

Town of Medway
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity Advisory) Committee
November 16, 2021 - 6:00PM
Location: Sanford Hall

Committee Members Present: John Foresto, Bill Kingsbury, Susan Dietrich, Khalid Abdi, Marques Crosby, Andrea Crow Henry, and Brian Sharkey

Committee Members Absent: Dan Kerls and Judith Lane

Community Members Present: None

Call to Order: At 6:04PM, John Foresto called the meeting to order. He led the committee in the Pledge of Allegiance. He shared that he will be running the meeting due to the absence of the Chair, Dan Kerls.

Mr. Foresto asked for public comment. There were none at this time.

Agenda Items:

1. Review and approval of minutes: 5/5/21, 6/15/21, and 11/2/21

VOTE: Ms. Dietrich moved to approve the minutes from 5/5/21. Mr. Kingsbury seconded and it passed unanimously. VOTE: 6-0.

VOTE: Ms. Dietrich moved to approve the minutes from 6/15/21 with amendments. Mr. Sharkey seconded. It passed unanimously. VOTE: 6-0.

Ms. Crow Henry joined the meeting.

VOTE: Ms. Dietrich motioned to approve the 11/2/21 minutes with amendments. Mr. Abdi seconded. VOTE: 7-0.

VOTE: Ms. Dietrich moved to approve 5/25/21 with amendments. Mr Crosby seconded. Passed unanimously. VOTE: 7-0.

2. Focus Group Point Person Update

Mr. Sharkey shared his general outline of the process: invitation, identifying who they will reach out to. He stated that he has a drafted invitation that he will share with committee members. It includes shared language in the form of a template that can be used by each focus group. Its content includes but is not limited to the committee's expectations, timing, and the mission statement.

Ms. Dietrich asked if the point person will assemble the group for the committee. Mr. Sharkey confirmed that this is the case; he also clarified that the point person will coordinate dates and identify 3-5 people for the focus group.

Town Focus Group: Mr. Foresto shared that he spoke with Mr. Boynton, who has identified 3 people from the town who could be in the focus group: himself, Allison Potter, and the HR Director. He also shared that the town offered conference spaces in Town Hall for all of the focus groups.

Mr. Foresto asked who will do the interview for each focus group; Mr. Sharkey suggested varying the interviewer, as well as doing multiple focus groups on the same day. Ms. Dietrich shared that since there are 7-8 identified groups, 2 a day would be reasonable. She also reminded the committee of the goal to complete the town, school, and police focus groups by January. At that point, the committee will regroup, debrief, and move forward with the other focus groups accordingly. Mr. Crosby asked how many committee members will be present at each focus group; Ms. Dietrich responded that 2 committee members will be present at each focus group. The committee discussed potentially doing a private Zoom for the focus groups in order to be accessible to all interested community members; this is true in regard not only to participation, but also for listening and learning.

Mr. Foresto shared that he will invite the full Selectboard to the focus group.

Schools: Ms. Dietrich shared that she will reach out to the Superintendent of Medway Public Schools and ask for an additional 3-4 people to join the focus group. She felt confident that there would be a good cross section that represents each element of the school system.

Police: Mr. Kingsbury shared that the police department is willing to provide a number of participants, including the chief, a sergeant, as well as a detective and/or officers. He underscored the importance of older and younger officers both being represented in this focus group. He shared that their availability tends to be Tuesdays after 10AM.

The committee also briefly discussed the Council on Aging and Housing Authority focus groups being done together as one focus group at the senior center. Mr. Foresto will reach out to Ann Sherry, who is the contact for the Affordable Housing Committee.

Student Groups: Ms. Dietrich shared that she will reach out to the Medway High School principal about this.

Business Community: Mr. Abdi shared that he has not yet spoken with Julie Dennehy.

Religious Groups: Mr. Sharkey shared that he has not yet reached out to Saint Joe's, but will be doing so prior to the next meeting.

Underrepresented Groups: Ms. Crow Henry shared that the veterans community, the LGBTQ+ community, and single parents should be involved in this focus group. Mr. Foresto suggested adding persons with disabilities to this group, with which Ms. Crow Henry agreed. Mr. Foresto suggested that Ms. Crow Henry reach out to Ellen Hillery about this.

