



Amherst Community Diversity Commission

Tuesday, November 14th, 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, Dr. Mohammad Asghar Khan, Cynthia Bass.

ABSENT: Maria Cala, Prachee Samant.

GUESTS: Anne Dafchik (Town of Amherst – Architect), Yanhong Baranski, Danessia Scott-Warren, Esq.

OLD BUSINESS:

Central Park Project: Anne Dafchik presented the general overview of the 170-acre project. Below is the summary of the comments and questions of the Commission:

1. The location of projects that celebrate the diversity of Amherst: Projects, similar to the Unity Circle [\[link\]](#), would be best located in a visible plaza or public place. Could the big meadow area centrally located between the theater museum and clubhouse be ideal? Even though it is spread out, it seems like an appropriate location. An additional, smaller location might be near the Winter Market.
2. The funding: how would these types of projects (often considered as art or separate from buildings) be funded if they are included as part of a larger project or if they are standalone budgets?

3. The educational exhibit: Talking about the Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village Museum, once it is relocated to Central Park, could it include a permanent exhibit that celebrates the evolving diversity and makeup of the town?

4. The growing diversity: Whatever form the exhibit or monuments take, it should have the ability to grow over time as diversity grows in the Town... Examples are flags, benches, murals, pavers/tiles, or monuments... Perhaps there is an opportunity for members of the public to sponsor individual components of the design. A circular layout to the project may be favorable, however the order of the individual components should be such that importance isn't implied from one area over another.

5. The multifaced diversity: Any monuments or plaza components honoring diversity should not only include nationalities but also cultures, religions, faiths, and ethnicities.

6. The space for close-range interactions: For example, large picnic shelters or pavilions. There are very few Town parks that have large park pavilions similar to the Governor's Lodge at Chestnut Ridge. Spaces that enable a large crowd to come together promote "coming together" and interaction. The ability to connect and gather together is important for growing diversity and appreciation of others.

7. The regular updates: Three committees would benefit from regular updates from the Amherst Central Park planning group. They are the Diversity Committee, Committee on Disabilities, and the Arts and Culture in Public Places board. Perhaps regular quarterly updates would be an appropriate interval.

8. The task force: A request was made to re-engage the Amherst Central Park task force; public input is important for public support.

9. The accessibility: Park access via public transit or non-vehicular modes of transportation would be beneficial.

10. The communication of additional ideas: The committee will send via email examples of good exhibits or public spaces that celebrate diversity.

OCTOBER 10TH, 2023 MEETING MINUTES: A motion was made to approve the minutes' conditional on the revision by __Dr. Mohan Devgun__ and second by __Thomas Lucia__. Unanimously approved.

Planning meetings for 2024: Dr. Devgun asked for plans other than the Juneteenth Celebration. Zhen Liu proposed to plan for the AAPI heritage month in May. He also asked if we could contact the AAPI Club of Williamsville North for potential collaboration. Thomas Lucia said he will try to

get the list of all such clubs of all high schools. Zhen also mentioned the new Northwest Amherst Community Center could be the place for such events. Heidi gave the address of the Center's building and invited everyone to visit.

Dr. Devgun mentioned the Vaisakhi festival of the Sikh community in June. Tom asked Dr. Devgun to send him the information so he can send it to the schools and the clubs.

Heidi also confirmed the December event and the display at the Audubon library.

Zhen mentioned the preparation of the Community Diversity Calendar of 2024. Debbie reminded Zhen that after the calendar is revised and approved by the Commission, the new liaison should put it on the communication of the town board so it can be approved to be posted on the town's website.

Yanhong mentioned the coming Chinese New Year on February 10th and the celebration event at the Center for the Arts of the UB. The Commission will help advertise the event.

COMMUNITY MATTERS:

SCHOOL BOARD LIAISON REPORT: Thomas Lucia reported that the guest, JoAnn Balazs, Sweet Home Central School District Asst. Superintendent & DEI Coordinator, was not able to come.

Thomas also reported that he found out that Williamsville North is the only high school offering an AP African American program. He has yet to know anything about the program.

TOWN LIAISON REPORT: Deborah Bucki's Liaison report included her appreciation for the celebration and the gift for her retirement before the meeting started. She also briefly shared the timeline of her career at the Amherst Town Government. Everyone thanked her again.

NEW BUSINESS:

COMMUNICATION, IF ANY:

Police Safety brochure: Debbie presented the brochure printouts with tips on protecting the lives and properties in worship places. The original file was sent to her by the police department, and Marty helped reformat the brochure. Debbie said the Commission should be proud of themselves for pressing the police department to bring the brochure to fruition.

Display items: Debbie said Heidi wrote the list of items and sent it by email to her. Then Marty checked the prices and talked to the finance department, which would order them for the Commission. The total cost is \$181.49, covered by Debbie's town-board member's general budget line.

Heidi reported the list of items and explained that the purpose of the purchase is to have the items available for future displays. She planned to keep the items in a storage box at the Town Hall.

Heidi reported the date of next Monday 4:30 PM for members to join her to set up the display. She also asked the members to help write a paragraph explaining each one of the holidays, printed in the same font and on the same paper so no one is special. She also made the request for the recipe for ethnic/cultural foods to be displayed with the same requirements.

Finally, the Commission confirmed the transmission of other display items and the way of reimbursement for the cost of the food and drink at the event.

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

MOTION TO ADJOURN: First motion to adjourn the meeting by __Dr. Moham Devgun__ and second by _Heidi Levebvre_. Unanimously approved. The meeting concluded at 6:50 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