

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission
February 25, 2025
Meeting Minutes
(Virtual Meeting)

Attendees

Janine Taylor (Co-Chair), Serena Hu, Thomas Plihcik, Nnenna Uneke, and Safa Khan. Joanna Steffey and Isaac Tesfay did not attend. Raul Fernandez (Consultant) also attended, along with guest presenters Aaliyah Bannister-Batie and Tia Gary of Wayside Youth & Family Support Network.

Welcome and Opening

Janine Taylor called the meeting to order at approximately 7:04PM and confirmed the Commission had quorum. Janine noted that this session was being recorded and live broadcast on Sudbury TV, and reminded attendees there is no expectation of privacy in this public forum. Public comments were limited to three minutes per speaker. Serena Hu volunteered to take meeting minutes.

Land Acknowledgement

Janine read the land acknowledgement, recognizing the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Nipmuc, Pawtucket/Pennacook, and Massachusetts peoples.

Reflections

Janine acknowledged that this is a difficult time for many in the community for a variety of reasons and encouraged everyone to extend kindness and grace to one another as residents, in workplaces, and in places of worship.

Thomas shared a reflection on attending the Lincoln-Sudbury Climate Community Group the previous evening, noting how moved he was by the willingness of students to speak up and share their views even when uncertain, in contrast to a professional training he had led earlier in the week where adult participants were notably more hesitant to engage on DEI topics. Janine agreed, reflecting on her own years participating in the Lincoln-Sudbury racial community group and on the value of bearing witness to students finding their voice over time.

Public Comment

No public comments were received.

Approval of Prior Minutes

Serena shared the draft January meeting minutes for review. The group noted that the full Select Board had attended the prior meeting in person (with the exception of Jennifer Roberts, who attended in person with Janine), and agreed this should be noted in the minutes without necessarily naming each member individually. Thomas moved to approve the January meeting minutes; Nnenna seconded. The motion passed with Serena, Thomas, Janine, Nnenna, and Safa voting yes. Joanna and Isaac were absent.

Discussion

12/12/24 Email from Sally Purrington Hild – Invitation to Collaborate

Janine reported that this item was carried over from the prior month. Laura, who is leading this particular initiative, was unable to join due to a scheduling conflict. The Commission agreed to reach out early once a March meeting date was confirmed so that Laura could plan to join and discuss the project further next month.

Wayside Youth & Family Support Network – Courageous Conversations / VCR Presentation

Janine introduced Aaliyah Bannister-Batie (Vice President of Government and External Affairs) and Tia Gary (Trainer Consultant), both of Wayside Youth & Family Support Network, who presented on the Validate-Challenge-Request (VCR) framework and its role in facilitating courageous conversations.

Aaliyah explained that DEI work encompasses far more than race, gender, and sexuality, extending to age, religion, culture, socioeconomic status, physical and cognitive ability, and that the VCR framework provides a structured approach to productive dialogue: validating others' lived experience, challenging assumptions and biases, and requesting specific changes or commitments. She described courageous conversations as a tool for building trust, improving conflict resolution, and strengthening relationships within organizations and communities alike, and noted it is applicable far beyond DEI-specific topics.

Tia added that these tools can be adapted for different age groups, citing an organization called Little Uprisings that teaches a related framework ("Affirm, Counter, Transform") to younger children through puppet shows, and shared her own experience embedding VCR-style training into curriculum at an independent school, starting with educators and expanding to parents and students.

In response to a question from Raul about optimal group conditions for this work, Aaliyah explained that Wayside has facilitated both small and large group trainings, and recommended the Commission start with itself to build a foundation before expanding to the Select Board, other boards and commissions, and eventually the broader community. She noted Janine has already received VCR training and could help lead internal practice sessions.

Safa relayed a question from Lisha Kinto, Vice Chair of the Commission on Disability, asking whether courageous conversations training would address disability specifically; Aaliyah confirmed that trainings are tailored to the requesting organization and would incorporate disability alongside other dimensions of DEI.