Ms. Dietrich discussed the opportunity to give community members the chance to come to the community forum and having breakout focus groups for non-affiliated individuals who could provide general feedback. She stressed the importance of giving individuals the opportunity to self-identify and engage in the conversation accordingly. She reiterated the potential structure of the second half of focus groups being slightly more open-ended and open to broader feedback, as opposed to the highly focused groups in the first round. Ms. Crow Henry agreed with the approach of having a broader opportunity; she gave the example of individuals who identify as potential members of multiple focus group meetings. She suggested using billboards and social media in order to find volunteers to join the focus groups.

Mr. Crosby suggested having multiple “citizen-at-large” focus groups in order to ameliorate this potential issue. Ms. Dietrich suggested leveraging the conversations in the initial focus groups to find out how those communities share information with people within their communities. She suggested asking them to encourage participation within their respective groups. Mr. Foresto agreed with having general focus sessions that are open to anyone from any group. Mr. Crosby asked if there are rules for engagement in the focus groups; he addressed the potential for people with polarizing different views in the same conversation. Mr. Sharkey suggested giving the moderators shared language and general guidelines in order to keep the conversation civilized and constructive.

Ms. Dietrich reminded the committee of their initial conversation about doing a community survey; she reiterated that this is a non-confrontational, low-stakes, anonymous way to share feedback without the potential for contentious debate. She suggested finding multiple ways of gathering feedback, not just limited to the citizen-at-large focus groups. She suggested giving out forms for community feedback, then creating a survey based on those findings, and therefore receiving feedback in a less formal way.

Mr. Foresto agreed that this could elicit a broader sense of participation and therefore more useful, comprehensive information. Mr. Sharkey clarified the plan: the committee will orchestrate town focus groups, reconvene in January with findings and initial recommendations, attend the town forum with the opportunity for IDEA to present interim findings, receive feedback, and recruit new focus group members.

Ms. Dietrich’s suggestion was to essentially eliminate citizen-based focus groups and receive feedback in a different way via an online feedback form.

Mr. Crosby asked if there is anything to gain from an in-person focus group. Mr. Sharkey asked if there are individuals with underrepresented people that might not feel “heard” by a survey. He shared that the survey is more controlled, but might lack the depth of opportunity to capture participants’ voices.

Ms. Dietrich suggested following up, whether by committee members or in the form of a focus group, with individuals who checked off the box on the survey stating that they want to share more information and continue the conversation.

Mr. Crosby suggested adding an additional question on the survey that asks for any feedback.

The committee agreed that town, police, and school-based focus groups will be done by 12/15. All other focus groups will be done by the end of January.

Ms. Dietrich asked Mr. Crosby if Medway Marches would want to be a focus group. He shared that they would definitely be open to this. Mr. Foresto and Ms. Dietrich stated that this focus group will be completed by the end of January.

3. Council of Aging Representative

Mr. Foresto shared that the committee needs to request a new representative from the Council of Aging. He stated that the Selectboard will handle this and appoint someone.

4. Website Content Discussion

Mr. Crosby shared that he met with Rich Boucher, who gave him access to edit the website. He shared that the committee can add or change content independently. He also shared that there is now a group email address set up for the IDEA Committee; any email that is sent to the IDEA Committee address gets sent individually to each member.

Ms. Dietrich encouraged the committee members to evaluate when the email address will become public, as well as how to manage it internally and/or seek a clerk to manage it. She suggested establishing a protocol for timely responses, as well as establishing guidelines for who will respond. Ms. Crow Henry shared that a clerk would be necessary to handle this with timeliness and thoroughness. Mr. Crosby shared that he is willing to be the initial monitor of the email address, once it becomes public; at that point, the committee will assess the need or lack thereof for a clerk.

The committee reviewed how other town committees list their contact information on the site; they decided to list the shared email address for each member.

Mr. Sharkey volunteered to be the clerk for the email address, while Mr. Crosby will be the webmaster. The committee agreed to this approach.

