

An Open Letter to the Community

In recent years, the Hartford Selectboard and School Board and others have been taking steps to make Hartford more inclusive and welcoming to all of Hartford's residents and guests, particularly those who do not make up the cultural, racial and ethnic majority. Key accomplishments of this process have been the formation of the Hartford Committee On Racial Equity and Inclusion, and the town and school contract with the Vermont Partnership for Fairness and Diversity.

Though this work has been an expression of enormous goodwill and has sought to strengthen the fabric of our community, it has not always been easy. As we have progressed, sometimes working in environments fraught with strong feelings on both sides, we have occasionally recognized the need for a course correction.

This was particularly the case Thursday night at a Fair and Impartial Policing Policy Work Group, made up of the town manager, police chief, representatives of the Selectboard and School Board, and members of the advocacy community.

At the meeting on Thursday, two things became clear: 1. Our chosen strategy of police policy revision is not the most effective means of accomplishing our goals. 2. There is a stronger, less legally problematic and less controversial path forward involving the passage of an ordinance. The work group was unanimous in recognizing these points.

Speaking on behalf of both the Selectboard and School Board, we can clearly state that both the undocumented community and the members of Hartford's police force are cherished members of our community. Regarding the latter, there is no doubt in our minds that Hartford is now blessed with an outstanding Police Department and staff of police officers that is deserving of our gratitude and respect, both for the sacrifice that they make and for the quality of service they daily render for our community.

Moreover, we as a broader municipal community do trust our police force for the strides the department has made and its demonstrated commitment to becoming a model community police force in our state. That this fact has been obscured by a process to date which has not integrated the guidance from the police department in a timely manner is a regrettable mistake that we can and have learned from.

Though there will be difficult conversations both on this and other topics going forward, at this point we believe that the worst of the community tension on this topic is behind us. The July 30 Selectboard meeting will not address amendments to Hartford's Fair and Impartial Policing Policy but rather will discuss a proposed "Welcoming Hartford" ordinance.

We are extremely proud to represent and serve the Town of Hartford in the ways we do and we all look forward to seeing as many as can make it at the Hartford High School Auditorium at 6 p.m. on July 30 to advance this important conversation to the next level.

Brannon Godfrey, Hartford Town Manager
Phillip Kasten, Hartford Police Chief
Kevin "Coach" Christie, School Board Chair
Jameson Davis, Selectboard Member
Simon Dennis, Selectboard Chair