



Diversity Task Force
Town Hall
173 Main Street
Groton, Massachusetts 01450
selectboard@grotonma.gov

Raquel Majeski, Chair
Michelle Collette, Vice Chair
Gordon Candow
Susan Hughes
Deirdre Slavin Mitchell
James Moore
Fran Stanley

Regular Session Minutes

Date/Time: Thursday, August 18, 2022 at 5:30 pm
Location: Virtual meeting held via Zoom
Members attending: Raquel Majeski, James Moore, Michelle Collette, Deirdre Slavin-Mitchell, Fran Stanley
Handouts: Agenda, draft minutes from July 28, 2022, August 1, 2022 email from Rebecca Tabasky

Chair Raquel Majeski called the meeting to order at 5:31 pm. Attendance was taken, members identified themselves and individuals' cameras were all on. Bhaskar Gupta Karpurapu has submitted his resignation. The Town website needs to be updated to reflect this change. Gordon Candow is absent but not expected since his role is envisioned as an alternate nonvoting member. Adjustments to Gordon Candow's position may need to be made by the Select Board as it is the appointing authority.

Minutes

A few corrections were made to the July 28, 2022 draft minutes.

Michelle Collette moved to approve the July 28, 2022 minutes as corrected. James Moore seconded. Motion carried (3:0:2) by roll call vote of Majeski – aye, Moore – aye, Collette – aye, Slavin-Mitchell – abstain, Stanley – abstain.

Raquel Majeski is meeting with the Select Board on Monday, August 22, 2022 to discuss the proposed charge and changes to membership of this committee. Other members are invited to attend as well. Regarding the proposed name change, Michelle Collette said that her impression is that the task force was expected to be of temporary duration by design and that a Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee (DEI) would be a standing committee with an expectation of an ongoing nature. Regarding the one year term, James Moore said that he is optimistic that if we have a year then maybe we won't be needed after the year is up. Michelle Collette said that a putting the DEI on a one-year term schedule from July 1 to June 30 matches the fiscal year and makes a lot of sense because the vast majority to volunteer appointments are on this same schedule.

August 1, 2022 email to Select Board about white supremacist activity

Raquel Majeski shared her computer screen so that the group could read the email from Rebecca Majeski to the Select Board about white supremacist activities taking place in Pepperell and Boston¹. This emailed letter was

¹ From: Rebecca Tabasky
Date: August 1, 2022 at 11:12:53 AM EDT
To: Select Board
Subject: Concerns About Lack of Response re: White Supremacy

Dear all,

I'm writing now because I'm concerned by the lack of any kind of direct response following what I shared last week about the leader of NSC-131, a known neo-nazi group, living and actively recruiting people into this hate group from the town next door to ours. I'm pasting below the text of what I read during last week's meeting, and am writing this atop a note I sent about dangerous graffiti in Groton earlier this year.

Do you think the Select Board recognizes and agrees about the threat that this is? Do you believe that the town is going to do anything to take this threat to us seriously?

forwarded to the Diversity Task Force. Select Board member Becky Pine asked the Diversity Task Force to look at the letter. Raquel Majeski asked the group for action steps and suggested actions to recommend to the Select Board.

Fran Stanley took issue with naming individuals. There is an individual known for white supremacist activities in Pepperell and there has been a march in Boston. White supremacy is real and hatred is real but she doesn't want individual versus individual polemics which can incite extra legal actions and is also risky behavior.

James Moore asked what we would do if we had an incident like this in Groton. He said that it is important to state the obvious and to try to be prepared. Fran Stanley recalled a person who now advises mayors and municipalities on such plans after the Orlando mayor said that a plan would have been helpful for him when he was responding to the 2016 mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub². Michelle Collette agreed that a proactive approach could be helpful for the Select Board and the police. She added that the Patriot Front has an active presence in Townsend. There are almost weekly demonstrations on the Townsend Common for similar white supremacy groups. Michelle Collette said that this would be a situation where cooperating with GDRSD's DEI folks would be helpful.

Deirdre Slavin-Mitchell likes the proactive approach and wants to have a plan in place. She said that such plans could address the many overarching forms of hatred and the many things that people can do with hatred. Raquel Majeski took issue with labeling the Republicans specifically as all about hatred and the group agreed. Deirdre Slavin-Mitchell suggested avoiding politics as that tends to muddy the water. James Moore said that the concept that he returns to is otherness. Our goal is not to point fingers it is to build bridges.