Ms. Dietrich asked if the committee's plan, schedule, and feedback form should be published to the website before or after the focus groups take place.

Mr. Foresto suggested putting the feedback form on the website and informing the public of this via the town communications link.

Mr. Crosby suggested ensuring that there is an inbox from which the committee can reply out of; this way, the committee members can all see the feedback forms, but only Mr. Sharkey will respond.

Ms. Dietrich also suggested creating the feedback form in a way that generates a response receipt. Mr. Crosby confirmed that there is an automated response receipt with a brief message from the committee.

Ms. Dietrich also suggested creating a brief synopsis of the committee's timeline, mission, and goals to be disseminated to the public prior to the focus groups and community forum. She estimated that this description should be brief (2-3 sentences). Ms. Crow Henry used her business background to indicate clockwise organization with the synopsis on the right side for maximum engagement.

Mr. Crosby asked if the committee should also provide Sandy the writeup for social media. Mr. Kingsbury agreed and also shared the importance of a graphic to correspond with the writeup. Mr. Crosby offered to find an image for this.

5. Internal Focus Group

In the mock focus group, Mr. Sharkey established ground rules of respect, flow of conversation, and general expectations.

He then posed the following questions: what are the greatest opportunities and challenges facing this group? He also suggested beginning by giving each focus group the opportunity to explain how their community influences the town, then segueing into the aforementioned question. Ms. Dietrich also suggested beginning with personal introductions; Mr. Sharkey agreed and felt this could be particularly helpful to the moderator and note-taker.

Mr. Crosby asked if the committee will document which focus group member makes each suggestion. The committee confirmed that this will be the case.

Mr. Crosby also asked if the committee will be asking the participants to answer on the basis of their group or as an individual; Mr. Sharkey said the primary lens is the group, but that the individual perspective is bound to arise, as well.

Ms. Dietrich asked if the committee will provide the focus group members with the expectations and purpose of the focus group upfront. The committee confirmed that this will be the case. She then confirmed that the committee will provide individuals with the focus group questions in advance of the meeting.

Ms. Dietrich suggested sharing working definitions and terminology with the focus groups upfront to ensure continuity and consistency.

Ms. Dietrich asked Mr. Sharkey to establish a working version of the moderator script; he agreed to do this.

Ms. Dietrich asked the committee if they wanted to simulate a focus group; the committee felt that preparing and talking through it, as well as convening after the first focus group, was sufficient.

6. Review and Update Schedule

Ms. Dietrich reviewed the schedule: Phase 1 (April-November) revolves around creation of focus groups, reaching out to contacts, and doing an internal focus group. Phase 2 (December-April) revolves around doing the first round of focus groups, the community forum, sending a survey to the community, and draft a summary report of key findings. Phase 3 (May-September): target a second community forum, draft the final report and recommendations, do any additional follow-ups, and make policy recommendations. The final phase is October-November 2022: do a final community forum after creating recommendations for review and feedback, make final revisions, then present to Selectboard in November 2022.

Mr. Foresto expressed concerns about not getting enough participation and engagement.

Ms. Dietrich shared that due to the personal nature of this process, people are likely to be more forthcoming. Mr. Foresto agreed, but shared the importance of reaching out to the community for public comment and engagement. Ms. Dietrich shared that coming to a meeting can be intimidating, due to the public nature; she shared that the feedback form, in particular, will elicit more community involvement. She also stressed the importance of personal invitations and providing context for individuals; she framed the committee members as ambassadors for the mission of this committee. Ms. Crow Henry shared her impressions that the personal nature of the committee's mission will elicit more participation.

The committee agreed that this timeline is realistic, thorough, and thoughtfully put-together.

The committee agreed to meet on Tuesday, 11/30 at 6pm at a location to be determined.

The committee planned to do the town focus group between 11/30/21 and 12/7/21, then do the focus groups for the schools and the police the week of 12/6-12/10.

VOTE - Motion to Adjourn: At 7:43PM, Ms. Dietrich motioned to adjourn. Ms. Crow Henry seconded this motion, which passed unanimously. VOTE: 7-0.