

Georgia DEI Meeting Minutes

October 4, 2023

Committee Members present: Jana Thuesen, Heather Grimm, Martha Jansen, Bob Stebbins, Tracy Tyson, Karen Badger (Zoom)

Public Present: Terry Cleveland, Kurt Hersey, Heather Dunsmore, Mary Chiapanelli, Marc Price, John Chag, Dayle Goad (Zoom), Shannon Jenkins (Zoom), Brian (no last name, via Zoom), Frank Gore, The Dixon (zoom), Cheryl Letourneau (briefly to make sure the technology was working)

Meeting began at 7p.

- Introductions: Name, how long you've lived in town, and reason for joining DEI committee.
- Review Selectboard Charge from Chair Devon Thomas as sent to Jana Thuesen via email
 - "The selectboard request of the DEI coming as stated on our July 24 regular meeting was that you look into what a DEI statement is, and if adopting a DEI statement would be beneficial to the town of Georgia; after which we then ask that each member of the committee share with the town what they have learned as well as their thoughts on the issue."
 - What towns have DEI statements? How are they implementing them? What towns don't have DEI statements? Why not? What towns have rescinded DEI statements? Why?
 - Several committee members expressed confusion over the charge. Clarification was made during conversation that this committee is simply to research towns with DEI statement provided by the Vermont Inclusion Declaration and decide as a group if the town of Georgia should adopt a statement or not and explain why. Jana offered to reconnect with the Selectboard to further clarify.
 - Martha shared information gained from her phone calls with the towns of Highgate, St. Albans, and Milton about their DEI statements.
- Committee Assignments:
 - Positions – Jana Thuesen read the following position details and voting process to all who were present.
 - Chair: Responsibilities include scheduling and planning meetings, distributing meeting minutes once submitted by the secretary, distributing informational material related to the agenda, overseeing committee meetings, and keeping the meeting on track to be respectful of timelines.

- Co-Chair: Acts as the chair in the absence of the chair. Supports the chair with needs as appropriate or when requested by the chair to manage responsibilities.
 - Secretary: Take meeting minutes and submit to the chair for review before publication as appropriate, making sure that assignments and action items are clearly notated.
 - Nominations can be made by any committee member. We will vote publicly by round until one nomination remains, who will then be named to that position. In the event of a tie, the current Chair is the tie breaking vote.
 - Chair:
 - Martha Jansen nominated Heather Grimm. Tracy Tyson nominated Jana Thuesen. Martha, Linda Kirker, and Heather voted for Heather. Bob Stebbins, Tracy, and Karen Badger voted for Jana. Jana votes as tie breaker as current chair as directed by the Selectboard. Jana is Chair.
 - Co-Chair:
 - Tracy nominated Heather. No other nominations. Heather is Co-Chair.
 - Secretary:
 - Bob nominated Martha. No other nominations. Martha is Secretary.
- Scheduling:
 - Three meetings scheduled after conferring with the committee members and the town meeting calendar. Meeting dates are 10/19, 11/15, 12/4 all at 7p. Jana will send these dates to Cheryl Letourneau to add to the calendar and reserve meeting space. Jana will request Zoom setup from Cheryl for these meetings as well.
 - Karen Badger recommended Jana connect with a peer who conducts diversity trainings about unconscious bias. Karen will send Jana contact information to explore this potential opportunity.
 - Jana will send meeting dates to Bob Harnish from the Vermont Declaration of Inclusion to determine when he and his colleagues can join the committee meeting to present their information about DEI statements.
 - Martha recommended watching a video at this meeting that she felt appropriate to share with the community. Jana requested the video name to view before sharing to decide if it was appropriate for the committee topic at hand and make sure that it wasn't biased or geared toward either side of the DEI belief spectrum.
- Means of Soliciting Feedback from the Community:
 - Create a form for feedback and concerns from community?
 - Discussion had about various types of feedback (in person, virtual, anonymous, drop off sites). It was decided that the committee will hold off on making any final commitments on this until the Charge is clarified because it may be unnecessary.
 - Town Survey?
 - Discussion had about creating a survey to gauge the town residents' feelings about signing a DEI statement as a community and how to do this. Jana recommended using a google form so that it could be anonymous if wanted.

This form could be connected to a DEI email address that then automatically sends the responses to a spreadsheet or Google Group. Conversation had about who has access to this email. Jana and Heather will discuss options and bring it back to the group. Cheryl confirmed to Jana during a Selectboard meeting that she would be open to placing the survey link on the town website if the committee decides that this is the direction they'd like to proceed with.

- Heather shared a handout she created with her thoughts about DEI statements to the members of the committee. She included questions that could potentially be on this survey.
- Bob stated that he would like to make the committee aware that much of this discussion could be beyond the Selectboard Charge and that this may not be relevant to the work at hand.
- Linda prefers in person testimony about positive and negative experiences that community members have had to know what is really going on in town.
- Jana prefers a variety of options given technology availability and concern and respect for allowing residents to remain anonymous if they wish.
- Martha recommended a drop box site for paper copies of a survey.
- Heather recommended allowing the option to leave contact information on a survey if that respondent is willing to engage in follow up conversation with the committee.
- Bob recommended tabling the details of these community responses until there is clarification on whether this is part of the committee's charge. The committee will reconvene to discuss this survey in detail at a future meeting.
- Public Comment:
 - Terry Cleveland expressed her thoughts on DEI, community, common goals. She asked: "How does it hurt the community to learn?"
 - Kurt Hersey shared personal experience of bias and exclusionary comments in town during their time working at a local store. They stated that implicit bias shouldn't be feared and offered a connection to learn about Implicit Bias after attending a recent conversation about this in a neighboring town. Jana obtained the name of the presenter and will research this potential opportunity.
 - John Chag shared personal community experience.
 - Karen Badger would like to explore what diversity means to the community. She would like to inquire about experiences in town with stopping vs allowing biases to continue to happen. Karen would like to know what the community would like a DEI statement to include.
 - Heather Grimm would like to know what the town wants for the future in terms of DEI.
 - Mary Chiapanelli expressed that she values public comment on the topic of DEI as the committee moves forward.
- No further public comment. Meeting dismissed.