

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Anti-Racism (IDEA) Committee
Tuesday, December 14, 2021
Virtual Meeting
Meeting ID 955 0283 4166; Passcode 273748

Present: Abbey Salon, Co-chair; Gray Birchby; Abigail Butt, ex-Officio; Tim Higgins, ex-Officio; Russell Kramp; Becky McFall, ex-Officio; Margaret McLaughlin; Susan Taylor.

Absent: Jennifer Glass; Jen James, Co-chair; Ian Spencer, liaison, Public Safety

Also Present: Marianne Cooley, Needham Select Board and Kate Fitzpatrick, Needham Town Manager (joined at approximately 7:20pm)

Welcome: Tim Higgins welcomed everyone, and Committee members introduced themselves.

Meeting with Needham Unite Against Racism Initiative (NUARI): Mr. Higgins welcomed Ms. Cooley and provided an overview of IDEA's work.

- George Floyd's murder sparked community conversation and action.
- Private organizations started conversations, and the Select Board took leadership on the town government side.
- A community group, Welcome, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (WIDE), used a grant to hire consultants to lead trainings for community boards and organizations.
- The Select Board (SB) held roundtables focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Fall of 2020.
- In 2021, the SB launched the IDEA Committee with representation from volunteers and town staff.
 - The group has worked on educating itself and refining its mission.
 - We have reached out to other communities to see what kind of work they are doing.
- IDEA is at a crossroads and figuring out how to proceed. Lincoln is a small town with limited staff resources. Difficult to get work done between meetings.
- Asking for up to \$100,000 to hire a consultant to do a thorough baseline study and chart a path forward.

Marianne Cooley asked for clarification about IDEA's mission. Mr. Higgins said that it is meant to be a standing committee with the goal of understanding current structures.

- Ms. Cooley said that NUARI was originally meant to exist for a year. They are now in year 2 and hope to be finished at the end of the year. The goal, now that they have created a vision statement, is to work with town committees and organizations to see how they will adopt and imbed the vision.
- Needham started this work after a Needham police officer arrested and handcuffed a Black resident publicly and without cause. There was no apology from the Police department, and this injustice prompted NUARI's creation.
- Needham is about 20% people of color. There is a sense that Asian or Indian residents may feel more comfortable. There is a very small Black population (about 400 out of 30,000 residents) that may not be aware of other Black residents and that may not feel as connected.
- Many told Ms. Cooley that NUARI is the most racially diverse committee they had ever been on. They have a member from the School Committee to serve as a bridge with the schools, someone from the Human Rights Committee (HRC), a Black business owner, a clergy member, an Asian-American resident, a Hispanic resident, and a Black committee member.

- NUARI started by creating a vision statement. This took many meetings and lots of thoughtful consideration of each word and the power of language.
- The group spent time on intentional practices and on thinking about what individuals can do to make the community inclusive.
- Policing, housing, schools, and town hiring practices became the focal points.
- Most people on the committee and in the community were not aware of work already being done by the schools and the town. Communication is crucial.
- NUARI had numerous check-ins with the community to ask for feedback. Now they are working to educate the community more broadly and to imbed the work in town committees to actualize the principles.
- They did not do an equity audit because they were in the midst of the policing investigation, the schools had done one, and the Needham Housing Authority had recently done audit work. Instead, they focused on collecting information about “lived experiences” from people of color living in town.
- Mr. Higgins clarified that it sounds as though NUARI has more of a facilitator role. He asked whether they see any difficulty with coordination without a centralized effort.
 - Needham has a Human Rights Committee. NUARI is hoping that the HRC, along with Needham’s “resilience network” will take over the role of coordination.
 - Mr. Higgins noted that Lincoln does not have an HRC. We have police chiefs who have been working to make sure we have progressive policing policies. Discussions about housing are always a challenge. The Select Board was encouraged to take and keep the lead in order not to lose energy on the town government side.
- Mr. Higgins asked how the “lived experiences” process worked. Ms. Cooley said they have a resident who is a consultant in this area who led this effort. It was helpful to have someone outside the town government structure. Needham Town Manager, Kate Fitzpatrick (who joined the meeting later), and Ms. Cooley said that some initial open sessions with the Select Board were awkward and didn’t feel safe when residents were invited to air their issues. NUARI got started after those sessions.
- Susan Taylor asked about accountability. What happens if a committee member or staff do not follow through, what happens? The HRC and resilience network are out in the community and the issues they identified are within the purview of the SB or the School Committee, so they get referred to the appropriate place.
- Needham has a new Assistant Town Manager who does almost all the leg work. Early on they hired a consultant to help NUARI develop the vision statement. They underscored that vision statement work is very important.
- They are looking for capacity to gather and analyze data. Needham did a town-wide survey asking people to self-identify. Also, from now on, applicant tracking for town positions will be anonymous.
- Consulting firms are very busy. Needham has partnered with other towns to hire consultants.
- Becky McFall asked what we need to do to help people understand what they don’t know. She said that communities like ours tend to think they understand racism, but the more work is done, the more we realize we don’t know. She asked Ms. Cooley and Ms. Fitzpatrick about the types of training they are hoping for.
 - NUARI realized that on a community basis, they need to outsource difficult conversations such as “what is race?” and “what is policing?”
 - Needham is following Arlington’s lead and working first on getting supervisors trained before diving into examining town services, programs, and policies through an equity lens.
 - Looking forward to getting to the “meat of the work” in terms of looking at every policy, service, etc.

