

HCOREI Meeting Minutes

Recording: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-krjGDVgXluEkk4DTnNxZCq88sXE80Cl/view>

Town of Hartford Committee on Racial Equity and Inclusion
Wednesday June 3, 2020
6:00 PM to 7:30 PM

Time	Agenda Topic.	Committee Action
6:00 PM	Call to Order/Welcome	
<p>In Attendance: John Hall, Ann Raynolds, Sara Campbell, Allene Swienckowski, Nancy Russell, Alicia Barrow, Joe Major, Giavanna Munafo Community Members: Chief Phillip Kasten, Rebecca Whitney, Kim Souza</p> <p>Welcome message - Dr. Jess Fried -Allene’s Daughter -</p>		
	Consent Agenda (Approve May 20, 2020 Minutes)	
6:05 PM	Acknowledge Community Members Community Members Input	

Conversation with Chief Phillip Kasten - Joe invited the Chief to join us tonight.

Joe stated to Allene: “ It’s Important to hear from the Chief - there are a lot of questions/concerns, locally, nationally. It is important to not only work with the Chief but to also acknowledge and send out a unified statement around unfolding events. Within the community there is a lot of concern and fear at this time of heightened anxiety.

Chief Kasten (CK) - The Chief mentioned the letters that he had shared with the Town Manager and Allene from the VT State Police and from the State’s Fair and Impartial Policing Policies committee (Ed. note: We will make them available to anyone who has not read them).

The Chief then addressed the current issue roiling the country. “There cannot be a single person who is not mortified watching what happened to George Floyd. I can not think of any training that I’ve participated in that would have ever instructed an officer to do what was done to Mr. Floyd as well as the inaction of the other officers present. I think it’s important for HCOREI and the community to understand where the Hartford Police Dept. (HPD) stands on this issue and to be available to answer questions, to alleviate doubts about our feelings on what occurred, and what we will do going forward to make sure people of color, people in our community can call on our law enforcement agency.”

Chief Kasten offered to answer questions.

Questions:

Alicia -- What does the HPD have in store for training/retraining officers to make sure this kind of behavior isn’t something that we face in our community?

CK -- Specifically on the misuse of force - this is not something taught in the state of VT. It is not taught or permitted under any policy or procedure at HPD. If an officer did employ use of force, then that

officer would be performing an act outside the scope of our dept. and it would be handled through the disciplinary and criminal process. If we have a criminal issue with a police officer, it's turned over to the VT State Police. I cannot ask staff to do a criminal investigation on their peers. Following a criminal investigation, the case moves to an administrative investigation with rules much stricter than the law requires. We are steadily working on training HPD in the tenets of 21st Century Policing. For crisis intervention training we use the Memphis model, a 40 hour program in collaboration, with community policing, de-escalation especially around marginalized, vulnerable populations. We also use Blue Courage training, a US Dept. of Justice program in mindfulness and guardianship training. We are trying to get procedural justice training and would like to move forward with a comprehensive plan similar to the Norfolk VA Dept. which has received awards on this training. We have used parts of their curriculum on cultural competency modules. And we think Vermont is the perfect place to introduce this program. Last Spring, I started conversations with Dartmouth and began conversations with Gabrielle Lucke about future steps, and then covid-19 happened and we missed the deadline.

Michelle - - Does the HPD have a social media policy for employees?

CK -- There is a rule in our Code of Conduct that addresses social media - There was a Valley News story about that not too long ago. Would you be willing to send specifics to me Michelle? I will give you a call.
Michelle -- That would be great.

Ann -- Would you consider some type of citizen review/communication board - perhaps an HCOREI sub-committee that could in some way work with you on filling that role - have you ever considered that?

CK -- We know that it is something that has been discussed around the state - agencies have implemented things like that. We're a small agency - b/c the town is small, but part of the larger Upper Valley and as such we do not have a lot of resources. You will hear from me. HCOREI's presence is very important.

Sara -- The Strategic Plan calls for the Town and School District to hire a Public Information Officer. We need to know how best to communicate as one voice.

Ck -- We sent three people on staff for public information officer training - along with some other trainings and we're in the process of developing a media communications policy for the department

Kim -- Are you receptive to a method for people being able to file complaints to someone who is not a member of the HPD, like an ombudsman? Is it something you'd be willing to consider/discuss

CK -- We currently receive communications from the Select Board via the community, the Town Manager etc.

