

Racial Equity Study Group

Michael Herbert introduced the Racial Equity Study Group during the Ashland Board of Selectmen Meeting on August 5th. "In light of the recent murder of George Floyd and the global response it generated, I felt it was more important than ever to understand the perceptions of the town by people of color and how we can do a better job of creating an inclusive community for all" said Herbert.

The group consists of Herbert, Assistant Town Manager Jenn Ball, Makeda Keegan, KG Naryana, Rabbi Eric Gurvis, and recent Ashland High graduate EJ Smithers.

The group wishes to create a data-driven systematic approach to identify and examine race relations in Ashland to improve policies town-wide. Makeda notes, "Specific problems need systematic responses, and anecdotal perceptions do not work for generating systematic change."

The group began meeting Mid-June, and together they identify what the Ashland community is already doing to create the welcoming community it strives to be, and how we can better create an equitable community.

KG also is a member of this team, and encouraged BIPOC community members to lend their voices and experiences, adding at the meeting, "It is important to expand the Town's diversity by getting involved in volunteer opportunities to better understand the government's role in the community."

The Select Board Members Greaves, Kinsman, Magnani, and Mitchell all supported the efforts of this group. Magnani reaffirmed the study group's mission to include all demographics including ethnicity, race, gender, and religion referring to systematic change. Greaves, Kinsman, and Mitchell commended the groups' efforts. Greaves extending support to the group through "this process." Mitchell called this study, "a priority above the list of priority projects."

While this study group is in its infancy, there is no specific timeline other than the group is already working to identify the existing data, and identify the data they wish to explore. They are working with partnered academics to identify how to collect the data and how to analyze the data. Once conducted, these data findings will be presented to the community. From there, the next steps include implementing the findings with policy creation as well as their continued improvement.

Makeda notes, many towns in Massachusetts mirror the Town of Ashland with its diversity and its population size. There are more of these little towns than the bigger entities, like Newton. The Town of Ashland has the unique opportunity to lead the space to take this data and find basis for actionable change without simply conducting a study, and putting in a book to live on a shelf gathering dust.