

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TOWN OF FAIRFIELD
April 25, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZm0NCZFcxY>

A meeting of the Town of Fairfield was held on Monday, April 25, 2022 at 8 PM via Webex.

The meeting was called to order at 8 PM by Moderator Mark McDermott.

PRESENT: 39 ABSENT: 1 VACANCY: 0

PRESENT: Bateson, Furey, Longo, Ruggiero, McCormack, Perham, Steele, Durrell, Galdenzi, Lambert, Pistilli, Karson, Kelly, Spolyar, Zezima, Diaz, Garskof, Siebert, Wolk, Berecz, Gale, Graceffa, Havey, Kuhn, McDermott, Vergara, Wackerman, Ference, Iacono, Messina, P. Tallman, Brown, Georgiadis, Horton, Scinto, Astarita, Britton, Petise, S. Tallman

ABSENT: Schwartz

ITEM NO. 1 ON CALL: PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & MOMENT OF SILENCE

Moderator McDermott led the Body in the Pledge of Allegiance and a Moment of Silence in memory of Charlie Capalbo who recently passed away.

ITEM NO. 2 ON CALL: TO CONSIDER & ACT UPON THE FEBRUARY 28, 2022 MINUTES

Joe Siebert, District 5 moved this item as distributed with the Call, duly seconded.

VOTE: The minutes of the February 28th meeting were approved by unanimous voice vote.

CONSENT CALENDAR: The Moderator reported that items 5, 6 & 7 were eligible for the Consent Calendar.

VOTE: Items 5, 6 & 7 were approved by unanimous voice vote.

ITEM NO. 3 ON CALL: TO CONSIDER AND ACT UPON THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION RECOMMENDED BY THE FIRST SELECTWOMAN: "RESOLVED, THAT A CERTAIN CONTRACT NEGOTIATED BY AND BETWEEN THE TOWN OF FAIRFIELD AND FAIRFIELD PUBLIC HEALTH NURSES, UNIT 34 OF THE AFT NURSES AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS - AFT AFL-CIO, CONCERNING CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT FOR A PERIOD COMMENCING JULY 1, 2020 AND ENDING JUNE 30, 2024 BE, AND HEREBY IS, RATIFIED."

Jill Vergara, District 7 moved this item as distributed with the Call, duly seconded.

Ms. Vergara said many nurses felt undervalued and read several statements from the nurses regarding their increased duties as first responders during the pandemic.

Liz Zezima, District 4 said she supports the nurses contract and is thankful for all their hard work during the pandemic.

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Patty Ericson, union secretary, read a statement on behalf of the union regarding taking on additional jobs during the pandemic such as working clinics and contact tracing, working on the frontline and being subject to harassment by parents.

Sharon Pistilli, District 3 thanked the nurses for all their work during the pandemic.

Pamela Iacono, District 8 expressed appreciation on behalf of the Republican caucus and their full support of the contract.

VOTE: The contract between the Town and Fairfield Public Health Nurses Unit 34 was approved by unanimous voice vote.

ITEM NO. 4 ON CALL: TO CONSIDER AND ACT UPON THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION RECOMMENDED BY THE FIRST SELECTWOMAN: “RESOLVED, THAT A CERTAIN AGREEMENT NEGOTIATED BY AND BETWEEN THE TOWN OF FAIRFIELD AND THE PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION LOCAL 1303-366 OF COUNCIL 4 AFSCME, AFL-CIO CONCERNING CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT FOR THE PERIOD COMMENCING JULY 1, 2020 AND ENDING JUNE 30, 2023 BE, AND HEREBY IS, RATIFIED.”

Hank Ference, District 8 moved this item as distributed with the Call, duly seconded.

Jill Vergara asked if there were a “hard & fast” deadline to approve this contract. Atty. Courtney George explained following submission dates and approval by the union the deadline would be May 19. Ms. Vergara said the redline version was difficult to read particularly the appendices with the salary schedules and requested non-redline copies and asked in the future for clearer documentation.

VOTE: The contract between the Town and the PETA Local 1303-366 was approved with 34 in favor and 2 opposed (Wolk & Vergara).

