

DANVERS HUMAN RIGHTS & INCLUSION COMMITTEE
Meeting of Thursday, August 20, 2020

In accordance with the Governor's March 12 Order suspending provisions of Open Meeting Law and to promote public health and social distancing, a meeting of the Danvers Human Rights & Inclusion Committee was held on Wednesday, September 2, 2020, at 8:30 AM via WebEx video conference call.

Committee members present: Dutrochet Djoko, Chair; Eric Crane, School Committee Liaison; Charlie Desmond; Bob Gamer; Bill Graham; Donna Hopkins; Sally Kerans; David McKenna; David Mills, Board of Selectmen Liaison; Paul Pawlak; Jorge Sanchez-Salazar; Douglas Vooyo, Interfaith Liaison

Staff present: Jen Breaker, Assistant Town Manager; Eileen Page, Human Resources; Lt. Rob Sullivan, Police Liaison

Not present: Cathy Sullivan-Bradley

With a quorum present, Mr. Djoko called the meeting to order.

Opening Remarks from the Chairman

Mr. Djoko stated that the Committee seeks to do good work and to promote respect and understanding for all.

The Committee will consider a statement regarding the Town Manager's decision to have "Thin Blue Line" flags removed from Town vehicles

A draft letter to the Board of Selectmen expressing support for the Town's Manager's decision to remove Thin Blue Line Flag decals from Town vehicles, specifically firetrucks, was sent to the Committee for review.

Mr. Gamer supported the letter as written, saying that flying a Thin Blue Line flag diminishes the Black Lives Matter movement.

Mr. Desmond supported the letter, saying that it conveys the most important elements of the Committee's mission.

Mr. Graham stated that he supports the letter.

Ms. Hopkins expressed concern for the length of the letter, and would like it to be more concise. She asked to strike the phrase "*We stand against hatred*", as hatred was not the intent of the Danvers Fire Department.

Ms. Kerans agreed that the letter is too lengthy, and stated that a bigger issue at hand is that the Town does not have a process and policy for when any groups seeks to fly a particular flag.

Mr. Mills suggested that the letter be emailed to the Board of Selectmen for discussion, posted on the Town website for the public, and also have printed copies passed out at the Community Conversation on Wednesday evening.

Mr. Pawlak would like to see the Board of Selectmen draft a firm policy about which flags may be flown on Town properties and vehicles, and draft a process for approval when employees seek to fly a particular flag.

Mr. McKenna suggested that the letter be published in its entirety and sent to the Board of Selectmen, but be presented at the Community Conversation as an abbreviated 2-3 paragraph statement. He also noted that it is a violation of Conflict of Interest laws to use a public position to make a political statement.

Mr. Sanchez-Salazar agreed that the letter was too long, and agreed that the Board of Selectmen should draft a firm policy on flag displays.

Lt. Sullivan stated the Danvers Police Department's position that any person making threats to the Town Manager and his family over the removal of the Thin Blue Line flag does not support the Police Department, and that such actions do not align with the values of the DPD. He also stated that to police, the flag represents support for the families of officers killed on duty.

Mr. Crane stated that there seems to be a misconception that the issue at hand is “Thin Blue Line versus Black Lives Matter,” and that the goal of the HRIC should be to bring the perspective to the discussion that supporting police is not anti-Black Lives Matter, and supporting the Black Lives Matter movement is not anti-police.

Reverend Vooy's stated that Mr. Bartha's decision to remove the Thin Blue Line flags from Town vehicles took courage.

Mr. Djoko stated that he agrees the letter needs to be shortened. He also agreed that paper copies should be distributed at the Community Conversation.

Ms. Kerans stated that she would also like the Board of Selectmen to establish a policy. Ms. Hopkins stated that she did not think the letter should be about establishing a policy, and the message of support for Mr. Bartha should remain the clear focus.

The Committee recessed at 10:10 AM to allow Ms. Breaker time to make the requested changes to the letter.

The Committee reconvened at 10:17 AM.

- *Vote: Mr. McKenna moved to send the letter to the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Desmond seconded. The motion carried 5-0-2, with Ms. Hopkins and Ms. Kerans abstaining. Mr. Pawlak and Mr. Sanchez-Salazar were not present for the vote.*

*Respectfully submitted by Eileen G. Page
09.15.2020*