



Amherst Community Diversity Commission

Tuesday, October 10th, 2023
5:30 PM, in-person meeting
TOWN OF AMHERST building, 5583 Main Street, Amherst 14221.

WELCOME & ROLL CALL: Chairperson Dr. Mohan Devgun welcomed all the attending members of Amherst Community Diversity Commission.

ATTENDING: Chairperson. Dr. Mohan Devgun, Deborah Bruch Bucki, RN, PhD, Amherst Deputy Supervisor/Councilmember/Commission Liaison, Gul A. Rahman, Vice Chairperson, Zhen Liu, PhD, Secretary; Commission Members: Melissa Abel, Anne Rohrer, Dr. Joseph Sankoh, Thomas Lucia, Heidi Nicklaus Lefebvre.

ABSENT: Dr. Mohammad Asghar Khan, Cynthia Bass, Maria Cala, Prachee Samant.

GUESTS: Scott P. Chamberlin, the Town Police Chief, Solomon Joseph, Yanhong Baranski.

SEPTEMBER 12TH, 2023 MEETING MINUTES: A motion was made to approve the minutes' conditional on the revision by __Zhen Liu__ and second by __Thomas Lucia__. Unanimously approved.

OLD BUSINESS:

Meeting with Town Police Chief. The Commission met Scott P. Chamberlin, the Town Police Chief, for 35 minutes.

Dr. Devgun asked how the Commission and the police can collaborate on the safety of community worship houses in the current time. The Chief explained that the police department work at two levels in this regard:

- First: SWAT officers do threat assessment throughout the town, looking at the building and the grounds around the building, and then give recommendations.

- Second: Intelligence units keep a good eye on local and world-wide development. If there is perceived threat, officers will be sent to do heavy checks, every hour or every half an hour depending on the situation, to check all business in the surrounding area. There are more options depending on the individual facility.

Thomas Lucia asked about the increase of threats. The Chief answered that there was no uptick in threat cases. Most cases were school threats. Students said unintelligent things and were reported. The police typically received reports and investigated 3-4 times a week. Most were not really concerning. The department have a protocol on how to have students, school, parents, and the courts involved.

Dr. Devgun asked if the Chief can come to community and talk about safety. The Chief was open to the invitation and will bring an expert on threat assessment with him.

Dr. Devgun asked if the Chief remembers any recent race related crime. The Chief said this type of crime is hate crime, motivated by religion, race, sexual orientation, and so on, and is required to be reported to the State once a month. He did not remember the last time reporting any hate crime.

Gul A Rahman, Anne Rohrer and Zhen Liu asked about several recent local incidents, including a helicopter raid in a residential neighborhood, the carving of a swastika at Sweet Jenny's, and the shoplifting in retail stores. The Chief shared his information on them.

Dr. Devgun and Gul asked how to contact the police for education and communication at the community organizations. Melisa Abel shared that the Senior Center do Coffee-with-A-Cop every month, so two officers usually come and do a great presentation. She can share the contact with the Commission.

Heidi Lefebvre asked if there are any written protocols or resources about things that religious or cultural institutions should be aware of. The Chief answered that he had officers a year ago prepare written pamphlets but they are not complete yet. He will find where they are at with it. The Chief also stressed that for organizations it is important that, if it does look right, call somebody, because that's usually what happens.

Gul raised the question if the police will bring security awareness to schools. The Chief answered that every school district has its own policy, and his officers are involved in lockdown drills and so on. They just did a mock with all the superintendents and principals. The schools also do drills multiple times a year to teach kids what to do when they actually are going through it. They take it very seriously.

Dr. Sankoh added that his neighborhood has had community watch for many years. Zhen asked for information about Citizen Police Academy and the Chief answered with details. Dr. Devgun asked if the Town Police provide police cars to guard worship places. The Chief said he knew a

lot of communities in different areas of the country have it, but it's foreign to this area because of the lack of officers. However, off-duty officers can be hired to do that.

At the end, the Commission thanked the Chief for attending the meeting and answering questions.

The Meeting with the Town Supervisor: Debbie Bucki summarized the meeting that took place before the current meeting:

1. The Town Supervisor said there's been controversy about Audubon. With Audubon and many other historical people during the times in which they lived, there were practices that probably were allowed, but upon further reflection now in our present day, they weren't the best. That's the crossroads that we're at, which is where the question about Audubon comes in.
2. The Supervisor said that he thinks that the interest in the topic now has maybe diminished somewhat because now there's so many global problems, especially most recently with the turmoil for Israel and such.
3. So he said that changing everything in the town would be complicated. Specifically, on the John James Audubon Parkway, we have the senior center, the library, the court, the police. The court and police have records. The senior center has a lot of correspondence, too. To change that would be complicated.
4. It's a different story for UB because on the part of John James Audubon Parkway under the domain of UB there aren't buildings that have addresses that use the name of John James Audubon. They have names of buildings, such as the Baldy Hall or so. It's a different way of addressing the buildings and the classrooms at UB.
5. He said that he knows from his information that UB doesn't really want to go ahead. They're reluctant to go ahead without us doing something.
6. He said that though there is a concern, but maybe there would be *phases*. There are some easier things to start with, which could be the library. They have a new director and she's trying to call it Amherst Central Library. And he said the same could happen for Audubon Golf Course. So there are some things that could be done that might not be so complicated. That would be a place to start the change.
7. Buffalo News contacted Debbie in April. They also contacted the town in June. It's been quiet since then. So he said that if the Buffalo News does contact us, he would deflect. At this time, it's a bridge too far.
8. The Commission therefore isn't involved anymore at this point. Instead of focusing on that, he wanted the Commission to focus on big questions: What is Amherst? What do we offer? In particular, he wanted us to be involved in the planning of Amherst Central Park.

