Minutes
Town of Farmington, CT
Racial Equality Taskforce
Online Webinar
November 19, 2020
6:30 P.M.

Attendees
Joseph Capodiferro
Edward Giannaros
Kay Higgins
Sarah Smith
Yahmina Penn
Nieka Thompson
Jeremy McLaurin
Chris Cloud
Jessica Harrison
Bill Beckert

Staff
Nancy Parent
Kory Vincent
Anna Savastano

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A. Call to Order.
Chris Cloud called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM.

B. Public Comment.
None.

C. Reading of the Minutes.

1) **To approve the attached October 7, 2020 minutes.**
Upon a motion made and seconded (Capodiferro/Giannaros) the minutes passed unanimously.
2) **To approve the attached October 21, 2020 minutes.**
Upon a motion made and seconded (Capodiferro/Giannaros) the minutes passed unanimously.

D. Update and discussion on goals and timeline.
The group had a discussion on and made updates to Goal 5 and Goal 6. **(See attachment 1)**

The group also discussed the importance of more minorities applying to be appointed to Boards and Commissions and running for elected office in Farmington. They discussed the cost of running for different offices and C.J. Thomas, Town Council Chair, shared that the cost can be as much as $3,000 for signage, but is often times much less. Edward Giannaros offered to draft a letter on behalf of the Taskforce to the political parties encouraging increased recruitment, and Town staff said they would also be willing to create a campaign to raise awareness of openings on Boards and Commissions.

Jessica Harrison asked about Title 1 Grant money given to Farmington Schools by the State of Connecticut. This grant is given to assist with students with socio-economic

disadvantages. She inquired how the funds were being used. Anna Savastano said that she believed the Board of Education had a report on that information and that she would reach out to them.

Kory Vincent discussed the ways the Farmington Police engages the community. He shared that they have one School Resource Officer at the Highschool and two officers at the lower schools. District officers also visit the schools regularly to fully integrate in the school community. They assist with Security drills and Spirit Days. Since the pandemic started, the police have done many community parades, with as many as seventeen done in a single week. They also participate in FUNCOPS, a grant-funded program that allows police officers and students to engage in activities together. Kory asked the group for more suggestions to engage the community. One of the suggestions was increasing more casual interactions, like stopping to play ball with children. Another suggestion was increasing programs for students to learn about policing and hopefully get more children interested at a younger age.

The Taskforce had a discussion on the Police Department's recruitment process and ways they weed out White Supremacists and other unfit candidates. Kory explained the rigorous process to become a Farmington police officer, which includes full background checks and a neighborhood visit asking neighbors about potential candidates. The Department feels that by asking neighbors instead of just friends they are more likely to get a true picture of the candidate. They also review the internet footprint and perform a physical, written and psych exam.

The makeup of the Farmington Police Department is 69% White men, 24% White women, 3.6% Black men and 2.4% Hispanic or other men. The group had a discussion on the ways to increase the number of Black candidates that apply to these positions. Kory explained that one of the largest drawbacks is that it is hard to predict when a position will become available so doing targeted recruitments is more difficult.

E. Public Comment.
(Submitted via Zoom Chat)

Joshua Kellett, Farmington
Mr. Kellett asked the Taskforce the following:

- How assured are you that within your training and staffing we are weeding out white nationalists and racists amongst the force? and that it is actively condemned if it does occur? Or rather, how can we assure public parents, POC children and teens of this rigorous process?
- Is there data from businesses who have applied and withdrawn, or those who have shown interest so we can see whom and at what point we lost potential vendors?

Lisa Arenivaz-Humbarger, Farmington
Ms. Arenivaz-Humbarger asked the Taskforce the following:

- Is the Farmington Police Department willing to do a Unity March with People of Color (PoC) and others when the COVID-19 situation allows for it?

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F. **the next meeting. (Please bring your calendar.)**
The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 2, 202 at 6:30 P.M.

G. **Adjournment.**
Upon a motion made and seconded (Giannaros/McLaurin) the meeting was adjourned at 8:42 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Anna Savastano
Management Analyst
Clerk

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ACTION PLAN

GOAL 1	CURRENT STATUS	ACTION STEP
To hold meetings with residents to identify issues in the community that have led to unequal treatment based on race and to engage residents through holding community forums, dialogue groups, and training workshops on implicit bias; to develop a campaign to increase public awareness of these issues.	Gather information regarding current issues and town statistics.	1. To work with the Social Services Department to promote the Color of Justice program and other initiatives that promote awareness to diversity. 2. To form a subcommittee to create a website that highlights the work done on the Racial Equality Taskforce and throughout Town and to provide online resources for residents to learn about racial equity issues. 3. To create a "Social Media Etiquette" campaign to promote responsible social media use. 4. To create a subcommittee to organize and host multiple facilitated focus groups (open to all residents) to participate in learning, sharing, and education about race and diversity matters. 5. To recommend that the Town Council commits or reprioritizes funds (if needed) to assist in the above action steps. 6. To recommend a campaign to increase participation on Town Boards & Commissions from minority groups
	By 05/01/21	

