

Diversity/Equity/Inclusion Meeting with Don Turner, Town Manager of Milton, VT

December 20, 2021

Present: Don Turner, Jay Furr (Richmond Selectboard), and Christine Werneke (Richmond Selectboard)

Mr. Turner was kind enough to meet for about an hour and provide a history and synopsis of Milton's Diversity/Equity/Inclusion efforts.

Milton's efforts began in 2017 with training on diversity, equity, and inclusion, provided by Abundant Sun, a Burlington, VT company specializing in DEI training and consulting. The initial round of training, focusing on bias in the workplace, was provided to Milton leadership (Selectboard, school board, and department heads) and then the training was opened up to members of the Milton town workforce and then the Milton community. Since 2017 Milton has arranged DEI training a couple of times a year.

Milton's Selectboard and school board have passed several resolutions, denouncing racism and establishing a town policy focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Their joint resolution can be viewed at <https://www.mtsd-vt.org/> under the "Our District" heading – look for "Racial Equity – Joint Resolution". In May of 2021 the Milton Selectboard adopted its own Declaration of Inclusion (<https://miltonvt.app.box.com/s/g6nm1mebgj3czetlywp1l3xnsbdynyy3/file/810611764449>).

Milton has formed a police advisory committee (<https://www.miltonvt.gov/413/Police-Advisory-Committee>) that does not have formal power over the police department but instead meets with the chief of police and discusses ongoing efforts to combat bias and determine where additional effort is needed.

Milton has adopted a civil flag display policy. In 2020 the town erected a new flagpole specifically for the community to fly flags of one sort or another, with no preference made for any particular viewpoint. Community organizations are required to submit an application and upon review, may fly their flag for up to a month. Organizations wishing to raise a flag must be national- or Vermont-recognized nonprofits. These organizations must be open to the general public without regard to race, age, sexual orientation, or national origin. Only one flag can be displayed at a time. Flags that advocate for political or religious causes are not permitted, nor are flags that are associated with hatred, racism, or violence.

Milton also has an advisory committee made up of business and organization leaders, selected to represent specific sectors of the Milton community. Don Turner meets with this group on a weekly basis to assess progress and determine next steps forward.

The Milton schoolboard has hired a Director of Equity and Education Support Systems and is working on an overall DEI policy, which the town in turn will consider adopting.

Milton is also reviewing municipal code to scrub out and remove non-inclusive terminology, sexist language, and other terms that might imply bias.

Milton has worked with the Vermont Council on Rural Development (vtrural.org) on an initiative focusing on "Belonging in Milton". The focus is not specifically on any one specific group or community within the town, but rather addresses whether *all* sectors of the population (based on age, sex,

race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and so on) feel as though they belong in Milton. The core concept is to try to undo/reverse the culture and biases that leave some residents feeling as though they are perceived as outsiders, even though they may have lived in Milton for many years. A report on this initiative is due back in January of 2022. Don pointed out that there are many protected classes under federal and Vermont law – race, religion, national origin, age (40 and over), sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, familial status, disability, veteran status. Virtually every Milton resident could be said to belong to one or more of these protected classes. To be truly equitable and inclusive, Milton should not focus on a single (or a few) protected class(es) to the exclusion of the others. *All* of Milton needs to feel that they are part of the community, are welcome, and feel included and respected.

Furthermore, Milton leadership understands that all too often the question has come up of “Who are these white people trying to tell us what *we* want?” as a result of equity committees themselves not being diverse. Milton wants to avoid the question “What can we (the Selectboard, school board, town leadership, etc) do for you” and wants to instead focus on “What can *we do together.*”