

Q&A Session for Community Discussion on Race, Diversity, and Inclusion

Q: Where can we find statistics about the various demographic groups in Andover, and how those have changed over time?

A: The United States Census Bureau's American Community Survey is the best source for understanding demographics in Andover.

Q: How will all the emails that have already been sent to InclusiveAndover be factored in to the assessment or overall process? What kind of concerns have surfaced to date?

A: The emails to Inclusive Andover will be included in the overall assessment and part of the ongoing work in Andover. Many emails have asked about body cameras on police officers, the type of social services provided by the police department, and the type of training police officers receive. Many of the emails include thoughts on the importance of discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Q: I am interested in how this group will help town deal with racism from staff and students at the high school based on the stories I have read from Black at Andover High Instagram page. Has there been discussions to adopt an anti-racism curriculum in the schools?

A: The Andover School Department, like all departments in town, will be part of this process going forward.

Q: How many people of color are employed by the town in all the departments? What are we doing to invite and encourage people of color specifically blacks to apply for roles in the community?

A: Race is something that is an optional identifier on employment forms. However, we estimate there are 10-12 employees that are persons of color. Our recruitment process considers diversity a very important part of the hiring process.

Q: What was the process of selecting who would head this division? Where was the position advertised? Who was part of the hiring process — specifically from our local community of color?

A: The Town felt it was important to do what we could without a funding source for a new position to get things moving. To that end, one of our existing staff persons with a great deal of passion for these matters stepped forward to take on the additional duties.

Q: How might we compensate people of color for their participation in such a committee given the barriers due to the wealth gap?

A: Currently, the town does not compensate committee members on our volunteer boards and committees. This is not something that is currently budgeted.

Q: I am interested how teachers will be supported in their efforts of teaching "hard history," recognizing biases and combatting racism.

A: The Andover School Department, including curriculum leaders, will be part of this process.

Q: Are you going to work with Merrimack Valley Black and Brown Voices for understanding underrepresented populations in Andover?

A: Yes, the town has worked with and will continue to work with Merrimack Valley Black and Brown voices and any members of the community.

Q: What does the Andover Town Symbol depict? Who created it, and when? In what way were native folks involved (or not) in creating it? Is there a plan to reconsider the symbol as a part of this initiative?

A: Our current Town Seal was designed by William Foster, then age 13 ½, and adopted at the March 5, 1900, Annual Town Meeting. William was born at 61 Porter Road and the family also lived at 29 Summer Street. Foster became a well-known illustrator. Later, he moved to Maine and became friends with Leonard Bean, better known as LL Bean, and designed the cover of the first LL Bean catalogue. Over the years there have been different designs used for specific purposes. Some of the other designs show a longer coat, a blanket, olive leaves, a war bonnet, a pond, and an additional mountain. The Select Board Meeting room mural is representative to every design there is. The town is open to reviewing the town seal.

Q: Do we have statistics that breakdown the racial identity, gender identity, disability status etc. for people who receive support services in town?

A: Information on clients that receive support services in town from licensed social workers is confidential.

Q: Recounting experiences of racism can be a repetitively traumatic process. As the town works to develop anti-racist culture, how will the town go about providing opportunities for people to talk about their experiences in such a way that will not be traumatic?

A: We hope to work with those in our community that have knowledge and experience in this area to create safe spaces for conversation and dialogue. As part of the process going forward, the town will issue surveys as well as conduct focus groups that will allow participants to share their experiences based on their comfort.

Q: What is the commitment to hiring an anti-racism coordinator for the town?

A: Included in the Select Board/Town Manager Goals and Objectives for 2020-2021 is identifying a dedicated resource focused on advancing the town's work around equity and inclusion goals.

Q: How can we create a safe venue to listen to our black and brown siblings who are living in our community? Will the focus groups stretch to include diversity?

A: Focus groups will allow participants to freely and safely share their experiences. Other programming will certainly be considered.

Q: What networks can be cultivated in our community to provide resources for minority groups (across schools both public and private, businesses, faith communities, youth groups, and the larger community)?

A: All networks will be consulted and part of our diversity, equity, and inclusion work.

Q: How do you define 'our workforce?'

A: When speaking about the town workforce – it is town and/or school employees.

Q: Memorial Hall Library is a cultural hub for the community. How can we focus support toward the library to educate families, school librarians, and the community at large?

A: Memorial Hall Library frequently displays recommended books and reference materials as well as holds events for the community to participate with a wide range of cultural focus.

Q: How will you address the racist institution of police and punitive systems? Are you examining ideas of restorative and transformative justice in the town and in schools?

A: The Andover Police Department undergoes many hours of training each year to ensure that practices meet 21st Century policing. Work will continue across all Town Departments to build cultural competence and to understand implicit bias and its resulting injury to people of color in our community.

Q: Do we have the demographics of the student body at each level? How do you propose to include student voice?

A: Any publicly available demographic data of students is compiled and publicized by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The Andover Public Schools and its students will play a role in our diversity, equity, and inclusion programming

Q: How can we use signage to show what is happening in Andover to delve into this cultural challenge in our community? Can we hang a banner across Main Street? Can we hang something on Old Town Hall?

A: Banners are not allowed to be hung across Main Street or on Old Town Hall. However, our work will be publicized using all available town communication channels.

Q: How do we attract more people of color to live in Andover and make Andover an attractive place for people of color to live?

A: It is the hope that through the work we will be conducting moving forward, that Andover will be known as a place that is inclusive of all.

Q: What is VISIONS role and how long will they be consulting on this work?

A: Visions Inc. will be assisting the town in its community assessment through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Following this process, Visions will create an assessment findings report that will articulate common themes found, as well as an analysis and needs assessment. This will provide a path forward for our diversity, equity and inclusion work.

Q: Will any of the focus groups include young people (middle and high schoolers)?

A: Yes

Q: How do you ensure that people who are in different levels of awareness are able to participate, stay engaged, and feel safe as they learn?

A: The goal is to communicate this throughout the entire community and create safe and supportive learning environments.

Q: When and how are we educating the community about the movement of Black Lives Matter?

A: It is the expectation that our work surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion will educate the community.

Q: How are the schools working on curriculum changes to teach a true representation of American history, giving BIPOC and other underrepresented groups their rightful say? How are we ensuring that BIPOC students see themselves reflected?

A: Curriculum is set at the state level, but the schools will be part of this process going forward

Q: Will the committee be reflective of the community or will there be more representation of the smaller demographic groups?

A: It is the goal that any committee is reflective of the entire community.

Q: Do we have any data on the existence of an opportunity gap in Andover schools for students who are marginalized or economically disadvantaged?

A: The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has a number of data sets and statistical reports that might be helpful.