Raquel Majeski asked if there should be a 'no hate' working group. Alternatively, the committee as a whole can work on this matter. Raquel Majeski then suggested that each member might take responsibility for a nugget of the whole to work on. Deirdre Slavin-Mitchell said that we should all think of it as a crisis intervention. The message might be that an expression of hate is not acceptable and to have an educational piece. Michelle Collette added that it is critical to have a rapid response and not wait 10 days. One example of delay is the usual deliberative pace of Select Board meetings posted with 48 hours notice. There needs to be a swift media response that is thoughtful and timely. A goal is for the affected people to see right away that there is a community response.

I'd be happy to further discuss how we as a town might take more visible and uncompromising stances and actions against white supremacy.

With thanks, Becca

What I wrote and read at last week's Select Board meeting:

"As you may have seen, this weekend people from NSC-131, a white supremacist group based in New England, one the Anti-Defamation League has defined as a Neo Nazi group, made another showing in Boston: this time in Jamaica Plain outside of a drag queen story hour attended by children. They stood outside chanting "Pedo Scum: Off Our Streets." Over the fourth of July weekend the Patriot Front, another white supremacist group, marched through Boston and assaulted a Black artist who confronted them. Back to NSC-131 in JP this weekend, one of the group's leaders aggressively fought with a counter protestor and was arrested. Outside of his arraignment this morning, he and his white supremacist crew - without recourse - assaulted one of the counter protestors there; during the hearing the prosecutor noted that this man has three prior arrests, and that his behavior is escalating and becoming increasingly violent. For years this man has worked to recruit young men into this white supremacist group using what used to be fringe racist and nationalist ideologies, but ones that have now been mainstreamed by Republicans. This man who openly organizes and commits acts of hate and intimidation is young - 23 - and dangerous, and he lives in Pepperell.

Suffolk County District Attorney Kevin Hayden issued a statement in which he said, "The presence of white supremacists at a Jamaica Plain book reading today, like their downtown Boston march earlier this month, is at once a disgrace and a warning. Society everywhere is targeted by these groups, and society everywhere must reject them."

So I'm sharing this today to bring these issues to wider attention, to plead with you to take seriously the hate we have already seen in Groton and the ways it might escalate, to plead with you to develop plans and protocols that the town will use to confront and reject homophobic, racist, antisemitic, and nationalist hate when it shows up anywhere in our community, and to plead with you to proactively work with administrators and educators in our schools and to ensure that our children are being taught to reject any attempts at being recruited into these groups, to speak up against intolerance and hatred, and to celebrate and welcome the differences among us. Thank you."

² <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-08-15/how-mayors-manage-the-aftermath-of-mass-shootings>



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The group discussed how references to hateful acts being the actions of either youth or individuals with mental illness is a response that tends to minimize the actual impact. Raquel Majeski added that you don't want to be in the business of measuring hate (along the unhelpful lines of comparing sorrows).

Raquel Majeski spoke up for the value of documented reporting. She will work on the reporting of hateful incidents. A clear system to report is important. A sound plan would can mitigate negative impact of a hate incident on the front end. James Moore asked what the municipality's purview is. For example, graffiti in the schools is a school matter. Deirdre Slavin-Mitchell will work on how the incident gets communicated out. Michelle Collette is interested in how we can best provide support for the victim – adding that there is an ongoing discrimination issue before the Committee on Accessibility at present. Michelle Collette said that there needs to be a reasonable threshold. Every misstep doesn't rise to the level of concern. To react as if it does, leads to a dismissal and disregard of the issue. James Moore called for a show of love. Deirdre Slavin-Mitchell said that the aim is to change the culture. Raquel Majeski reinforced this point on the importance of moving the culture forward, not "I" but what we know to be true. She referenced Loretta Ross' approach of calling people in and a gentleness to the approach that doesn't look like "shame, blame and guilt".

Other updates

Fran Stanley said that the state has released final guidelines for the MBTA Communities multi-family zoning. Groton will be considered a small adjacent town and have a much lower target of units to zone for (approximately 208 units versus the prior figure of 750 units). The result is a feasible goal for the Town as compliance which let the Town apply for MassWorks grants and allow for some additional needed housing.

Michelle Collette said that the Seven Hills pediatric hospital on Hillside Avenue is planning to build a group home for children on its existing campus. This home will be similar to the well-designed Sand Hill Road group home also built by Seven Hills several years ago.

Michelle Collette said that there are free COVID-19 test kits available at Town Hall and several other locations.

Raquel Majeski said that there have not been any applicants inquiring about membership lately.

Meeting adjourned at 6:35 pm.

Next meeting: September 8, 2022 at 5:30 pm on Zoom

Notes by Fran Stanley