ITEM NO. 5 ON CALL: TO HEAR, CONSIDER AND ACT UPON THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION AS RECOMMENDED BY THE BOARD OF FINANCE: “RESOLVED, THAT, AS PART OF THE COMMERCE DRIVE AND STATE STREET EXTENSION BRIDGE PROJECT, AN APPROPRIATION IN THE AMOUNT OF \$200,000 TO PAY FOR FEES ASSOCIATED WITH THE RIGHT-OF-WAY PROCESS AND PERMANENT AND TEMPORARY EASEMENTS RELATED TO THE PROJECT, OF WHICH 100% SHALL BE COVERED BY A METROCOG LOTCIP GRANT, BE, AND HEREBY IS, APPROVED.”

This item was on the consent calendar.

ITEM NO. 6 ON CALL: TO HEAR, CONSIDER AND ACT UPON THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION AS RECOMMENDED BY THE BOARD OF FINANCE: “RESOLVED, THAT AN APPROPRIATION IN THE AMOUNT OF \$120,000 FROM THE WPCA FUND BALANCE TO COMPLETE THE MICROGRID PROJECT BE, AND HEREBY IS, APPROVED.”

This item was on the consent calendar.

ITEM NO. 7 ON CALL: TO HEAR, CONSIDER AND ACT UPON THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION AS RECOMMENDED BY THE BOARD OF FINANCE: “RESOLVED, THAT AN APPROPRIATION IN THE AMOUNT OF \$540,000 FROM THE

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WPCA FUND BALANCE TO REPLACE THE COMPOST AGITATOR AND DOLLY AT THE WASTE WATER TREATMENT FACILITY BE, AND HEREBY IS, APPROVED.”

This item was on the consent calendar.

ITEM NO. 8 ON CALL: TO CONSIDER AND ACT UPON A SENSE OF THE BODY RESOLUTION REGARDING RACISM AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS.

Tom Lambert, District 3 moved this item as distributed with the Call, duly seconded.

Margaret Horton, District 9 said there is a need to acknowledge other’s lived experiences.

Jeff Steele, District 2 said it has been past practice to have sponsors from both parties so the language can be worked out jointly. This resolution was adopted by the state and 22 municipalities and not adapted for our town. He said the resolution’s focus solely on racism, and not discrimination or bigotry, it does not declare that we are tolerant or inclusive; it is overly broad and stigmatizes the town. There are other public health emergencies, like mental illness and fentanyl that have killed people, and does not recognize the work that the Town has already done.

Amendment: Jeff Steele, District 2 moved to strike and replace the proposed resolution with a substitute resolution that he emailed and read (copy attached hereto) entitled “A Resolution Promoting Equality, Tolerance & Anti-discrimination in the Town of Fairfield”, duly seconded.

At 8:43 PM, Ms. Zezima called for caucus. The meeting resumed at 8:56 PM.

Ms. Pistilli agreed with the additional points that were raised. Racial Equity & Justice Task Force (REJTF) report was given in January and we stand behind the work of the REJTF, and if we want to work on the other issues we can do it down the road.

Liz Zezima recounted the steps taken so far; 3/6 email to the first selectwoman about the blueprint from the REJTF submitted in January and to discuss the idea of a resolution; it is within her purview to do a proclamation. Ms. Zezima’s idea was to see what the RTM can do and brought it to the person charged with those recommendations; cc’d to Bertolone, Bremer, Iacono, Steele, Baldwin, first selectwoman replied it is in the RTM’s purview to bring forward a resolution but don’t know what real impact it would create and change. Ms. Zezima replied given the time constraints during the budget season and thanked her for convening the taskforce in September. After May 2 would like to have a conversation so everyone has known about the resolution for a month and a ½. On April 7 she asked the minority leader about support for the resolution and she replied they would be caucusing tonight. No one asked to amend the resolution; everyone had been included. We are turning this into an all lives matter moment; this was drafted to a specific charge in response to the blueprint about racial equity and justice.

Karen Wackerman, District 7 said those are noble things that should be on our radar but this is in response to the REJTF. It would be great to talk about Rep. Steele’s resolution in the future. It’s a tribute to the first selectwoman.

Ms. Horton said this is the best way to honor our Black and indigenous residents as is.

Ken Astarita, District 10 said we are a welcoming tolerant community and makes clear we won’t tolerate racism, discrimination or anti-Semitism and what the town has already done.

Marcy Spolyar, District 4 said as a sponsor she cannot support this amendment at this time. This has been a work in progress; the REJTF worked for over 18 months and came up with three recommendations and this resolution is best practice. Our focus should be this is a public health crisis but would like to work on the others in the future.

Mr. Lambert echoed prior comments and said he would be supportive of work the Town could do for those marginalized groups as well.

