

To: Wellesley Select Board

From: DEI Task Force

Date: February 10, 2026

Re: Equity Audit Update Memorandum

The Wellesley Select Board adopted a Statement on Anti-Racism and Anti-Bias on February 22, 2021, in response to increasing reports of incidents of hate and bigotry in the community. Shortly thereafter, the Select Board staff created the DEI Task Force (“Task Force”) to build on the statement’s goal of creating a more inclusive and welcoming Wellesley for all residents. The Task Force is made up of residents, Town officials, and municipal staff. After a year and a half of work, the Task Force produced a [report](#) and proposed that 2023 Annual Town Meeting adopt an Anti-Racism and Anti-Bias Resolution and allocate funds (\$100,000) to retain a consultant to conduct a Town-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion audit (“Equity Audit”). The purpose of the Equity Audit was to establish an understanding of current conditions in the community and to identify actions that would lead to greater inclusivity and improve municipal services. Town Meeting overwhelmingly supported the resolution and appropriation.

With the leadership of former Wellesley Assistant Executive Director Amy Frigulietti, the Task Force retained the services of Racial Equity Group (“REG”) to conduct the Equity Audit. REG, led by President and CEO Bird Guess, began work in January 2024 with a series of trainings for municipal staff. They conducted a staff-wide survey to collect data and then compared that data to trends in the region and the Commonwealth. REG then conducted focus groups, interviews, and a community-wide survey of residents to gather Town-specific data. These steps were heavily advertised through the Town website, public announcements, and social media, and physical copies of notices and surveys were placed at key public spaces throughout the community.

REG completed data gathering in the fall of 2024 and provided a draft final report, gap and barrier analysis, and a set of recommendations to the Task Force at the end of 2024/early 2025.

Key Equity Audit Recommendations:

1. **Maintain DEI Task Force:** Provide oversight of and accountability for achieving the recommended objectives and goals of the Equity Audit through a permanent body such as the DEI Task Force.
2. **Attract and Retain Diverse Talent in the Municipal Workforce:** Expand efforts to create equal employment opportunities, including internships, to attract a competitive pool of qualified candidates, including females and people of color, who are significantly underrepresented in the municipal workforce. Train and equip all managers to create fair and inclusive workplaces.
3. **Measure and Monitor Equity for Vendors and Contractors:** Survey all bidders/contractors to provide baseline representation data and identify whether equal opportunities exist. Demonstrate good faith efforts to expand outreach to all businesses, including minority and women-owned businesses, to generate a competitive pool of qualified contractors.
4. **Enhance Belonging and Inclusion for All Residents:** Offer more diverse community events and activities and improve communication about events. Provide resources to help host culturally diverse events, support events with attendance, and find ways to acknowledge diverse holidays and cultures represented in the community.

The Select Board office staff is evaluating potential models for a permanent DEI committee per recommendation #1. Regarding recommendation #2, the Human Resources Department is reviewing existing HR policies and procedures to expand efforts to attract and retain diverse talent. Given the complexities with Massachusetts public procurement laws and Wellesley's decentralized system of government, recommendation #3 has not yet been addressed – but it will be considered by boards, municipal staff, and the Task Force (or a future iteration of the Task Force) in the future.

The Task Force concluded that recommendation #4 was ripest for action and partnered with the leadership of the Wellesley Civil Discourse Initiative (“WCDI”) to gather feedback from the public through a facilitated dialogue held in October 2025 (one in-person dialogue and one virtual dialogue). The goal of this dialogue was to engage residents, business owners, students, staff, and other participants in a conversation about ways the Town can enhance programming, events, celebrations, and traditions that will improve the sense of welcome and belonging for all community members.

Included in this memorandum is a summary of the dialogue, including key takeaways and possible recommendations from the Task Force based on those takeaways. The Task Force

has also included: (1) the one-page summary of the Equity Audit provided to Town Meeting in March 2025, (2) the final Gap & Barrier Analysis, and (3) the 2024 Community Survey Results Report.

