

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

HELD AT 7:00 P.M. ON DECEMBER 20, 2023

VIA ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE

A. CALL TO ORDER *meeting was called to order at 7:12 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

Kathleen Francis

Kristen Dunleavy

Roxanna Tirado

Michelle O'Neill

Rita Chevalier

Christine McGrath - Council Representative

Claudine Pascale - Verona Public Library

David Rowbotham - Interim Director of Community Services & Recreation

Absent:

Wesley Tahsir-Rodriguez

Carla Buglione

John Vajda

Elisa Northrop - Public Information Officer

Diane DiGiuseppe - Superintendent of School

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the November 29th meeting were approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Name: Sarvenaz Singh, Verona Resident

S.Singh made a public comment regarding her recent experience renting the ballroom at the Verona Community Center. S.Singh has organized a Chabat Pot Luck with approximately 80 attendees. The event will include blessings and eating and can be done anywhere. This event is also both religious and cultural.

S.Singh completed the ballroom rental form and was reached out to by a town employee who responded with questions regarding the event. The questions involved:

1. Do I know you?
2. Have we ever met?
3. Who are you inviting?
4. What will you do other than eat?

S.Singh then reported that the town employee stated that she could not rent the hall to her because there is an unwritten rule that you cannot host a religious event where prayers are said. She asked for the town employee to escalate and the town employee then responded, via voicemail, stating that she will allow her to rent but for one time as it cannot be habit to rent for Chabat.

S.Singh was upset with the interaction stating that she felt it could have been handled better. S.Singh stated that she brought this to the MIAAC because she wanted to be sure that the ballroom use was rented in an equitable manner.

Responses:

D.Rowbotham thanked S.Singh for bringing this concern forward and stated that this issue was brought to his attention this morning. D.Rowbotham stated that he felt there was no reason not to allow the rental for S.Singh, which was the decision that was made. D.Rowbotham also stated that the only written rules are related to having different rates for non-residents for residents. He did state that the town does try to be fair in their rentals, which may have been why the town employee responded stated not to make it a habit to rent for Chabat. D.Rowbotham stated that they will continue to review this with the town attorney.

C.McGrath also thanked S.Singh for raising her concern with the MIAAC and opined that many "unwritten rules" have been identified and that written policies are needed. She did state that her understanding of the rental of the ballroom was that religious

events could not be held nor could any events with political ties. C.McGrath stated that the township should look at the policy piece and further into S.Singh's concern as it appears that there are training opportunities.

REPRESENTATIVE UPDATES

- C.Pasquale - C.Pasquale gave an update regarding two events that are in the planning phases. The first is Black History Month and the second is the Women's Impact Panel. Black History month is tentatively scheduled for February 4th with a rain date of February 6th. This date will be confirmed with the sub-committee. The event will be held at the library and the theme is an open mic event. The Women's History Panel is scheduled for March 10th at 3pm in the Ballroom. The subcommittee will meet in early January to further plan. The goal is to follow the same process as last year where women will be nominated to be on a panel discussion and asked about their careers, community service, and other impacts they have made.
- D.Rowbotham - D.Rowbotham reported three updates. The first was regarding the part time recreation position, focused on inclusivity, that will reopen in January. The second was regarding the recreation tent area at the pool. D.Rowbotham met with C.Holland (council woman) and Mary Ellen Hughes (Director, Verona Pool), regarding making a portion of this area an inclusive safe space for those who need this. This need was identified during pool surveys that were sent out. M.Gruet also mentioned the accessibility report that was done on the Verona Pool earlier in the year and she will send to D.Rowbotham to review. The details are to be determined but the idea was very well received by the MIAAC. D.Rowbotham gave an update on the Lunar New Year Celebration, which will take place on February 3, 2024, at Verona High School.
- C.McGrath- C.McGrath provided an update on public hearings regarding the following an application to Essex County Community Block Grant
 - a. C.McGrath thanked the committee for the Accessibility Report that was used to request grant money (100k) to replace doors at the Community Center and to revamp the pool walkways.
 - b. C.McGrath also discussed a 2.4 million dollar grant for ADA improvements made to Everett field. This would include accessible bathrooms, bleachers, and parking.

C.McGrath also stated that there will be a second hearing on Jan. 8, 2024.

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion:

Organization of Documents - K.Dunleavy and C.Mcgrath updated the committee on the google folder that was created that would store all committee documents. Kevin O'Sullivan would be the owner and K.Dunleavy and M.Gruet would have edit access to the drive. K.Dunleavy offered to be the point of contact for all uploads. The committee agreed that members should have read only access only. C.McGrath stated that she could handle this piece.

Online Submission Requests - M.Gruet, M.O'Neill, and K.Francis are resolving the concerns regarding the online submission requests with E.Northrop. E.Northrop has been very helpful in assisting in providing information on the submissions and who has access/where do they go. M.O'Neill will set up time with E.Northrop to discuss. Updates will be provided to committee next meeting.

High School Volunteers - M.Gruet, M.O'Neill, and K.Francis will work to follow the process that the Environmental Committee used to recruit high school students for membership. The group will provide an update next committee meeting.

Event Planning Guide - C.McGrath discussed a concern related to Fair in the Square a Veteran who had a difficult time securing parking. C.McGrath requested that M.Gruet recirculate the Event Planning Guide to the committee and collaborate with E.Northrop.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 8:25 PM