



Amherst Community Diversity Commission

Tuesday, March 12th, 2024
5:30pm online meeting
(Zoom)

WELCOME & ROLL CALL: Vice Chairperson Gul A. Rahman welcomed all the attending members of Amherst Community Diversity Commission.

ATTENDEES: Gul A. Rahman, Vice Chairperson, Zhen Liu, PhD, Secretary, Angela Marinucci, Amherst Town Councilmember and Liaison, Commission Members: Heidi Nicklaus Lefebvre, Ann Rohrer, Melissa Abel. Martha Taggart, Amherst Town Secretary to the Supervisor.

ABSENT: Chairperson Dr. Mohan Devgun, Cindy Bass, Mohammad Asghar Khan.

GUESTS: Annette Herrman, Communication Specialist for the Town of Amherst, JoAnn Balazs, Assistant Superintendent of Sweet Home School District, Danessia Scott-Warren, Esq.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS:

Annette Herrman talked about her background in advertising, and that she would help the Commission develop its brochure, and to do so she needed to know what the Commission is involved with, how to get the word out to the community about its initiatives, and what it would like from the community.

JoAnn Balazs talked about her role as the Assistant Superintendent for Talent and Equity at Sweet Home School District. She said that, with Heidi and Melissa through the Northwest Amherst Community Center, the School District partners with the Town. She looks forward to more collaborations.

The Commission thanked them for their participation.

INTRODUCTION OF TOWN COUNCILMEMBER AND LIAISON:

Angela Marinucci talked about her meeting with the former Liaison Debbie Bucki about the Commission. She recalled her experiences as an attorney of business immigration law working with foreign nationals, as the Deputy Commissioner in Personnel of the Erie County, and then as the Senior Services Commissioner of the Erie County. Her vision is to rebuild the connections within the community that were lost during COVID time, and to make her beloved town a better place. She is passionate about what the Commission does and will make sure we are successful.

The Commission thanked her and expected to collaborate as a great team.

MEMBERSHIP AND APPOINTMENTS:

Martha Taggart shared a resolution drafted by her, which included all the individuals who expressed interest in being appointed or reappointed to the Commission. It will be clocked in at the March 25th Town Board meeting.

JoAnn and Annette also expressed their interest in being appointed.

The participants discussed their concerns about the quorum requirement, the limit of using excused absence, the members who did not attend all of the meetings in 2023.

Martha agreed to finalize the resolution with updated information.

OLD BUSINESS:

January 9th MEETING MINUTES and February 13th MEETING NOTES:

The motion to approve the minutes and the notes was moved by __Gul A. Rahman__ and seconded by __Ann Rohrer__. Unanimously approved.

PRESENTATION BY DANESSIA:

Danessia Scott-Warren reported her educational writings for the Black History Month and Women's History Month, available on the Commission's webpage, as well as her background in DEI consulting and as the President of DEI Collective at Nichol School. The Commission praised Danessia's contribution.

Gul asked if the Commission could be proactive in getting projects approved by emails. Melissa, Heidi and Danessia share their ideas on it.

Danessia also updated the Racial Healing Circle events she had been organizing for schools, churches, governments, etc.. She explained the plan to do them through Amherst Town. The Commission responded positively and asked questions on the participants' ages, schools, and so on. Others who attended these events shared their thoughts too.

SCHOOL BOARD LIAISON REPORT:

Gul asked if any person is willing to take over the role of school board liaison after the resignation of Thomas Lucia. Zhen mentioned that Danessia volunteered by email to Chairperson Dr. Devgun. The Commission thanked Danessia for taking over the role. She will report to the Commission in the future.

TOWN LIAISON REPORT: Angela confirmed that she will update her report in the next meeting as the Town Liaison.

NEW BUSINESS:

COMMUNICATION, IF ANY:

Annette Herrman asked the Commission what it wants, in creating the new brochure to communicate with the community, among other things. Gul, Ann, and Heidi offered their insights such as to carry on the vision of the former Chairman, Dr. Khalid Qasi, raising the Commission's exposure, targeting more community groups, finding new ways to communicate, to celebrate diversity, and to educate the community about our diversity.

Annette then asked about the budget of the Commission's operation. Melissa explained that in the past the Commission had a small budget from the Town Liaison's budget line. She added that the Commission could piggyback the budget of other town committees for their events that the Commission can share. Ann mentioned the lack of a fiscal agent. Annette said that she was willing to speak for the Commission to the Town's grant manager.

Annette then asked about the sponsorship. Heidi mentioned the small amount such as the food, and water expenses in the past. Others were more concerned about the process to get the approval from the Town. Annette explained her perspective as a marketer and an advertiser, meaning creating reciprocity between the organizer and the advertiser. Using the Juneteenth event as an example, she brainstormed how reciprocity could be created.

Martha said she will review with Councilmember Marinucci the funds available in the past, as well as the protocol to take sponsorship.

Melissa reminded the Commission that the planning of this year's Juneteenth event needs to be started. The Commission discussed the related topics such as making it a focal item at the next meeting and the estimated expenses of the event. Annette asked the Commission to come up with a budget figure so she can use her connection to get sponsorship.

FUTURE MEETINGS: Next Diversity Commission meeting will be held on Tuesday April 9th, 2024, at 5:30p m via Zoom.

MOTION TO ADJOURN: First motion to adjourn the meeting by __Zhen Liu__ and second by _Heidi_. Unanimously approved. The meeting concluded at 6:45 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