



Amherst Community Diversity Commission

Tuesday, September 12th, 2023

5:30pm

Online meeting on Zoom

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: Dr. Mohammad Asghar Khan, Cynthia Bass, Dr. Joseph Sankoh, Thomas Lucia, Heidi Nicklaus Lefebvre.

GUESTS: Purnima Mohan, Joe Voytovich, Solomon Joseph, Yanhong Baranski, Danessia Scott-Warren, Esq.

ABSENT: Melissa Abel, Anne Rohrer, Maria Cala, Prachee Samant.

May 16TH, 2023 MEETING MINUTES AND JUNE 20TH, 2023 MEETING MINUTES: Dr. Devgun reported one spelling error in the minutes of May meeting: It is "Sikh" instead of "Seik". Zhen Liu confirmed it.

A motion was made to approve the minutes' conditional on the revision by __Dr. Devgun____ and second by __Thomas Lucia____. Unanimously approved.

OLD BUSINESS:

Sikh Festival: Dr. Devgun thanked everyone who attended the Vaisakhi Mela of the Sikh community. Tom Lucia suggested the Commission expand the invitation to the whole town in the future, by advertising the event in Amherst Bee, for instance.

Juneteenth Celebration: With 170 people attending, the event was well received. For more discussion among the Commission please see the June meeting minutes.

Renaming Audubon Parkway: Dr. Devgun expressed his concern on the difficulty of the task. He proposed a meeting with the town Supervisor, Brian Kulpa, for clarification and direction. He invited the Commission to join the meeting. With Debbie Bucki's help, the meeting is scheduled for Tuesday Oct 10th, in person, at 4:30 PM. On the same date, at 5:30 PM, the Commission's monthly meeting will be held in the council chamber.

A motion is moved by Zhen to approve the meetings and seconded by Gul and Tom. Unanimously approved.

Meeting with Town Police Chief. Dr. Devgun invited all members to propose questions this week and will compile and send them by email to the Police Chief, so that he can prepare before attending the meeting. Examples are what the local police can do to keep the community, churches, mosques, and temples safe.

Debbie Bucki recalled that her church school recently had a safety exercise.

Budget for Commission: Joseph Sankoh raised the issue that the Commission needs its own budget to carry out its mission.

Debbie Bucki reported that in 2022, the cost of tablecloth, banner, etc. were reimbursed by the town. In 2023, she (and each councilmember) has a \$2000 general budget to reimburse the expenses of the boards/committees/commissions she works with. There is another Town Budget line entitled "Celebrations." When Debbie spoke to Councilmember Jacquie Berger regarding the issue, Jacquie said there is a fairness concern on giving money directly to a town committee for activities. For example, the town Arts and Culture Committee, with which Jacquie Berger is the liaison, takes applications for grants from external organizations. A town committee can apply for grants in the same manner. The Commission applied for a grant last year but was not successful.

Joseph suggested that the town could give business cards to commission members. Debbie agreed to explore this idea.

Danessia asked if sponsorship can be used to replace the budget. Debbie said she had to check with the town comptroller on that.

SCHOOL BOARD LIAISON REPORT: Thomas Lucia reported that he went to two presentations of the DEI Committees to their educational board about their plans, one of the Sweet Home Central School District and one of the Williamsville Central School District. It was in June. And they were all good. JoAnn Balazs is the DEI coordinator at the Sweet Home CSD and the Assistant Superintendent for Talent & Equity.

He also contacted Dr. Lynn Shanahan, the DEI coordinator and the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Technology of Amherst Central School District. She explained that they were at the end of a five-year plan and the DEI program was not in the plan. She will contact Tom once a plan is made. Currently, all school districts are following the guidance booklet on DEI by the state.

Heidi reported that she attended an event organized by JoAnn Balazs at the Sweet Home CSD, called "Challenge 2 Change". It was fabulous, featuring guided outdoor activities and covering all age groups.

Cyndy suggested inviting schools to present their programs at future Juneteenth events. Dr. Devgun suggested inviting the school coordinators to the Commission's November meeting, so that they can plan ahead of next year's Juneteenth event. Tom agreed to look into it.

Heidi also suggested that, for similar community events, Commission members can share the information and take turns to participate and report back at meetings. Cyndy commented that this is a great idea.

TOWN LIAISON REPORT: Deborah Bucki's Liaison report included the coming meetings with the Supervisor, with the Police Chief, and the budget issues that were already covered earlier in these minutes.

Dr. Devgun asked who the town liaison would be after Debbie retires at the end of 2023 and expressed his concern about the transition. Debbie said the transition will be fine and explained that it will depend on the election results and the Supervisor's decision afterwards to assign all liaisons to different town committees. Each committee can also send a request to the Supervisor. When Danessia asked if Debbie would run for election this year, Debbie explained that she would not since she is term limited.

Debbie reminded that some Commission members' term would expire at the end of 2023. If they wish to continue serving on the Commission, they should indicate their interest to her while she is still here.

All members also expressed their gratefulness to Debbie and agreed that the Commission should honor her in a nice way as a group and her friends. The plan will be discussed at the October meeting and be carried out in November.

FUTURE EVENTS DURING 2023

Heidi called all members to contribute materials for the showcase display in December at Audubon Library. Artifacts and pictures are needed to represent various cultures and faiths. She will collect them at the November meeting and set up the display right after Thanksgiving for Dec. 1st. There will also be a children's program during the holiday break, organized by Heidi, Anne, and Tom, at the library. Heidi will disseminate the info about future meetings with the library to the Commission.

COMMUNITY MATTERS:

NEW BUSINESS:

Helping the asylum seekers: Heidi reported the arrival of asylum seekers, who were accepted by Sweet Home School District. Currently, 52 school-age members of the group are enrolled for school, and they and their parents are living in Red Roof Inn. They need luggage or duffle bags to transport their belongings. Heidi asked the Commission to consider what role the Commission should be in supporting the group in their transition in the community, as a part of the Commission's mission. She invited members to share ideas via email.

Debbie suggested that the Commission might be able to collaborate with the group on certain holiday celebrations as a niche help. Heidi will coordinate this since a holiday event is coming for the refugee group.

COMMUNICATION, IF ANY:

Community event: Gul Rahman shared the event on October 11th, **The Tent of Abraham**, “to experience the spirit of Abraham’s traditions of the values of faith, hospitality, and mutual respect.” The flyer will be sent to the town board and DEI coordinators of school districts.

Gul also invited everyone to attend her upcoming **Cancer Care Hospital, Lahore, Pakistan Fundraising** event on September 30th. The flyer will be sent.

Guests of the meeting: Solomon Joseph and Yanhong Baranski briefly introduced themselves, due to the time limit. Gul invited them to attend the October meeting so they can have more time to introduce themselves, as well as to send their bio via email.

FUTURE MEETINGS: Next Diversity Commission meeting will be held on Tuesday October 10th , 2023 at 5:30pm in person Amherst Town Municipal Building.

MOTION TO ADJOURN: First motion to adjourn the meeting by __ Heidi Nicklaus Lefebvre __ and second by __Cynthia Bass_____. 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