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Will Diaz, District 5 said Rep. Steele's amendment makes very valid points, but it's a diversion on racism and related his own dealing with micro aggression, but there's no focus on the nuance of racism.

Jay Wolk, District 5 said there are a lot of good points in this resolution. He had bipartisan support for a sense of the body resolution previously. Any racism bothers him, but we need to pass the original resolution.

Laura Karson, District 4 said the original resolution came from the REJTF. There are treatment plans for substance abuse, but we don't have treatment for racism; it is a public health crisis. The REJTF gave a blueprint, there's work to be done.

Mr. Steele said he appreciates everyone's comments. His amendment is inclusive, it does not hide any issue, it incorporates it, it addresses racism, and states how we should get in front of it. He hopes there can be bipartisan support as there is nothing in it that we cannot agree on. He does not intend to hide or confuse an issue. Our purpose on the RTM is to discuss important issues together.

Dru Georgiadis, District 9, said she agreed there are a lot of important items in there, but it does not address poverty. She had asked her caucus to include poverty. Racism has contributed to poverty across the country. She hoped they would all support the original resolution and look forward to working on the next one.

Ms. Horton felt the amendment was too broad and dilutes racism and honoring their experience.

Joe Seibert, District 5 commended Rep. Steele and agreed with many things that were included and agreed that poverty should be included, but cannot support the amendment at this time. This is chapter 1 about the overall quality of life, so let's get this done and then work together on others.

Public Comment:

Speaking in opposition to the amendment: REJTF members: Doug Bunnell and Ryan Odinak. Selectman & Co-Chair Nancy Lefkowitz said the original resolution acknowledges systemic racism exists and is a public health issue. The resolution is boiler plate and we can address the nuances in Fairfield later, but it is meant to acknowledge that Fairfield is not immune.

Mr. Steele said he did not send the amendment out because it was not ready as he was still working on it today. It addresses everything the task force listed; he does not think anyone would think the Town does not address efforts to address racism. It addresses it and how to confront it. These components bring to life everything that has been said. Ms. Lefkowitz clarified that the proclamation was outside the purview of the task force as they could only make recommendations, if they had the power to make a resolution they would have.

Mr. Wolk said a sense of the body resolution is not legally binding.

Ms. Zezima thanked the first selectwoman for convening the task force, the REJTF for their work, the caucus for their powerful comments and Jeff Steele for his work and said the first selectwoman is empowered to issue a proclamation.

VOTE: The amendment to strike and replace the proposed sense of the body resolution regarding racism as a public health crisis with a resolution promoting equality, tolerance & anti-discrimination failed with 17 in favor and 22 opposed.

IN FAVOR: Bateson, Furey, Longo, Ruggiero, McCormack, Steele, Durrell, Gale, Ference, Iacono, Messina, P. Tallman, Scinto, Astarita, Britton, Petise, S. Tallman

OPPOSED: Perham, Galdenzi, Lambert, Pistilli, Karson, Kelly, Spolyar, Zezima, Diaz, Garskof, Siebert, Wolk, Berecz, Graceffa, Havey, Kuhn, McDermott, Vergara, Wackerman, Brown, Georgiadis, Horton

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Ms. Wackerman urged bipartisan support of the sense of the body resolution.

Public Comment: Ms. Lefkowitz spoke in favor.

VOTE: The sense of the body resolution regarding racism as a public health crisis failed with 22 in favor and 17 opposed.

IN FAVOR: Perham, Galdenzi, Lambert, Pistilli, Karson, Kelly, Spolyar, Zezima, Diaz, Garskof, Siebert, Wolk, Berecz, Graceffa, Havey, Kuhn, McDermott, Vergara, Wackerman, Brown, Georgiadis, Horton

OPPOSED: Bateson, Furey, Longo, Ruggiero, McCormack, Steele, Durrell, Gale, Ference, Iacono, Messina, P. Tallman, Scinto, Astarita, Britton, Petise, S. Tallman

ITEM NO. 9 ON CALL: RTM REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE REPORT

Pamela Iacono reported that the Committee is still working on the ordinance, but they have paused as the Charter Revision Commission is working on its recommendation. Karen Wackerman thanked Hal Schwartz who resigned from the Committee for his leadership. The SLMC has appointed Marcy Spolyar. A meeting is scheduled for April 26th.