Serena shared her perspective as a current Lincoln-Sudbury student, noting that while difficult conversations are increasingly part of the curriculum, students often are not given formal tools or training to navigate them, and expressed strong support for extending this kind of training to students. Tia and Aaliyah encouraged the Commission to advocate for this through the School Committee and offered to share additional resources and organizations that support this work with students.

Thomas asked whether Wayside had examples of this approach being scaled successfully into a general community setting (as opposed to a school or workplace), noting his interest in building grassroots community buy-in alongside leadership engagement. Aaliyah said she would follow up with specifics but noted Wayside has worked with several Massachusetts cities and towns. Raul added that follow-through after an initial training is critical, and that any engagement with Wayside should include a clear plan for sustaining momentum afterward.

Janine clarified for the group that courageous conversations is a general framework applicable to any difficult conversation, not exclusively DEI topics, and suggested it could be valuable training for Select Board members given the range of difficult interactions they encounter. The Commission

thanked Aaliyah and Tia for the presentation; both offered to remain available for follow-up questions and to share further information on Wayside's Equity Center course offerings.

Following the presentation, the Commission discussed next steps informally. Thomas and Raul discussed the importance of pairing top-down leadership buy-in with grassroots community engagement to drive lasting policy change. Safa asked how the Commission would translate this training into concrete action — including how topics would be chosen and whether a subcommittee would be needed — and Janine responded that the immediate next step is for the Commission itself to complete training, with the goal of later extending it to the Select Board and then the broader community, potentially with age-appropriate programming for children, students, and adults. The group agreed to continue this discussion at a future meeting rather than make immediate decisions.

Follow-up Discussion – Proposed Gender Identity Support Policy

Janine reported that she had not yet received the expanded policy draft that presenters had said they would send the prior month for the Commission's review, and confirmed no one else in the group had received it either. She noted she had connected the presenters with contacts at the LGBTQ Chamber of Commerce, including a board member who has been a helpful resource, and that they appear to be receiving good support through that connection. Janine said she would follow up to request the policy directly so the Commission can determine what support, such as a letter of support, might be appropriate once the policy is reviewed. The group agreed to return to this item once the policy is received.

Mission Statement Review and Consultant Engagement

Janine noted that Raul's six-month consulting contract is concluding this month and the Commission needs to determine how to engage his services going forward. As previously discussed, the group asked Raul to review and provide feedback on the Commission's mission statement, noting its current scope is very broad. Raul agreed to complete a written review ahead of the next meeting and, availability permitting, to attend the next meeting to discuss it further.

Cultural Festival – Discussion and Planning

Safa led a discussion on planning a cultural festival, asking the group to weigh in on timing. After discussion of spring, summer, and fall options — accounting for major Jewish holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) falling in late September and October this year — the group converged on early September, before those holidays, as the preferred window, with the idea of framing it as a fall festival celebrating the diverse cultures of the town.

The group discussed potential venues, including Haskell Field/the Sudbury Community Center and Camp Sewataro, noting Haskell Field's visibility and accessibility as advantages, with Camp Sewataro's Liberty Lodge offering a rain contingency option. Janine, Safa, and Serena/Thomas each agreed to look into a different venue option and report back. Given the Commission's small size, the group agreed not to form a separate subcommittee at this time, and to begin more in-depth festival planning in April.

Future Agenda Items

Carryover items for upcoming meetings include: the invitation from Sally Purrington Hild/Laura regarding public programming collaboration; the proposed Gender Identity Support policy, pending receipt of the expanded draft; Raul's mission statement review and consultant engagement going forward; and continued cultural festival planning.

Meeting Close

The group discussed potential March meeting dates. March 25th and March 31st were both ruled out due to conflicts, including the observance of Ramadan (which runs from approximately March 1st through March 29th) and the Annual Town Election/Town Meeting in late March. The Commission settled on March 18th as the next meeting date.

Nnenna moved to adjourn; Thomas seconded. The motion passed with Serena, Thomas, Nnenna, Safa, and Janine voting yes; Joanna and Isaac were absent.

The meeting adjourned at 8:52PM.