

SOUTH ORANGE/MAPLEWOOD COMMUNITY COALITION ON RACE
May 23, 2019 Meeting

Call to Order: Robert A. Marchman called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM

Present: Carol Barry-Austin, Lee Boswell May, Colleen Breslin, Catherine Cronin Tegan Culler, Nancy Gagnier, Leila Gonzalez Sullivan, David Harris, Summer Jones, John Kerner, Kristen Mahoney, Fred R. Profeta Jr., Erin Scherzer, Ed Stuart, Barbara Velazquez

Absent: Nina Essel, Stephanie Lawson-Muhammad, Rhea Mokund-Beck, Reynaldo Tapia

Excused: Abigail Cotler, Dean Dafis, Audrey Rowe, Meredith Sue Willis

Minutes Approval:

- Motion to approve the April 2019 Trustee Minutes was made by Kelly Quirk with a second by Tegan Culler. Fred Profeta and Erin Scherzer abstained; all others approved.

Chair Report: The chair welcomed newly elected South Orange Village trustee Summer Jones to our meeting and to her new role as our liaison.

- Robert noted the passing of Ms. Bobbie Raymond who worked on racial integration in housing, the model adopted by Oak Park, Illinois, and was an influence on the work of the Coalition.
- Robert raised the issue of the incidents in both South Orange and Maplewood regarding people calling the police on people of color in their neighborhoods and noted that it will be the topic of our conversation for developing a Coffee House Discussion topic.
- Robert met with Assemblywoman Mila Jasey to discuss outreach to surrounding communities for potential collaborations on our mission.
- Robert also met with Thom Puryear of the local chapter of the NAACP also to discuss where we can work together.
- Robert raised the issue of the upcoming Pride Festival, Pride March, and the Juneteenth Celebration. The date of Juneteenth conflicts with the Festival. Robert and a number of trustees shared concerns about the date conflict and the lack of sensitivity to LGBTQ people of color that this shows. All agreed that we should not co-sponsor an event in the future that puts people in this position because it exacerbates a tension existing tensions about race and LGBTQ identities. We need to be more aware and to teach others like the leaders at Durand-Hedden about intersectional issues. Nancy will see if the town can arrange for jitneys between the events.
- Robert reminded the board of the changing composition of SOMA and the growing need to re-engage people in community affairs and our mission. He and Fred Profeta highlighted the importance of neighborhood associations in our work.

ED Report:

- Conversations on Race: Nancy expressed deep gratitude to all who made it happen. What a great team effort to develop the ideas, find the speaker, work with Seton Hall on the collaboration and then in the end do all the logistics to create a smooth check in and diverse tables. Evaluations at first glance are very, very positive on everything except for the space. We received a few modest donations since the event.
- Nationbuilder Update: Nancy was able to use the platform to do a follow-up thank you and donation ask letter to the attendees.
- Spring Appeal: letters went out. All current donors got personal notes written to them on the appeal. Bulk should be out soon from mailing house. We will do a separate letter to people in Nationbuilder for whom we only have email addresses.

- Financials & Review: Financials were reviewed by F&D as well as the EC. Nancy submitted half-yearly reports to the towns on progress against goals and a request for funding disbursement. Checks will arrive soon. The Review is complete in draft form. Once Lorry checks the details, a draft will be sent to our treasurer Ed Stuart. Coalition accountant, Femi is currently completing the 990 for which he got an extension beyond the May 15th due date.
- New Superintendent Meeting: Nancy attended, met Dr. Taylor, and told him briefly about the Coalition and the members who would be reaching out for a meeting. She has high hopes for his work in SOMSD.
- SOMA Caribbean Festival cancelled. Frank McGehee told Nancy that they need a year to fundraise and plan to carry this off well.
- Demo report presentation, June 11th, SOPL, 7:30 pm.
- Pride Month: The Coalition purchased an ad in the festival journal and is promoting all the local events including the March on June 2nd and the Lavender Graduation.

Committee Reports:

Committees deferred reports in favor of getting to the discussion topic.

Summit on Civil Rights: Robert, David, and Nancy attended. There was a major focus on integration in schools, housing, and jobs and infrastructure. There is a follow up in November for the break-out sessions. Excellent speakers and presentations. We made some good connections to people in NJ and in other states.

Coffee House Discussions Topic

The board reviewed the three recent incidents of people calling the police on perceived suspicious activity, the police response, and the social media responses. Erin Scherzer, a member of the Maplewood Community Police Board, shared that they will be working on a guide on when to call the police. Carol Barry-Austin said that Tuxedo Park has an emergency meeting to address what happened in that neighborhood. A number of important issues to address were raised:

- Confusion about what should prompt someone to call for police
- Racist assumptions about people that causes suspicions
- Perceptions about the overuse of force or extraordinary presence on the part of the police
- The use of social media to shame people—both those who call the police and those who question the motives of the callers
- The use of social media to post surveillance footage and photos
- The resulting trauma for people of color in seeing these social media posts
- Calling the police to mitigate all conflicts and seeing if there are other resources to go to first
- Dispatcher training needs to be improved

Once these issues were surfaced, the board discussed possible ways to address them in Coffee House format:

- Title it simply: When Should I Call the Police?
- Do one for each town, with their own police force present
- Bring in an outside expert speaker who understands the prejudices and who can tee up the conversation and later address questions
- Use case scenarios at tables so they can think through best outcome solutions
- Put the focus not on police behavior but on the callers
- Develop a take-away akin to Speak Up that is a check list for when to call the police and guidance on social media postings

Next Steps: The board felt this should be worked on over some time in order to get the right expert. The board suggested doing a community survey to ask what they think should be addressed. This will be under David Harris's lead. Timing is likely to be September. It was suggested that South Orange & Maplewood

have separate Coffee Houses (workshops). An announcement to the community should go out soon so they know we are working on it.

Liaison Reports: Summer Jones had no report to make at this time. Dean Dafis was at the Chamber of Commerce dinner.

New Business/Announcements:

Kelly Quirk announced the first planning meeting for this year's annual dinner, June 5th, 7:30 pm, at the Coalition office and thanked all those who volunteered at the retreat.

Fred Profeta inquired about the marketing survey. He wants the Coalition to use special funding to seek professional advice, especially given that there is new research about moving patterns for African Americans.

Erin Scherzer noted that we must reconsider our minimum board member requirement in our By Laws. The Pro Bono lawyer suggested raising it to avoid quorum issues. The EC will discuss and we will present the edited version in June.

Adjournment:

Move to adjourn by David Harris and seconded by Tegan Culler. Meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM

Next Meeting: Thurs. June 27th, 7:30 PM, Prospect Church, 646 Prospect St. Maplewood NJ.

Submitted By: Nancy Gagnier

Secretary: Carol Barry-Austin