- They have made a few changes such as they provided T passes to METCO students so that they could get to summer jobs in Needham. This required ensuring that the job schedules worked with the train schedule.
 - The Needham Historical Commission (Society?) is looking at the history of individual buildings in town through an equity lens in order to get to a different audience that might not have previously gravitated to DEI topics.
- Mr. Higgins said that we have yet to figure out where people can go if residents have experienced an incident at a business or organization that isn't the schools or with the police. Where do people in Needham go?
 - The HRC is likely to be the place for this. An HRC member, plus a member of town staff might be involved in hearing this issue. The HRC has no authority, but it is a place to be heard.
 - Their resilience network could be a place for a non-school hate incident to be discussed. They will be producing a guiding document within in a couple weeks.
- Abigail Butt said that one struggle is how we get buy-in from staff and residents so that they want to do DEI work. At the Council on Aging & Human Services (COA&HS), they have a group that is working on making sure programming is more integrated, not just "one-off" programming because it happens to be Black History or Pride Month.
 - She noted that the Lincoln Historical Society has done some work, but where next?
 - In Needham, they are working to build a list of interested residents so that people get together to have a meal and talk about topics.
- Mr. Higgins talked about the Zoom bombing incident that Dr. Butt used as a deep learning experience for her board. At a video conference meeting, the COA&HS Board was "Zoom bombed" and her board was unprepared to handle the situation. One member of the Board is Black, and the online intruders singled her out for racist rhetoric. Dr. Butt said that she was trying to calm the situation and neglected, in the moment, to address the impact on the Black board member who felt victimized both by the incident and by the lack of immediate support from other members. A lot of work was done subsequently to understand the impact of the incident.
- Russell Kramp acknowledged that DEI work is dangerous because not everyone buys into it. How do we get past the first step of "we don't know what we don't know" or maybe the fact that people don't want to know? How do we get started without harm being done? Dr. Butt noted that in this case she helped to create the harm, and we need to talk about how "we" not just "they" do harm.
 - Ms. Cooley said that the interfaith clergy representative to NUARI is very valuable because he has the skills and ability to gently push back on statements that are harmful.
- Margaret McLaughlin asked Ms. Cooley and Ms. Fitzpatrick about efforts around housing.
 - Needham has started an affordable housing committee with representatives from Planning, the Select Board, and the community to work together to make recommendations about Needham's next steps. Like Lincoln, they have met their 40B affordable housing threshold. Now they are looking for new housing opportunities but have a challenge because what is officially "affordable" in the suburbs is still out of reach for many.
 - Also, the services residents want the town to provide make it harder to keep the town affordable. They are looking at zoning by right opportunities that will not overburden the schools.
 - The Needham Housing Authority is looking at a plan available to renovate and redo affordable housing that will be ready when Federal grants are available.
 - They continue to work with large developers on projects on truly affordable units for low-income residents.

- Mr. Higgins asked whether Needham is considering hiring a Diversity Officer. At the moment they are looking more towards community and staffed-based work because it is hard to get funding for a new town position. They must prove the need. They are planning to hire a consultant to understand what is needed.
 - Mr. Higgins said that IDEA is looking at what Nantucket did to hire a consultant and what they asked of the consultant.
- Susan Taylor noted that NUARI seemed to be working on both on the interpersonal and on the systemic issues. She asked if the same resources are good for both, or if two kinds of effort are needed. Ms. Fitzpatrick said that it is two sets of resources. It is important to work on the interpersonal relationships with town boards first, even though everyone wants to get to the institutional work. People have to be able to listen to each other first.

The Needham representatives left the meeting and Mr. Higgins asked IDEA members for reactions about how much of NUARI's work maps onto Lincoln's work.