Wellesley DEI Task Force Membership:

- Melinda Arias-Voci
- John Benzan
- Linda Chow
- Leda Eizenberg
- *Amy Frigulietti** (former Asst. Executive Director)
- *Bird Guess* (Racial Equity Group – Equity Audit Consultants)
- Dolores Hamilton* (Director of Human Resources)
- Stephanie Hawkinson* (Public Information Officer)
- Je’Lesia Jones
- Meghan Jop* (Executive Director)
- Glen Kim
- Ann-Mara Lanza
- Lisa MacDonald
- Paul Merry
- Lina Musayev
- Lise Olney
- Tere Ramos
- Odessa Sanchez
- Corey Testa* (Assistant Executive Director)

*Wellesley Town employee

Equity Dialogue Follow-Up: Debrief, Next Steps, and Recommendations

Background

Upon the completion of the Equity Audit in February 2025 (see [Town of Wellesley DEI Equity Audit Report summary](#)), the DEI Task Force determined that a dialogue coordinated by the Wellesley Civil Discourse Initiative would be a helpful next step in addressing the following key strategy identified in the audit:

3.0 Enhance belonging and inclusion for all residents and stakeholders

- Objective 3.1 Support Diverse Cultural Events and Activities. Tactics:
 - Work with the appropriate Town committee to evaluate previous Town events/activities, and acknowledgement of diverse cultures/holidays, to identify opportunities to enhance a sense of belonging and inclusion for all stakeholders.
 - Identify diverse community organizations and individuals from underrepresented groups to gain input and feedback on potential diverse cultural programming opportunities.

On September 9, 2025, the Select Board approved funding from the R.W. Babson Fund to support the dialogue, which was titled, “Many Traditions, One Community: A Conversation About Belonging in Wellesley.” The Civil Discourse Initiative planned and executed two sessions of the dialogue (content identical) to which all members of the Wellesley community were invited: an in-person session and a remote session. The Town’s public information staff assisted with the invitation and developed a QR code for registration. The invitation was circulated by the Town, the Wellesley Civil Discourse Initiative, and other organizations in Wellesley, as well as being shared on social media.

A total of 83 people signed up, with 65 ultimately participating, including 39 who had not attended a previous dialogue. The high percentage of first-time dialogue participants indicates success in reaching new audiences. The Civil Discourse Initiative conducted one-on-one pre-dialogue conversations with 54 of the 65 participants in preparation for the dialogue sessions.

- The in-person session was held in the Wellesley High School Cafeteria on October 27, 2025, with 44 participants divided into 7 groups. Each group had 2 facilitators, one of whom took notes that were reviewed by participants during the session.

- The remote session was held via Zoom on October 30, 2025, with 21 participants divided into 4 groups. Each group had 2 facilitators, one of whom took notes that were reviewed by participants during the session.

The in-person session began with an introduction from Executive Director Meghan Jop and the virtual session featured an introduction from Assistant Executive Director Corey Testa, with both sessions including a detailed summary of the Equity Audit findings by the Town's consultant Bird Guess of Racial Equity Group, followed by a 90-minute dialogue that addressed the questions outlined in this memo.

Following the dialogue, participants were asked to provide feedback via a paper or digital form (a standard practice of the Civil Discourse Initiative). Of the 65 participants, 61 completed either a paper or digital form. Results from the feedback forms are summarized in the attached document.

The notes from the dialogues were transcribed and are summarized below.

Summary of Notes from the Dialogue Sessions

Dialogue Question 1: Experiences of Feeling Connected or Excluded at Community Events

Participants shared a wide range of experiences in Wellesley and beyond that shaped their sense of belonging. Many described meaningful moments of connection, often tied to shared traditions, cultural visibility, and opportunities for active participation. Conversely, feelings of exclusion typically emerged when events reflected narrow cultural norms, lacked representation, or when systems and communication barriers prevented engagement.

