

Town of Hartford Committee on Racial Equity and Inclusion

Wednesday, August 21, 2019

6:00 PM to 8:10 PM

In Attendance: John Hall, Chairman, Michele Boleski, School Board Representative, Ann Raynolds, Allene Swienckowski

Guest: Curtiss Reed, Vermont Partnership for Fairness & Diversity

The chair called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM.

The first item on the agenda was to approve Meeting Minutes for the dates June 19, 2019 and July 17, 2019. Previous Meeting Minutes could not be voted upon because HCOREI did not have the required Quorum.

Discussion:

Presentation: Mr. Curtiss Reed, Director of Vermont Partnership and Fairness & Diversity. VPFDD, headed by Mr. Reed, have been employed by the Select and School Boards to prepare a Strategic Plan for the Town of Hartford, VT.

Mr. Reed and VPFDD have already begun to work on the Strategic Plan for the Select and School Boards, school administrators and teachers, as well as the town staff.

Mr. Reed stated unequivocally what he and his staff would not do, that is, he and his staff are not interested in blaming, shaming or vilifying any individual on the Select or School Boards as they attempt to further equity and inclusion in the Town of Hartford. Mr. Reed's partner, Mary M. Gannon, a professor at Smith College as well as a consultant to several schools in New Hampshire, will be the lead person to our schools.

VPFDD employs a "data geek" and much of the information that is mined about our population and schools comes from census the census block. This data is very useful, also culled from the Department of Parks and Recreation as well as data from specific ZIP codes. The data will be collected not solely be about race and ethnicity but also about "abilities, identities (gender, etc.) as well as disabilities and our aging population.

Mr. Reed noted that our town website have a few links that do not work and that there are missing links. It is crucial for a community to have efficient, working access to the town's and the schools websites. One of Mr. Reed's questions centered on whether our website is easily accessible to handicapped individuals, and even those who are not technologically proficient.

The Genus of Hartford's Strategic Plan:

VPFDD, under the auspices of Mr. Reed, will be based on the economics of our town. Specifically, what can we do to make Hartford, as a town, more profitable and attract businesses with deep pockets to invest in our community and in turn attract individuals and families that will power our town via a strong economy.

VPPFD will also focus on the demographics of our town by utilizing focus groups to tease out who we are and what is important to the residents of Hartford. In other words VPPFD will take a deep dive into our community.

The reality of Hartford is that there is good stuff: happening and what we need to do is to expand the reach of what is right with Hartford.

Perhaps one way to highlight our values, especially in our schools is to perhaps utilize PSAs during sporting events at our schools. PSAs that clearly address our beliefs of equity and inclusivity in our community. Perhaps that transition time between eighth and ninth grade or even the first freshman assembly should highlight our values to our incoming students to ensure that they begin their high school lives with a cohesive bond of equity and inclusiveness.

Our chairman queried Mr. Reed how our committee might not be disruptive to his process. Mr. Reed replied “pretend that we are invisible. It is business as usual for you as well as any entity that we are observing.”

A major equity issue that is occurring in Hartford real time is the increasing Homelessness of people, families and children.

Michele Boleski is concerned about possible individual who may be resentful towards the efforts of Mr. Reed VPPFD and uncooperative. She mentioned a recent School Board retreat where a facilitator was used employed and made the process much easier than in years past.

Mr. Reed suggested that HCOREI invite Xusana Davis, first Executive Director of Racial Equity in the State of Vermont, to one of our meetings to discuss issues of race and poverty in Hartford.

Then Mr. Reed queried HCOREI members present with: “Why should a business entity want to relocate to Hartford?”

The members responded with a panoply of ideas such as: Hartford’s Annual Community, Picnic, WRJ’s Halloween Parade, WRJs Block Party, Horse Back riding competitions, expanding Tech opportunities, the nearby Lebanon airport, the Quechee Balloon Festival, WRJ craft beer, the Cartoon Studio, JAG.

Mr. Reed also suggested a planned cyber-security conference hosted at HACTC

The meeting ended with Ann Raynold’s detailing “A Day of Remembrance”, sponsored by the Episcopal Church.