

WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
Diverse and Inclusive Communities Committee Meeting Minutes
June 10, 2024, 6:00pm – 8:37pm
NS Works Community Board Room



Attendance:

Anne Bishop, Community Member, Co-Chair
Domenic Padula, Community Member, Co-Chair
Jamie Patterson, Community Member
Ian Shaw, Community Member and Avon View Teacher
Andrea Parker, Community Health Board Representative
Charlotte Paul, Glooscap Representative
Jim Ivey, Councillor, District 11
Deanna Snair, WHRM Employee
Sarah Taylor, WHRM Employee
Jessie Drysdale, WHRM Employee
Kevin Waters, WHRM Employee
Jenny LaPierre, WHRM Employee
Vanessa Lake, WHRM Employee

Guests:

Ashley Connors, Avon View High School Vice-Principal
Donna MacMillan, Avon View High School Interim Vice-Principal
Doug Jackson, Avon View High School Vice-Principal
Steve Carrington, Student Counsellor for Brooklyn and Dr. Arthur Hines Elementary Schools
Rayvonne Carrington, Black Educators Association
Heather Kidd, Teacher and Equity Coordinator for WHMS
Tristan Sampson, Student Support Worker for WHMS and AVHS
Dave Jones, Regional Education Officer for AVRCE
Paul Hanson, Avon View High School Principal

Regrets:

Ripley Brown-Fogarty, Community Member
Shartelle Lyon, SPEC Advisory Member
David Ferguson, RCMP Representative
Abraham Zebian, Mayor
Chris Burns, WHRM Employee
Mark Phillips, CAO

1. At 6:00pm, Anne called the meeting to order and read the Land Acknowledgements for the unceded Mi'kma'ki territory we live in and acknowledged the historic Black Loyalist communities in NS. The Committee members and guests introduced themselves and how they are connected

to the school system. Anne acknowledged that the Committee parted in conflict at the last meeting. A conversation will need to be had about respectful disagreements and discussions. The planning process is expected to be completed at the next meeting. Due to time constraints for some of the guests, the discussion on schools was held before other Committee business.

2. What is happening in our schools, what is being done to address it, and how can the Committee help? These were the core questions of the discussion. Paul acknowledged that racist, homophobic, transphobic, and other discriminatory incidents are occurring within the schools. It may not be that more incidents are happening than before, but more incidents are being reported. Tristan felt that incidents are being taken more seriously this year. Heather said that her students feel like something *is* being done. The schools have a variety of support systems in place to combat these incidents and it is the shared responsibility of all staff. They do not want to normalize racism and other discrimination. There are consequences to the students' actions; incidents may result in suspension. The perpetrator is also given an educational component to help them understand that what they said or did is wrong, and the victim is provided counseling. The parents of both parties are contacted following an event. Equity committees have been created; most responses have been reactive, but they hope to be proactive as they learn more. Staff are taking courses to educate themselves and bringing guest speakers to educate students. Staff are speaking directly with students to learn from them, to inform how they can do better going forward. Doug commented that staff are held to the code of conduct, and Steve commented that itself is systemic, but that is an issue beyond the group meeting here tonight.

The group discussed other concerns within the system and the community.

- Communication. Steve commented that false and/or incomplete information reaches the community rather than the full story. More communication to the parents and the public would be beneficial to avoid harmful misconceptions.
- Curriculum. Ian felt the students who *should* be taking the African Canadian Studies and Mi'kmaq Studies courses are not. These courses should be mandatory. Canadian History only skims the surface and students are not getting the full picture.
- Social Media and Cyberbullying. While many of these instances take place outside of school/the school's jurisdiction, the effects are still felt and have consequences offline.
- Parent Outreach. Many felt the problem begins at home. Children learn from their parents, and if their parents have discriminatory views, it is likely the child will, as well. Parents also need to be educated.
- Staffing. Staff are spread thin and doing all they can. It was expressed that they do not want to overburden marginalized staff members, but it was also noted than an allies' voice will amplify theirs, rather than "take over."
- Internalized Racism. This is a huge problem everywhere, not just in schools. Much of the world is a straight white man's world, and many people aren't even aware of the privileges they have. Use of slurs alone does not make someone racist. Microaggressions and assumptions can be just as harmful. Some students allegedly feel the teachers are discriminatory or judgemental of them based on their race/gender/etc.

The Committee asked how they can help. Spreading the word of what *is* being done would be helpful to combat misconceptions about schools "not caring." Ongoing discussions and

collaboration between school staff and this Committee would be a great asset. Advocacy to the School Board for funding full-time equity officer positions would be appreciated. Kevin and Sarah are working on an Anti-Racism and Hate Plan and would be happy to speak with the schools' equity committees. Anne suggested the Committee could function as a think tank.

The guests left the meeting at 7:35pm. The Committee thanked them for coming and for all that they are doing for the students.

3. Previous Business

- The Silent Disco was held on June 1. 14 people attended the event. The attendance was lower than hoped partly because Kings Meadow was locked down due to Covid. It was a great event for those who did attend.
- The Pride Crosswalk is going ahead. It is hoped to be installed some time this week at the intersection of Water and Gerrish streets. The Windsor Pride Parade is scheduled to be held on June 15 at 1:00pm, beginning at Victoria Park and will pass the new crosswalk on the way to the waterfront.

4. New Business

- The next meeting date was chosen as July 8, 2024, at 6:00pm. It will take place in Room 1A at the Hants Community Hospital. The Committee will not be meeting in August.
- Sarah Brothers and Jenna Warren-Mayor no longer reside in West Hants. The vacant Committee positions will be advertised, and members will be appointed by Council. Interested parties can apply by email to Deanna.
- Kevin requested the Pride flag be raised at a slightly later date next year so that the Access Awareness flag can be flown during NAAW.
- Dominic asked if new positions should be opened for middle school and high school staff, either as voting or advisory roles. This would require a recommendation to COTW/Council. It can be discussed at the next meeting.
- Next steps from the school discussion: Deanna suggested Committee members write letters as individuals to Council requesting that they advocate to the AVRCE for the equity officer pilot program. They will be submitted as correspondence and follow a different timeline than an official recommendation, which would take longer. Ian noted that this position can not be filled by anyone already in education. They are spread too thin. It could be a temporary municipal position at the beginning.
- The Committee discussed getting their name and message out there and using their position to amplify community voices. Jessie suggested using social media posts to highlight events and celebrations, but there was a concern about comments. Social media comments are not currently monitored by staff. Deanna said that the next WHRM Newsletter will have a section about the Committee. The Committee may also submit reports to Council as needed.

5. Moved by Anne Bishop and seconded by Dominic Padula that the meeting be adjourned at 8:39pm. Motion carried unanimously.