

EAGLE INDEPENDENT

Chelmsford panel eyes goals of fostering diversity, dialogue

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CHELMSFORD -- The town's Diversity, Racial Equity, and Inclusion Committee is working toward goals including events programming, and fostering greater dialogue in the community.

"It's a work in progress," said Philip Hicks, committee chairman. "We've got our mission statement, and we are looking at nailing down all the goals."

A message, and mission

"The team is a diverse group of residents from children," said Latosha Dixon, the committee's vice chairman who has taken out nomination papers to run for Select Board in this year's elections.

"Many have lived in Chelmsford for most of their lives, and other are fairly new."

Dixon said, "We've come together, and we've created a mission statement...all of this came together organically."

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Recently, the committee has been meeting with town boards and department heads. Police Chief James Spinney is set to appear at the committee's Jan. 19 meeting.

Events on tap

The committee has invited the community to take an anti-racism pledge.

Hicks said, "Here is an opportunity for folks who if interested, and connected with us, can express that. It's totally and completely voluntary."

Upcoming events will likely take place in a virtual format, due to coronavirus restrictions.

This includes a presentation of "Civil Rights: A History."

The series, which is linked to the committee's page, is produced by resident Jesse Heines and Chelmsford Telemedia.

A virtual airing of the series, followed by a discussion, is set for Martin Luther King Day on Jan. 18, and sponsored by Congregation Shalom.

Dixon said Black History Month will featuring an informational posting on a Black person each day of the month.

Answering a call

The Select Board voted to created the committee in the wake of protests of killing of George Floyd.

Hicks said he joined the committee at the suggestion of his wife, Kathy Cryan-Hicks, the Chelmsford library's retired assistant director of community relations and programming.

For Hicks, and many fellow members, the committee represents a first time serving on a municipal board. "I really think pretty much for all of us, it's just having the opportunity to help raise people's awareness."

Hicks said, "From my perspective, participating on a diversity committee gives me the opportunity to help increase people's awareness, and that is why I am involved."

"I have been involved in diversity and inclusion efforts throughout my adult life, and my professional career," Dixon said. "It came to a point where I felt a need to branch out into my community, the community where I work, and that I'm invested in, and where my son goes to school."

On her decision to run for Select Board, Dixon said, "I have a personal call of duty to actually be more involved in my community. I'm a conscientious person, and I see that there is a need for more engagement at the local level of politics."

A place in time

The upcoming observance of Martin Luther King Day and Black History Month will be the first since George Floyd's death prompted global outrage and demands for an end to racial injustice.

Hicks said, "It occurs to me that every Martin Luther King Day affords us an opportunity to look at where we are -- a good place, or a bad place -- at this juncture."

Hicks added, "My hope would be that it would cause people to recommit if they have taken their foot off the gas, so to speak, of civil rights issues."