

**SOUTH ORANGE/MAPLEWOOD COMMUNITY COALITION ON RACE**  
**March 24, 2017 Trustee Meeting**

**Call to Order:** Acting Chair David Harris convened the meeting at 7:30 PM.

**Present:** Carol Barry-Austin, Lee Boswell May, Walter Clarke, Dean Dafis, Nina Essel, Nancy Gagnier, Leila Gonzalez Sullivan, Len Grossman, David Harris, Joel Herbert, Stephanie Lawson-Muhammad, George Robinson, Audrey Rowe, Erin Scherzer, Peri Smilow, Keli Tianga, Barbara Velazquez and Meredith Sue Willis.

**Excused:** Victoria Calle, Abigail Cotler, Deborah Davis Ford, Omari Frazier, Nora Locke, Robert A. Marchman, Frank McGehee, Fred R. Profeta Jr., Indira Singh and Diane Thomson.

**Minutes Approval:** Len Grossman moved that February Minutes be accepted following correction of the last Minutes approval to January with a second by Fred Profeta. Approval was unanimous.

**Chair Report:** None. Chair Marchman is out of town in business

**Executive Director's Report:**

- Conflict of Interest and Trustee Pledge Forms were distributed with a request for pledge increases, wherever possible.
- Draft Financials were review and ED commented that corrections are underway for entry errors made while in transition with three admin assistants over the last 6 months.
  - Many thanks to George Forbes for assistance with Quickbook training.
  - Thank you letters are not legally required for donations under \$400, but it is our practice to acknowledge all donations.
- Trustees are requested to provide lists of potential donors from their personal contacts. Persons on those lists will receive the Coalition Spring Appeal Letter and future requests for donations and the submitting trustee will be asked to add a handwritten note.
- The 2017 Black/Jewish Seder on April 4<sup>th</sup> is a private event aligned with the Coalition's integration mission, co-hosted by Coalition Trustee Smilow and co-sponsored by the Coalition. A percentage of donations from the 150 expected attendees will be given to the Coalition. Future plans are to brand this as a Coalition event.

**Program Director's Report**

- Trustees were directed to the March Program Highlights sent earlier as part of their packet
- A Student Conversations on Race is planned by the Schools Committee at Columbia High School on April 20<sup>th</sup> as a joint effort with Stacey Lawrence and Meredith Sue Willis based on writings of Columbia High School students about recent race-related incidents.

**Fundamental Issue 1: Bias Incidents in the Schools Report/Discussion**

- Coalition BOE Liaison Stephanie Lawson Muhammad helped to lead this discussion
- Highlights of the discussion follow:
  - Superintendent Ramos has convened two meetings of key community organizations including the Coalition, clergy, BOE members and School District staff to explore and pose solutions to the incidents. A third meeting is planned for May 2017.
  - District must be transparent and honest in naming and addressing the incidents
  - Community must be mindful not to conflate dissatisfaction with curriculum with graffiti and hate speech. Different issues require different responses

- Community wants to know what corrective action will be taken by the District and what are the policies for handling like situations going forward?
- There was consensus that action is expected rather than letters.
- Current Cultural Competency training for teachers does not engage all teachers and approach is felt more effective for elementary and middle school. Teacher training cannot be mandated, but the Back To School Forum can be used to cover this information with all.
- Policies, like the five passed by the BOE last year on the 2015 Access & Equity Policy, take time for implementation
- Superintendent is asked to document the content and chronology of each event so that the community can level set.
- There is frustration and legal documentation that Black students in SOMA are under educated and over disciplined
- Community wants to know “Where is the Coalition?” We are here and have not changed our positions. We continue to keep our eye on the end game
- Families need resources to discuss race issues at home.
- Lots of gatherings and new groups are forming in response to recent issues including PARES (Parents in Partnership for Respect and Equality in SOMA) and SOMA: Addressing Race and Inequality.
- We need a standardized approach to teaching sensitive issues. Amistad Commission is being considered. Social Studies curriculum is being re-evaluated now through 2018.
- Coalition must effectively document and distribute information about the work that it has done and is currently doing.
- There is concern about Seth Boyden’s growing demographic disconnect with the integration desires of the community overall.
- There currently are several items that address equity in the District budget.