Allene reported working with another group trying to connect with Vital Communities to get an ombudsman for the Upper Valley.

John Hall -- Is there a process for filtering, vetting people in your department.

CK -- This is a focal point of the work we've been doing - It's hard to hire good police officers, a challenge both in New England and in small towns. I want to hire a workforce that mirrors our community - both the face and the values. It's easier to hire a good police officer than to fire a bad one. The recruitment/selection of officers is very important. Coach Christie is interested in this process and has engaged with every interview panel for new recruits. Also involved in the process is a member of the Police Union Board and Sgt. Connie Kelly, who assisted in developing the process.

Kim was queried by Jim Kenyon from the Valley News for an article he is writing about the differences in the HPD from ten years ago to now.

There was a brief discussion of the Wayne Burwell case, a very serious incident 10 years ago which resulted in a financial settlement with Burwell. Joe Major, newly transplanted to Hartford, was unaware of the incident. He asked for clarification. Allene gave a very brief description of that incident that occurred prior to Chief Kasten being hired.

CK said that he was aware of that specific incident and that the State Police changed how police officers in the State of Vermont responds to and handles mental health & crisis intervention training for officers (referred to Act 80).

6:50 PM Discussion on Legislation - Ann

H. 808 – Public Safety, law enforcement; use of force: Bill proposes to create statewide policy for the use of deadly force by law enforcement.

H. 464 - Law enforcement training; systemic racism: Bill proposes to require data collection and Criminal Justice Training Council to develop model policy, reporting to Exec. Dir. of Racial Equity (created in act 56 - Criminal justice training council)

H. 478 – Task force to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans: Bill purposes to establish a Task Force to study, consider and make recommendations to General Assembly

H. 284 – Criminal justice data collection: Bill proposes to require the Judiciary, the Center for Crime Victims Services, Depts. Of States Attorneys & Sheriffs, Corrections to collect & post data.

In addition there are the following bills pertaining to racial equity:

S. 54 – to strengthen reparative and racial equity components of the cannabis taxation and regulations bill

H. 926 – Relates to Act 250: Incorporate racial justice and environmental justice at center of statewide land use .

6:56 Hartford Select Board Adopts June 19th official holiday -

Alicia reported that at the previous night's Select Board meeting the subject of Juneteenth came up, and HCOREI's guidance was requested in preparing a Proclamation for the Town. The Select Board is in the process of crafting one. A suggestion was made for the Select Board to read the Proclamation in an outdoor area, like the park across from the Town Hall to an assembled, socially distanced audience, formally- making it Juneteenth day in Hartford. Future long term, more wide ranging plans for Juneteenth celebration might be made for next year and future years. Giavanna has done some research on past and current Juneteenth celebrations and also looked at some models. John referred to Gov. Scott's decree stated that there will be no festivals, carnivals, or large celebration due to covid-19. Other suggestions were made, but it was decided with the time prior to June 19 & COVID-19

limitations, there was not enough time to craft a celebration other than adopting a Proclamation by the Town.

Motion made by Alicia and seconded by Ann:

HCOREI is empowering Alicia and Joe to write the proclamation with input from John and will submit it to the selectboard. Motion passed unanimously..

7:27 PM The review and discussion of the Draft of Strategic Plan was tabled for next meeting (Plan Start-up Part I and Part II)

Allene announced that Curtiss Reed and Mary Gannon from the VT Partnership that developed the Strategic Plan on Equity and Inclusion will be making a presentation to HCOREI on implementation of the Plan. There has been no response to the HCOREI letter to the Select and School Boards.

The letter from HCOREI, sent a few days before the May 20th Select Board meeting. Kim reported it was read at the Select Board meeting recently, but not discussed. Michelle reported the HCOREI letter is on the School Board agenda.

7:35 Other items

Feb/March - educator resources- Becky/Michelle - are we still researching and accumulating materials, books, etc on racial justice. The question was posed should they continue based on Jameson's Schweitzer Fellowship.

Allene: Yes, and item will be discussed on a future agenda

Rally in South Royalton Saturday June 6

<https://www.facebook.com/SafeSpacesforBIPOC/>

7:35 PM Resume Road Map discussion - tabled for next meeting.

7:42 PM Adjournment