

**MEETING MINUTES FROM A REGULAR MEETING OF THE
MULTICULTURAL INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

HELD AT 7:00 P.M. ON NOVEMBER 29, 2023

VIA ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE

A. CALL TO ORDER *meeting was called to order at 7:04 pm by Michele Gruet.*

B. STATEMENT REGARDING PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT - read by Michele Gruet.

The notice requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act have been satisfied with respect to this meeting of the Multicultural Inclusion & Accessibility Advisory Committee which is being held via Zoom video conferencing. This information, along with the public internet link and telephone call-in information was posted in the Municipal Building, and sent the official newspapers of the Township, the Verona-Cedar Grove Times and the Star Ledger and MyVeronaNJ.com, TAPinto and the Patch, the official online news source(s) of the Township, at least 48 hours preceding the start time of this meeting. A public comment period will be held in the order it is listed on the meeting agenda and instructions on how to comment will be provided at the appropriate time.

C. ROLL CALL

Present:

Michele Gruet

John Vajda

Kathleen Francis

Kristen Dunleavy

Roxanna Tirado

Carla Buglione

Michelle O'Neill

Rita Chevalier

Christine McGrath - Council Representative

Diane DiGiuseppe - Superintendent of School

Claudine Pascale - Verona Public Library

David Rowbotham - Interim Director of Community Services & Recreation

Absent:

Wesley Tahsir-Rodriguez

Elisa Northrop - Public Information Officer

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the October 25th meeting were approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

REPRESENTATIVE UPDATES

- Christine McGrath – C.McGrath introduced D.Rowbotham, the Interim Director of Community Services & Recreation. In his role, D.Rowbotham also oversees vital statistics, senior services, and the health department.
- David Rowbotham – D.Rowbotham discussed the areas that he has oversight over and was looking forward to working with MIAAC on many of the open initiatives. D.Rowbotham provided the committee with an update on the disability coordinator replacement, as he is currently looking to fill this position. The application deadline has closed but will reopen shortly. The goal is to have this filled by the middle of January. D.Rowbotham also discussed Lunar New Year and how he is in the planning phases of this event. It is not yet determined where this event will take place as there are seating concerns in the gym at the Community Center. D.Rowbotham is working with the Board of Education on this, as well. D.Rowbotham will provide a date once it is determined. M.Gruet stated that MIAAC could help with the planning of the event.
- Claudine Pascale – C.Pascale discussed the following activities the library has in place or is in the process of planning:
 - Sensory Story Time – Occurring monthly
 - Sensory Photo Session – Santa
 - Women’s History Month – in progress
 - Lunar New Year – in progress
 - Black History Month – in progress
- Diane DiGiuseppe – DiGiuseppe stated that there has been an uptick in HIB cases regarding ethnicity and race. DiGiuseppe discussed the continuous strategies that the Verona Public Schools have in place to combat this. DiGiuseppe has a character education program planned that will be led by a West Point teacher who served in Afghanistan whose major message is “other people matter.” DiGiuseppe also mentioned the Peer Mediator program that is in place and although there is a positive impact with this program, it is more reactive and less preventative/proactive. This program will continue but with additional programs. The main focus will be positive psychology. DiGiuseppe discussed a partnership with a new DEI group whose goal is providing safe, equitable places and building connections. There will be workshops for students and teachers with a focus on restorative justice. Teachers will help students make better behavior choices. DiGiuseppe announced that Inclusive Schools Week will occur on January 22, 2024. There will be a speaker for HBW, named Jordan Toma, who is a motivational speaker with a program called “I’m just a

kid with an IEP.” DiGiuseppe also discussed the upcoming assembly on digital safety and mindfulness. This will take place on December 13th, at Verona High School, at 7pm. The Verona Police Department will be present, as well. Adults and Children are both welcome. All are encouraged to register on the Verona Public Schools website.

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion:

- Quiet Photo Session with Santa/Fair in the Square – M.O’Neill provided an update from the sub-committee that includes M.Gruet and J.Vajda. The photo session will coincide with Fair in the Square (Dec. 2nd) from 10am-12p. The subcommittee worked collaboratively with E.Northrope and C.Pascale who were vital in the planning and implementation. The ground crew will handle the set up of the backdrop for Santa upstairs of the library. E.Northrope coordinated the scheduling and will provide lists to the sub-committee and the day of the session, the sub-committee will welcome families, direct them to Santa, and assist with a sensory craft. M.Gruet and M.O’Neill will have 2 student volunteers assisting with the craft.
- Hanukkah/Menorah Lighting – C.McGrath stated that the Hanukkah celebration will take place on 12/11/23. There will also be a pre-party planned at the Verona American Grill before the lighting. The pre-party is scheduled for 5pm-6:30pm. The Menorah Lighting will occur at 7pm and there will be live music. C.McGrath stated that volunteers are not needed for this event.
- Black History Month – The sub-committee consists of W.Tahsir-Rodriguez, C.Buglione, and R.Chevalier and the sub-committee is looking to plan the event in February. C.Buglione stated that the sub-committee is meeting on Friday. C. Buglione was hopeful to work with the library on this event and C.Pascale will join the meeting to discuss. C.Buglione will provide updates at the next committee meeting.
- Women’s History Month – C.Pascale stated that planning is in progress. C.Pascale is in the process of revisiting the last Women’s History Month event but with some tweaks to improve. A sub-committee was created that included K.Francis, R.Tirado, and C.Buglione. C.Pascale will schedule a meeting with the sub-committee on the agreed upon date, 12/8/23.
- Year-End Report – M.Gruet stated that she would begin drafting the year-end report for 2023. This draft will be sent to the committee for review and once reviewed, will go to the town council. The goal is for this to be completed by the

end of January 2024. M.Gruet will send out the 2022 year-end report to the committee, as well.

- Volunteer Sub-Committee – C.McGrath stated that individuals were having difficulties submitting volunteer surveys through the town’s website. M.O’Neill and K.Francis to look into this issue with J.Kiernan and E.Northrope. M.O’Neill and K.Francis to provide an update to the committee.
- Other Items
 - K.Dunleavy will work with J.Kiernan and C.McGrath to obtain a google drive for the MIAAC to use.
 - C.McGrath mentioned the Allie’s Elves event which will occur on December 9th, from 11a-3p at the Verona Community Center.
 - C.McGrath stated that recently attended the League of Municipalities in Trenton, NJ. There was some material presented on inclusivity that C.McGrath will distribute to the committee. C.McGrath discussed making a connection between Sustainable Verona and MIAAC as there are sustainable projects that relate to diversity and inclusion. This will be a 2024 discussion.
 - J.Vajda mentioned that there may be grants available through AARP and that the Accessibility Report that was done would be ideal in processing the applications.
 - C.McGrath provided an update regarding the playground at the Community Center. The plan is in place and the bids for the ADA accessible playground are closed. Bids will be evaluated, and an update will be provided to the committee.
 - D.Rowbotham stated that a Fall Event is currently being planned that will hopefully kick off back to school. The planning is in progress, but initial thoughts are having projects and playing a movie. D.Rowbotham stated that volunteers will be needed.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 8:19 PM