**Fundamental Issue 2: Coalition Meeting with Maplewood Police Chief**

- Coalition Chair Marchman and ED Gagnier met with Maplewood Police Chief Cimino along with Mayor Vic DeLuca and Internal Affairs Police Officer, Dawn Williams, to discuss most recent incident
- Meeting focused on improving communications between officers and the community
- All Maplewood and South Orange Police Officers are scheduled to complete by October 2017 the Cultural Competency/Anti-Bias Training required by the NJ Attorney General.
- One outcome for having police in the schools is the opportunity to share positive interactions and build relationships with students.
  - LEADS program with 5<sup>th</sup> graders builds good relationships
  - Chief expressed interest in developing a program for 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders
- Discussed possibility of supplementing NJ State training with a Coalition tour for officers that focuses on community, demographics, history and local culture.
- 98% of officers in SOMA live outside the community. Residency requirement was removed.
- Need to disrupt assumptions about who rightfully belongs here with to adopt best practices for “stop” behavior with youth
- There was no discussion of a Civilian Review Board.

**Comments**

- Trustee Herbert indicated that he was asked to submit recommendations to the Maplewood Police Department based on his personal experience. He plans to include such actions as 1) increased transparency 2) clearer policies 3) incident tracking for accountability and 4) development of an Action Plan that can be measured and monitored.
- How do you measure the effectiveness of sensitivity training?
- What hiring practices can be implemented to minimize racist attitudes on the police force?

- There may be a need for a permanent committee to oversee and monitor police activity.
- Any positive actions taken need to extend to both Police Departments
- Chairman Marchman and ED Gagnier should schedule a similar meeting with South Orange Police Chief Kroll before the April Trustee meeting.

**Motion:**

Trustee Erin Scherzer moved with a second from Trustee Lee Boswell May that “Trustee Herbert present his Strategic Plan Recommendation for the Maplewood Police Department at the April 27 Coalition Trustee Board meeting and that Trustee Dafis share Maplewood Township related plans and expectations for the Coalition.” The motion passed unanimously.

**Finance and Development Committee Update**

- Newly re-assembled Finance and Development Committee consisting of Robert A. Marchman, Erin Scherzer, Peri Smilow, Nancy Gagnier, Kelly Quirk and Committee Chair Leila Gonzalez Sullivan s convened in March 16<sup>th</sup> .
- The committee reviewed current revenue reports and discussed possibilities for improvement
- Next meeting will review committee goals and priorities for fundraising
- Board member fiscal responsibilities will be reviewed later

NOTE: ED reminded new trustees that their lists of potential donors is needed for the Spring Appeal Letter to be mailed in April and that the Annual Dinner is October 14, 2017 at The Woodland.

**Liaisons’ Report:**

**South Orange:**

- Per Liaison Clarke, in these times, South Orange Village Township is glad that the Community Coalition is here.
- When the Coalition meets with South Orange Police Chief Kroll, Clarke would like to be included.
- No information on stage for XRootsFest. The Essex County stage is not available that day

**Maplewood:**

- Per Liaison McGehee through ED Gagnier, Maplewood Township wants the Coalition to be more visible in taking the lead on matters related to racial incidents.
- The Coalition should be the convener, even if items must be handed off to other entities.

Comment: The Coalition needs a Rapid Response Team to be able to make decisions and take action on emerging incidents. The Executive Committee is designated to fulfill that role.

**New Business:**

- Robert A. Marchman is receiving the Maple Leaf Award on May 7<sup>th</sup> and the Coalition is invited to support him through ads and attendance.
- Amy Harris has resigned and wishes the Coalition well.
- This is Leonard Grossman’s last meeting as he and his wife Deborah relocate to New York state. We thank him for his tireless service over more than a decade, and we wish him the best in his new community. The Nominating Committee will bring candidate(s) to the Board to fill his set on the Executive Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 9:27PM with a motion from Len Grossman seconded by Joel Herbert Next meeting is Thursday, April 27, Kol Rina Temple, 60 Valley St. (second level behind 7 Eleven) South Orange.

**Recorded by:** Audrey Rowe

**Secretary:** Meredith Sue Willis