- Abbey Salon said that NUARI is creating the vision and then working with groups. We might consider following this model in some way.
- Mr. Higgins noted that Needham has the HRC and more formal structures and Lincoln does not. If we don't have IDEA or something like it, then it is left to the schools and the Police Chief to do the work. We need a group to hold us accountable.
- Dr. Butt agreed and said she was encouraged by what we are doing as a community and the resources we already have. We have the WIDE community group thinking about creating a safe place for discussions and reporting incidents of harm, and a Planning Board and Department thinking about issues like housing. There are pockets of action. She said that there is someone on her board who is trained in trauma. Having someone like that involved in IDEA would be great because she has the gentle skills for difficult conversations.
 - Mr. Higgins agreed that as we move forward, we need to tap into community members with skills.
- Dr. McFall said that she was struck by the fact that NUARI had "majority minority" membership and that IDEA's lack of diversity is a short-coming. We might be able to create avvision, but we have blind spots because we're not living the experience. IDEA needs more representation, or we need to make sure others are reviewing our work. Mr. Higgins agreed we need to redouble efforts and outreach. Plan B is to use the "lived experiences" model.
- Ms. Salon strongly agreed that IDEA needs to get many more voices involved and that we need to understand peoples' experiences in an ongoing way. There is still work to be done in all our institutions. If we're the group holding this work for the town, we need to constantly hear, review, and adjust.
- Ms. Taylor said that she has found that having a review function can be a helpful way to pull people into the process even if people are unable to consistently serve on a board. People often are willing to join in this way. She also said that there really is something to the idea of food and music serving as bridges. She also reflected on the story of the Needham man who was arrested in public and said that something like this could so easily happen in Lincoln. Are we prepared to respond? Mr. Higgins said that at the very least, leadership and tone-setting are important.
- Ms. McLaughlin asked why we have not yet developed a recruitment plan? For another organization, she put together a plan and she suggested that we should establish one soon. Mr. Higgins asked her to share that information with the group and agreed that it should be an immediate priority.
- Dr. McFall reflected that we've been trying to figure out our mission and recruiting people will be more effective when we know what we are asking. Then we can reach out to individuals on a specific question, and they may then wish to continue if their input is valued. Dr. McFall also

noted that people of color may express exhaustion at being asked to solve racism for White people.

- Mr. Higgins asked how the schools recruited people. Dr. McFall said that they had a combination of faculty, community members, and students from Lincoln and Boston. They did an initial solicitation, looked at which viewpoints that were missing, and actively recruited people.
- Ms. Taylor noted that the group got smaller and whiter and more female over time.
- The group agreed that people want to be recruited for the skills they bring to the effort, not to be a token representative.
- Dr. Butt said that she has people she could invite and would be interested. If we're allowed to invite them, she can. Having specific tasks and questions will allow us to invite people based on their skill set. Mr. Higgins suggested that this be put at the top of IDEA's agenda as a next step for before inviting people to join.
- Mr. Kramp wondered if the Town has a telephone number that people can call if there's an issue. Could we have a group of people available to be called if there is an incident with a neighbor or in the community? Mr. Higgins agreed that this is high on his list of action steps. He said the town does have systems, but people don't know about them. There are more informal networks, e.g. people go to Dr. Butt or if it's police-related, there's a more formal system. Sometimes issues come to his office, and he tries to work through concerns. In recent years, Dr. Butt has helped him understand the professional resources that are available in the community. However, unless someone understands the town system, they don't know where to go. Dr. McFall said that for each large issue that gets raised, there are many smaller issues that don't. The schools, for example, don't have good data about issues that occur between staff-students or student-student. They've observed interactions that then don't rise to the administrative level. The schools have been trying to figure out how to gather information about smaller incidents. People are living with these aggressions, and they add up.
 - Mr. Higgins thought that Needham's HRC creates a visible resource for the community.
 - Dr. McFall said that we must figure out how to have different lenses because the information we have doesn't point to the root causes.
 - Ms. Taylor said that having trained ears is important. She knows that Lincoln-Sudbury students tried to have an open chat line for students to report and talk, but it quickly deteriorated because it lacked trained ears and trained responses.
 - Mr. Higgins noted that Lincoln's town culture is informal, and that is not an advantage in this instance. He takes from this evening's conversation that there is real energy around developing a response mechanism, and that it is a priority to address IDEA's lack of diversity.
 - Dr. Butt said that as we work on bringing in other people, including someone with a more "pastoral" role will be crucial in helping us.

Minutes: The approval of minutes was passed over until the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:40 pm.

Minutes were taken from the recording posted on the Town of Lincoln website (<https://lincolntv.viebit.com/player.php?hash=0jQCqoBLxcJI>) and respectfully submitted by Jennifer Glass