Ms. Zezima said redistricting is driven by the current Charter. The SLMC voted on the charge; there is no consensus on 9 districts right now but hope the Committee can negotiate and get the redistricting done.

In response to Ms. Pistilli, Ms. Wackerman explained that the deadline for redistricting is next spring, but they would like to get the new districts in place for the November election and in order to do that they would have to vote by May 11.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth P. Browne, MMC, MCTC
Town Clerk

Resolution Promoting Equality, Tolerance & Anti-Discrimination in The Town of Fairfield

WHEREAS the Fairfield RTM wholeheartedly condemns racism, anti-Semitism, discrimination and bigotry, whenever and wherever it occurs;

WHEREAS Fairfield residents have experienced racism, anti-Semitism, discrimination and/or bigotry;

WHEREAS Fairfield residents of all identities face many public health challenges, including mental illness, teen depression, substance abuse and violent crime;

WHEREAS the pandemic has had an unprecedented and far-reaching impact on the mental health of our residents; further exacerbating struggles that existed long before COVID;

WHEREAS there is no place for discrimination of any kind, including for reasons of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual preference, disability, religious or political beliefs in our Town, all Fairfield residents should have equitable access to opportunity;

WHEREAS the Town of Fairfield has made a commitment to be a welcoming, inclusive, tolerant and supportive community to all, taking a position of encouraging diversity of thoughts and ideas, and meaningful dialogue between, and input from, its residents, town government, police, and the school system, and constantly seeking to improve the quality of life for all who live here;

WHEREAS in 2020, the Fairfield Board of Selectmen (BOS), the first in the state, proactively established a Racial Equity and Justice Task Force to identify any racial and ethnic inequalities and injustices within Town governance and operations, and to provide the BOS with proposals to effectively address and eliminate them;

WHEREAS the Town Boards approved funding through ARPA for \$75,000 for a Diversity & Inclusion consultant to create an Affirmative Action Plan, review the Blueprint provided by the Racial Equity and Justice Task Force, and provide recommendations;

WHEREAS the Board of Selectmen proposed a Diversity Recruitment Coordinator in the FY23 budget to expand the Town's hiring practices and update the Affirmative Action Plan, once developed;

WHEREAS the first step, to call and ask for help, should be the most difficult step in working through any crisis, a full time Town Social Services Director will allow for planning and reviewing processes and procedures to streamline how services are provided in an efficient, compassionate and respectful way;

WHEREAS three hundred thousand dollars were designated in ARPA funds to assist local nonprofits that provide mental health services to residents;

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WHEREAS the Board of Education hired a DEI Program Director to provide leadership fostering the academic and social/emotional growth of all students through the promotion of a culture of community, tolerance, diversity and inclusion, and support students and staff to address issues and opportunities that impact student learning;

WHEREAS trust between law enforcement agencies and the people they protect and serve is essential in a functioning democracy, the Fairfield Police Department has established a Community Outreach Team, and has fully embraced and implemented community policing best practices and policies as recommended by President Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing;

WHEREAS the Fairfield Police Department has officially established the Fairfield Police Behavioral Health Network (FPBHN), in partnership with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), Greater Bridgeport Community Mental Health Center (GBCMHC), Child and Family Guidance Center (CFGC), Mobil Crisis Intervention Services (MCIS), Operation Hope, and Fairfield Senior/Social Services, to discuss trending issues, current best practices, available joint-training opportunities, debriefings on shared investigations, and to continually evaluate how they can better serve their communities, and each other, when responding to incidents involving behavioral/mental health;

Now, therefore, be it Resolved, that the RTM of Fairfield:

- (1) Fully supports efforts and initiatives to combat racism, anti-Semitism, discrimination and bigotry in all its forms in Town government, the Public School System and in the broader community;
- (2) Will consider equality and inclusion in any new or existing ordinances, committees, and commissions approved by the RTM;
- (3) Will support initiatives in the Human Resources Department to expand diversity recruitment, and policies in Town government;
- (4) Will continue coordinated efforts through the Town to remove the stigma and challenges of accessing mental health services by providing funding, and collaborating with Town departments, so individuals and families can access mental health services without regard for their ability to pay;
- (5) Further work to solidify alliances and partnerships with other organizations that are confronting racism and encourage other local, state, regional and national entities;
- (6) Will promote continued engagement on issues involving racism, anti-Semitism, discrimination and bigotry among all Town departments and service providers to get their support and input on current processes/procedures and new initiatives to address any issues as they arise.