Amherst Central Park:

Debbie Bucki reported that at the meeting, the Town Supervisor wanted the Commission to study how to promote diversity at the central park. The park will not be complete and ready for the public until 2025 or 2026. There will be maybe names of things, like a circle or a square to be called as Unity Square or Unity Circle, something to unify the town.

Debbie reported that the Town Disabilities Committee were already on board for there will be a playground in the corner of the park to be developed first. The Disability Committee were very concerned about the playground and wished all people can enjoy it. About a year ago, Debbie invited Anne Dafchik, the Town Architect, as well as the designer of the playground, to meet the Committee remotely. Many ideas were exchanged and there were emails about more ideas. One of their big ideas for the playground was to have family restrooms or accessible restrooms. They are not just for parents with small children, but for senior citizens who needs help.

Debbie recommended the Commission use the same format to be involved. She can contact Anne Dafchik and invite her to an extra meeting or one of the regular meetings to see what thoughts the diversity commission can add to more develop the park.

Debbie also reported that a couple years ago when the planning was just started, while Melissa and she were on the committee, the vision was that as one of the town's big projects, it was supposed to be inclusive, for all ages, all abilities, all diverse people, namely everybody in the continuum of the lifespan.

Debbie again suggested the Commission be involved as valued stakeholders, such that our opinion matters. She can contact the architect plus landscaping designer to have a meeting with the Commission.

The Commission asked questions regarding the type of facilities in the current design of the park, and agreed to have a separate meeting with the architect.

Commission's Own Brochure: Debbie then added that the Town Supervisor suggested the Commission to meet Annette Herman to develop the brochure for the Commission.

FUTURE EVENTS DURING 2023

Children's Program. Heidi reported that the Commission will hold a youth event on Thursday, December 28th, at the Audubon library. It will be from 2 PM to 4 PM. The theme is a celebration of holidays around the world. The library will provide stories and crafts, and the Commission will provide refreshments and paper goods. The refreshments need to be prepackaged, by state regulation.

Display Case. Heidi also reported that the display case in the entry lane of the library will be set up on Monday, November 20th. It will run from then, hopefully to advertise the above event, until the first of the next year, for about six weeks.

Heidi said the display is meant to be really representative. It needs many items that are visually interesting to tell stories. So, all members are called to lend something, donate something, or bring knowledge about what to shop for. The items will be stored at Town Hall in a labeled box. Heidi and Anne wish to have some budget spent on inexpensive but permanent items, which can tell stories about cultures, faiths, or ethnicities, year after year after year.

Gul agreed to bring artifacts and asked about the size requirement of the items. Heidi answered that the depth of the display case is about 6 inches, which will be the largest width of the items.

COMMUNITY MATTERS:

NEW BUSINESS:

SCHOOL BOARD LIAISON REPORT: Thomas Lucia reported that he sent out the flyer of the Walk of Abraham event to all principals of high schools and all superintendents. He received two thank-you notes for the information from the Sweet Home district's superintendent and the assistant superintendent.

Tom reported that Williamsville North High School is forming a new Asian Pacific Islander club for kids. Their shared-decision-making team is looking into how the students who speak another language are dealt with. Most of these students' parents can't speak English, so the kids are getting everything in school.

Zhen reminded Tom that the Commission wished to invite the DEI coordinators to our meeting for the preparation of Juneteenth event next year. The Commission agreed to give 15 minutes to each coordinator for a short presentation on what they do.

TOWN LIAISON REPORT: Deborah Bucki's Liaison report included the meeting with the Supervisor that was already covered earlier in these minutes.

Sponsorships. Debbie reported that, at the September meeting, a question was raised as to whether "Sponsorships" could be pursued as a source of revenue for program development. Debbie sent the question to our town comptroller, Daryl Bramer. His answer is that "The Town Board can accept a donation and approve a budget amendment recognizing the revenue and increasing an expenditure line with approval to spend from it." So, if the Commission had a specific purpose or had somebody who was going to donate money toward something, that would be allowed. The Commission would have to work on it through the Supervisor's secretary, Marty Taggart, and with the Town Comptroller, Daryl Bramer.

COMMUNICATION, IF ANY:

Community event: Gul Rahman invited all to attend the event, *The Tent of Abraham*, on October 11th.

Guests of the meeting: Solomon Joseph and Yanhong Baranski gave self-introduction. Yanhong invited all to attend the Chinese Club's event on Saturday Oct. 14th.

FUTURE MEETINGS: Next Diversity Commission meeting will be held on Tuesday November 14th, 2023 at 5:30pm in person at Amherst Town Municipal Building.

MOTION TO ADJOURN: First motion to adjourn the meeting by __Joseph Sankoh__ and second by _Zhen Liu_. Unanimously approved. The meeting concluded at 6:40 PM.

MISSION STATEMENT: The purpose of this coalition is to enhance and increase cooperation, understanding, and dialogue among residents of diverse cultural, religious, socioeconomic and racial backgrounds, and to promote inclusion throughout the town. Some of the responsibilities of the coalition will be to study the demographics of Amherst; promote town-wide events that foster cultural minority participation on governmental boards and committees and in the Town's workplace; and to facilitate meetings designed to promote a better understanding of who Amherst is as a community.

Respectfully submitted,

Zhen Liu, PhD

Secretary of Amherst Community Diversity Commission