GOAL 2	CURRENT STATUS	ACTION STEP
To analyze the current Town services in collaboration with the Town Manager to increase transparency, to address racial inequality and to develop initiatives and measurable goals.	Town Manager's Office will give a presentation to the taskforce.	1. To recommend to the Town Council that they add a strategic plan goal in regard to zero tolerance for racism in Farmington. 2. To form a subcommittee to provide a list to the Town Manager on recommend programs and services for racial bias training for employees and increasing efforts to diversify recruitment. 3. To recommend that the Town hire an Equity and Inclusion Consultant. 4.To recommend that the Town Council commits funds (if needed) to assist the Town Manager in the above action step.
	Complete: 10/4/20	

GOAL 3	CURRENT STATUS	ACTION STEP
To collaborate with and support the Farmington Valley Health District in their mission to incorporate and adopt principles of social justice into everyday public health practice.	Farmington Valley Health Department will give a presentation to the taskforce. **Complete: 9/23/20**	1. To review and to provide feedback of the Farmington Health District's declaration that racism and oppression is a public health crisis. 2. To recommend to the Town Council that they declare Racism and Health Disparities as a Public Health Crisis 3. Placeholder: Additional steps from FVHD

GOAL 4	CURRENT STATUS	ACTION STEP
To support the Board of Education in their efforts to ensure anti-racism, social justice and equity within the PreK-12 school system in collaboration with the Superintendent of Schools.	Board of Education will give a presentation to the taskforce.	1. To recommend that the Town Council request that the Board of Education include their diversity plan in the report that is added to the Town Council Strategic Plan and to give updates on the plan on a yearly basis. The plan should include, but is not limited to, the recruitment strategies in regard to a diverse workplace. 2. Even though the Committee is aware that the Town Council does not direct decisions or specific budget items to the Board of Education, it is recommended that the Town Council and Board of Education commit or reprioritize funds, if needed, to assist the Board of Education in the following recommendations in priority order: • Mandatory Teacher diversity training from an outside consultant • That an outside consultant performs a yearly audit (PreK – 12) of the curriculum to guarantee a diverse curriculum that represents all students • Funding for annual Summer Programming (Possible AP Readiness Session in August of each year) for students in elementary school and beyond 3. To recommend that the Town Council requests that the new Diversity Consultant Staff Member be appointed as a member of the Racial Equality Taskforce and that she may be appointed to serve on specific committees as developed by the taskforce. The taskforce is enthusiastic to support this new position with the follow initiatives: • To develop strategies to address the achievement gap • To review teacher handbooks • To recommend more diverse materials and activities • Teacher recruitment and possible search committees • To create a sense of welcome for different cultures and ethnicities through creative

		programs and initiatives 4. To recommend that the Schools increase communication and transparency to parents and the community.
	Complete: 10/21/20	

GOAL 5	CURRENT STATUS	ACTION STEP
To analyze current procedures and policies of the police department in collaboration with the Chief of Police, including use of force; to increase transparency to address racial inequality and to develop initiatives and measurable goals in collaboration with the Chief of Police.	Police Chief Paul Melanson gave a presentation to the taskforce about current policies and initiatives.	1. to arrange for a small working group to review Police Accountability Bill to further understand the language and impact of the bill that the Police Chief Association/Legislature is still reviewing 2. To actively recruit a more diverse staff for the police force – (See Town Manager Goal 2) by creating a working group to make recommendations on how best to recruit diverse candidates. 3. To recommend to the Town Council that a goal be added to Strategic Plan to provide an Implicit Bias Training for the Westfarms Mall Business Owners based on youth arrest statistics from the mall. 4. To arrange for a small working group to review the quality of the diversity training programing and to make any necessary recommendations regarding the frequency and depth of the training. 5. To foster the continued collaboration between Social Services and the Police Department with vulnerable residents and explore opportunities to formalize that relationship in accordance with the police accountability bill. 6. To recommend a working group to partner with the Community Policing Unit to increase programming and positive interaction with Black youth. 7. To recommend that the Town Council commits or reprioritizes funds (if needed) to assist in the above action steps.
	Complete: 08/26/20	

GOAL 6	CURRENT STATUS	ACTION STEP
To encourage a diverse workforce by providing education and training to local businesses in the areas of racial inequalities; and to research possible incentives to increase the number of Black owned businesses in collaboration with the Economic Development Director.	Economic Development Director Rose Ponte will give a presentation to the taskforce.	1. To create a focus group of Black business owners in Farmington and the surrounding areas to better understand the experiences of operating a business in Farmington compared to Towns in the surrounding areas. 2. To research resources, including HEDCO Inc. and SBA and DECD, that the Town can provide to Black and Brown business owners. 3. To identify banks and lenders that are minority focused that can be a resource to Black entrepreneurs. 4. To actively pursue economic incentives to promote procurement opportunities for Black and Brown owned businesses. 5. To initiate a campaign to encourage the Farmington business community to adopt best practices in minority recruiting, hiring and retention.
	Complete: 10/4/20	