

MINUTES of the Committee on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (CDEI) 12/8/22 MEETING

Items highlighted indicate CDEI member action needed

Pursuant to notice duly filed with the Town Clerk, a meeting of the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion was scheduled at 7:00 pm

What: Town of Hadley – Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)

When: December 8, 7:00 pm

Where: Hadley Senior Center

Who: Chair Mark Dunn (MD), E. Wayne Abercrombie (WA), Joanne Goding (JG), Clerk Pat Rissmeyer (PR), Sarah Strong (SS), Megan Relin, (MR)*

Absent: Randy Izer, (RI)*, Non-voting member/SB liaison

1. Welcome and call to order

MD called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm. SS proposed we reorder the agenda to accommodate guest speaker, Laura Baker, Real Estate Development Director, Valley Community Development. Motion was made by SS, seconded by JG and motion passed 5-0

2. Old Business (continued)

a. Discussion of Local Preference, Affordable Housing Project, Hadley, Laura Baker

LB thanked MD for his invitation and shared that her interest in meeting with the CDEI is to promote thoughtful reflection and conversation. Increasing racial diversity in Hadley is an issue particularly relevant to the CDEI. The projection under consideration is the renovation of the Econo Lodge located at 329 Russell Street in Hadley into affordable housing units. The property is located on a bus line and within the Route 9 commercial corridor.

The group engaged in a follow-up discussion on how Hadley can request Local Preference from the State, during zoning approval for Chapter 40B affordable housing development. Local Preference would allow Hadley to designate up to 70% of units to those with local ties (residency, employment, children in schools).

The group discussed how requesting Local Preference may assist the Town with some ongoing challenges. JG suggested Hadley has very few housing opportunities for lower wage earners in contrast to the numerous opportunities for minimum wage employment in Hadley the Route 9 commercial corridor. The location of this property seems to be ideal for employees who live in the more affordable Hamden County communities and have a long commute to work. Local Preference would prioritize these individuals which would be a benefit not only to employees but to employers. SS suggested that Local Preference would also give priority to a parent from outside Hadley exercising “School Choice” and enrolling their child in the well regarded Hadley School system. This would seem to be beneficial to the student who would live in their school community.

Although Local Preference would support the needs of Hadley employee and employer and the parent and student exercising school choice, according to LB, studies show that exercising Local Preference maintains the racial status quo in predominantly white communities. Local Preference reduces the number of units in the lottery available to the general population likely to be more racially diverse. In essence, by giving ‘preference’ to some, you are denying the opportunity to others. WA suggested that given our Committee’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we should express our opposition to Local Preference. MD suggested that we may want to consider recommending a lower percentage of Local Preference than the maximum of 70%. In response to what percentage that Select Board suggested they would request, LB followed up by email informing the CDEI that although the Select Board has expressed support for the project, and has requested a preference for local residents, no specific Local Preference percentage has been requested. LB anticipates that Valley CDC will be requesting a permit

soon and that will trigger a public meeting. MD informed the group that the Zoning Board of Appeals makes the decision about issuing a permit for the project. MD shared that the Zoning Board of Appeals meets quarterly, and LB stated that the Zoning Board may be seeking input. The group discussed ways to share our perspective with Town Officials. LB suggested that written correspondence, particularly a letter from the CDEI may be the most impactful.

LB shared that Valley CDC will do ‘affirmative marketing’ via radio, newspaper, churches to reach the population most likely to qualify for affordable housing. LB explained that every applicant who meets the criteria is placed in a ‘bingo ball’ style lottery from which individual names are drawn randomly. LB shared that typically residents stay in their units for years so there is not a quick turnaround.

The group engaged in a question and answer with LB.

- The group highlighted the lack of affordable housing in the Valley and LB suggested that the proposed affordable housing project on Russell Street could serve the region but opening the lottery to all applicants without a local preference restriction.
- The group asked LB what neighboring towns request Local Preference and LB stated that Northampton never requests it, but Amherst has.
- With regard to the Town’s financial investment in the project, PR asked if Hadley would be contributing CPA funds, and LB stated that has yet to be decided.
- PR asked why municipalities are offered the local preference option, particularly if the municipality is not contributing funds. LB suggested that this invitation may ‘sweeten the pot’ and improving the likelihood of project approval.
- In response to a question about income requirements, LB shared that the income cap is: Single Person - \$19,800 and Two People - \$39,540.
- In response to a question about the relationship between crime and income, LB stated that support reduces ‘acting out’.
- LB concluded by asking the CDEI to become educated on and counteract the systematic denial of housing inequity.
- MD thanked LB for sharing her time and expertise and asked her to keep us informed.

3. Clerk’s Report

PR distributed for review the CDEI minutes of November 17, 2022. JG moved to approve the minutes; SS seconded the motion, and the motion passed 5-0.

4. New Business

Given the limited time for discussion, PR made a motion to move New Business, ‘Review of Town of Hadley Code of Conduct’ to the January agenda. The motion was approved.

5. Open Agenda

MD announced that the CDEI has time to submit their annual report. PR offered to write a draft to be reviewed at the February meeting. SS offered to assist. MD announced that the Select Board will review MR request for appointment to the CDEI on 12/21/22. WA expressed his disappointment that the Select Board neglected to openly address the ‘crime crap’ comment of one of its members. JG suggested that the development of the Code of Conduct was the Town’s response. MD suggested the individual in question has invested quite a bit to the Town.

6. Next Meeting

MD announced that the next meeting will be January 19, at 7 pm in the Senior Center. MD thanked everyone for their participation and WA made a motion for adjournment and SS seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 pm by a vote of 5-0.

Minutes submitted by Pat Rissmeyer, Clerk, Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion