-law as drafted provided that fines would be imposed by the Select Board or by a committee created by the Select Board. Karen asked whether there was an appeal process. Charlie said an appeal process was a good idea.

Matteo asked whether there would be a public record of the fines imposed. Charlie said the fines were an alternative to firing offenders. Matteo suggested bringing complaints to the supervisor of the offender. An investigation would be performed by a group like internal affairs as suggested by Charlie, or HR as suggested by Matteo. If a committee was appointed by the Select Board, Charlie said, it should be autonomous. Karen pointed out that minutes of meetings concerning employment reviews or grievances were not public. Karen also pointed out that nuisance claims were heard by the Select Board in public, such as claims relating to yard appearance, trash and dog behavior.

Michael pointed out that in Amherst, complaints for discrimination are filed with the Human Rights Commission, which is headed by a lawyer and has formal procedures. He said having to go to the Select Board could be daunting. Going to the HRC could be anonymous initially. Charlie said that perhaps it would not be necessary to consider a complaint against a Town official at an open meeting. Karen noted that we are an advisory committee and that our involvement in the development of procedures could be iterative.

Membership survey results:

Matteo noted that only seven persons had responded to the recirculated survey. One person indicated she had not been sworn in and was not interested in being on the Committee or participating in a working group. Two persons had resigned from the Committee before the survey was circulated. A fourth person had not been in touch with the Committee since its inception and had not responded to the survey. Karen expressed concern about non-attendance at Committee meetings, and wondered whether the Committee should have a more hierarchical structure.

Anne said she was opposed to removing people from the Committee for non-attendance at meetings. She asked whether the Committee should set a goal for making recommendations to the Select Board within one year of its creation. Charlie said that if someone ignored the survey and was not otherwise in

touch with the Committee, we should assume the person is not interested in being a member of the Committee. That brings the number of Committee members down to eleven.

Charlie noted that the working groups have different timelines. Should we consider changing the structure of the Committee? Karen said the working groups were useful. They could be used to brainstorm issues.

Jessie asked whether we had concluded the discussion of Committee membership. Anne read the names of the eleven persons who had been responsive to the Committee: Charlie Lynch, Joe Davis, Jacqueline Faison, Matteo Ramos-Mucci, Roy Regozin, Dan Robb, Pat Schumm, Anne Stoddard, Jessie Jean-Louis, Jake Klar and Karen Ribeiro. Karen said she would update the Select Board about Committee membership.

Working Group Reports:

1. GOVERNANCE (Charlie, Joe)

Charlie said he had covered the activity of this group in his discussion of the proposed by-law.

2. PUBLIC SAFETY (Anne, Jessie, Jake, Karen)

Anne said the group is exploring how to interact with the Pelham Police Department. They have reached out to groups in Shutesbury and Leverett which deal with public safety issues to try to set up a meeting. Michael said the process has been glacially slow. They have been leaving messages. It takes time to gather information. The group is seeking an appropriate model, which is why they want to meet with representatives of small towns. Michael said they want to know more before meeting with the Pelham Chief of Police. Anne said she is not aware of any particular issues with the Pelham Police Department. Michael said there are two subjects - present issues and a vision for the future, a new way of doing policing.

3. OUTREACH (Roy, Dan)

Roy reported that he expects to obtain access early in March to resources made available to Amherst by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity. These include free workshops which can be used for training purposes, and a "bulletin board" arrangement that enables one group to seek input from other GARE members about particular matters of interest. Roy said he anticipates that Amherst will not request Pelham to share the cost of GARE membership.

4. HOUSING (Charlie, Anne, Dan)

Charlie said they had reached out for input from fair housing nonprofits, and that it would be helpful to have access to a professional who could give them advice.

Matteo asked about the master plan of the Planning Board, its wording and guiding principles. Anne said there is a master plan on the website, but it is not a Planning Board document. Anne said that maybe the document should be updated to make sure it is antiracist. Matteo suggested advising the Planning Board to introduce language that would promote antiracism, equity and social justice. Charlie suggested supporting the middle ground. Karen asked whether Tilman Lucas, the head of Pelham's Housing Committee, has been consulted. Michael mentioned Richard Rothstein, who wrote *Color of Law*. He said there is a video of Ta-Nehisi Coates interviewing Rothstein. Housing discrimination is not just private prejudice; it is supported by institutional practices.

Charlie said that discriminatory zoning practices can be difficult to detect because they can be effected under the guise of neutral sounding language, like maintaining the character of a neighborhood. Michael said to be more effective, you need to know the history. He said Amherst is providing low interest loans as a form of reparations. Pelham is providing some low interest loans as well. Karen said that two Habitat for Humanity homes are coming on the market.

5. HISTORY (Jake, Joe, Karen, Dan, Jacqueline)

Karen said that whitesforracialequity.org is a good site for resources. She said the working group did not meet this month.

6. EDUCATION (Roy, Pat, Jessie, Jacqueline)

Jessie said that she had met with Roy last week to discuss ongoing matters. Connections have been made with education personnel. The school is moving in the right direction. Jessie suggested that the ARAC recommend to the Select Board that each town committee participate in antiracist training. She said that the website theantiracisttable.com has helpful materials showing how to hold different people accountable for perpetuating racism. Roy added that, for now, monitoring developments relating to education should suffice.

30 day challenge:

The AntiRacist Table offers a 30 day challenge to learn how to be an antiracist. Jessie, Karen, Roy and Matteo expressed interest in trying it. Anne said that that would be a good idea before recommending it to the Town. Michael said that training could be helpful in bringing us together and helping us to feel more grounded. Charlie asked how we would do this as a group. Michael said we would need to speak with each other. Jessie proposed weekly check-ins. Karen said she would prefer a text loop where we could share takeaways, but not have a fixed time to communicate. Jessie asked about having a group email. Anne said she thought a check-in was needed, but it could be optional. She also said someone should notify the members who were absent what we are doing and how to join. Michael said we need to commit to make the time to talk about our involvement with the challenge separate from other meetings. Jessie said she could circulate a weekly email prompt, containing thoughts and questions, and that we could get together after the challenge has been completed. She also offered to encourage the principal to inform school personnel. Michael questioned whether we should work with people who are not connected to ARAC.

Karen said she had joined the challenge and decided not to use the app. The website is user friendly.

Jessie said her weekly email would be sent only to ARAC participants. We should start next week.

Charlie asked whether there was any issue under the Open Meeting Law. Roy said he thought there was an exception for training courses, as long as Committee work was not discussed. Karen agreed.

Charlie said the Select Board should be alerted in a separate email chain. Jessie said she would take care of it.

Closing details:

A date was selected for the next meeting, with the understanding that a special meeting could be scheduled in the interim if needed to timely complete work on the by-law.

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded and unanimously approved by roll call vote of the members still present (Anne, Charlie, Jessie and Roy) at 9:02 pm.

Next Meeting Date: March 22, 2021

Next Meeting Facilitator:

Next Meeting Note Taker: