



Town of Danvers Select Board

Gardner S. Trask III, Chairman | Daniel C. Bennett | Maureen A. Bernard | Matthew E. Duggan | David A. Mills

1 Sylvan Street, Danvers, Massachusetts 01923 | p: 978-777-0001 | f. 978-777-1025
www.danversma.gov

November 16, 2021

On behalf of the Danvers Select Board, I would like to make a statement about recent events that have included racist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic messages, discrimination, bullying, or other hate speech.

The Select Board members, and I as Chair, want to be clear in our condemnation of these acts, actions, and allegations. They are ugly and unacceptable, and any form of hate crime, hate speech, or discrimination has no place in the Danvers community or anywhere else.

We fully recognize that our community has an opportunity and an obligation to improve. That is not to say that the Danvers Community or its residents are inherently flawed, but instead, recognize some inconvenient truths and uncomfortable realities. We need to accept that we all have room to grow, and that we should aspire to make all our citizens and visitors feel this is a welcoming and inclusionary community.

We, as a Board, are committed to facing fully, unflinchingly, with eyes wide open and speaking in full voice, that this behavior has no place in our town. Some of our actions as a Board have been proactive and some have, unfortunately, had to be reactive.

As a reminder of our commitment to building an inclusive community, allow me to list some of the Select Boards actions over just the past 12 months.

- A year ago, we directed the formation of the Welcoming Community Working Group in response to the Thin Blue Line issue. Two Select Board members actively participated in the meetings of that group last winter.
- April 2021, the Board accepted the final report of the Welcoming Community Working Group, and many of the recommendations are being implemented now. This document can be found on DanversMA.gov.
- This spring, the Board started to initiate some of the recommendations and have directed the Town Manager to create a full-time position of Director of Equity & Inclusion. The search for that professional is in full swing.
- A Select Board Member continues to act as a liaison to our appointed Human Rights and Inclusion Committee.
- The Chair, on behalf of the Board, provided immediate response to the recent Unitarian and Connors Farm incidents. Within a day of the incidents, the Town issued a press release from the Select Board Chair, Town Manager, Chief of Police, and the Chair of the Human Rights and

Inclusion Committee, followed by communication of subsequent actions. Town Administration accepted responsibility for an employee's involvement in the Connors Farm incident and worked with the victims to understand their experience and how we can do better. Town administrators continue to work through internal training, engagement with outside organizations, and work with professionals to provide focused training with individuals, departments, and the entire Town employee base.

- With Select Board support, Danvers continues its history of hosting inclusion events, including the annual Pride Flag raising, seminars, workshops, and tomorrow's Human Rights & Inclusion Committee's Event, which aims to explore 21st-century racial dynamics through authentic conversation.

These are some of the recent steps taken at the beginning of a long journey.

There has been some concern over the response, or lack thereof, from the Select Board on the recent Boston Globe article and Middle School vandalism. Allow me to explain.

While we are committed to speaking out against hate crimes and championing equity, there are and will be three topics on which the Select Board will not comment publicly:

First, we will not comment publicly on an ongoing criminal investigation. This protects the victims' rights, respects the work of law enforcement professionals, and ensures our comments do not compromise any investigation or potential prosecution. Communicating the details of criminal investigations is the responsibility of the Chief of Police or the Town Manager.

Second, we will not comment publicly on any specific town employee, other than the Town Manager, or offer comments that can be used to identify an employee. We will not discuss any specific actions taken with an employee. Select Board members must respect and support an employee's rights as covered in their employment or union contract. The Town Manager is authorized by the 1949 Town Manager Act to hire, manage, and discipline all Town employees, and while we may share our thoughts privately with the Manager, we will not and cannot comment publicly on their performance. School and Library employees fall under the jurisdiction of the Superintendent, Library Director, School Committee, and Library Trustees.

Finally, and to that end, the Select Board will not comment publicly on the School Committee, the School Administration, or the education professionals working for the schools. As affirmed by Town Attorney, there is a wealth "of statutes and case law which create a bright-line distinction between the executive authority of the Select Board and School Committee."

While the two separately elected Boards work together often to support each other's independent missions, publicly commenting on how the School Department or School Committee should act or react to any School-related issues, especially without knowledge of legal counsel or confidential information they may have reviewed in rendering their decisions would be inappropriate and illegal. Communicating the details of a specific school incident, student, administrator, or professional educator's actions, or the response to those actions is solely within the jurisdiction of the Superintendent of Schools and School Committee.

In closing, I hope the public will understand that our lack of comment on a specific crime, town employee, or school issue should not be construed as tacit or silent approval.

The members of this Select Board, to a person, abhor the events of late and stand firmly in support of continued efforts to make Danvers a more inclusive, equitable, and welcoming community.

Gardner S. Trask III
Chair, Danvers Select Board