When Participants Felt Connected

Participants often felt most connected when engaging in **town-wide traditions, school events, cultural observances, and neighborhood gatherings**. Examples included:

- Participating in Wellesley's Veterans' Day Parade and Wonderful Weekend (both in May), which brought families and neighbors together;
- School-centered events such as multicultural nights, choral performances, holiday cookie exchanges, and field trips, which offered welcoming, diverse environments;
- Religious and cultural observances that were intentionally inclusive, such as the MLK Celebration, menorah lighting, inclusive bat mitzvah services, and veterans events;

- Neighborhood-based, informal celebrations—Halloween gatherings, progressive dinners, happy hours—that fostered personal connections;
- Cultural or identity-affirming experiences, such as representing one’s heritage at school diversity programs or seeing inclusive symbols (e.g., crescent at Town Hall, holiday decorations that acknowledge multiple traditions); and
- Community support moments, particularly during personal hardship, where residents showed up in ways that made individuals feel deeply valued and held by the community.

The shared thread in these stories is **recognition, participation, and representation**. When people saw themselves reflected in events—or when events invited them to contribute—they felt welcomed, valued, and connected.

When Participants Felt Excluded

Experiences of exclusion were typically rooted in **cultural misalignment, lack of representation, gaps in communication, or social barriers**.

Examples included:

- Events that appeared to center Christian traditions (Holiday Stroll, Luminary Night, Christmas lights) without acknowledging other cultures or faiths;
- The rejection of Pride Month celebrations, which signaled to some residents that LGBTQ+ identities were not equally valued;
- Town Meeting culture feeling homogenous, intimidating, or unwelcoming to younger or more diverse residents;
- Microaggressions and comments about neighborhoods, identity, or belonging—e.g., “starter homes” references or “this is my country;”
- Challenges accessing information as newcomers, non-residents, or Town employees without clear communication channels;
- METCO families, working parents, and new residents feeling disconnected or unable to participate fully; and
- Debates or decisions around religious observances (menorah placement, school holiday calendars) that made people feel their traditions were secondary or contested.

These stories reveal that **even small signals of exclusivity—whether intentional or not—often reinforce the feeling that Wellesley prioritizes certain identities while overlooking others.**

Dialogue Question 2: What Helps People Feel Connected to Community Celebrations?

Participants identified several factors that strengthen inclusion and belonging at community events:

1. Representation and Visibility

People feel connected when:

- Multiple cultures and religions are visibly acknowledged.
- Events include diverse foods, music, stories, languages, and symbols.
- Holidays are presented in a seasonal, secular, or multi-faith framework.

2. Opportunities to Participate or Contribute

Connection grows when residents can:

- Volunteer, perform, organize a booth, or share aspects of their culture.
- Bring family traditions to community spaces.
- Engage through their children's schools or extracurricular activities.

3. Welcoming Atmosphere and Interpersonal Warmth

Participants highlighted:

- Friendly hosts and greeters.
- Clearly explained activities.
- A sense that newcomers, minorities, and long-term residents are equally welcome.
- Events structured for all ages and interests.

4. Accessibility and Ease of Participation

Feeling included often depends on:

- Events scheduled at family-friendly times.
- Multiple locations across the Town.

- Clear information distributed through multiple platforms.
- Low or no cost to attend.

5. Town Traditions that Bring People Together

Events such as Marathon Day, Wonderful Weekend, MLK Day observances, school concerts, and holiday programming create recurring moments of unity and civic pride.

Dialogue Question 3: What Makes Participation Difficult or Less Possible?

Residents also named a set of barriers that limit inclusion:

1. Lack of Representation or Cultural Narrowness

Participants noted that:

- Events often appear designed with a white, Christian-majority audience in mind.
- Certain holidays or identity groups receive little visibility, support, or acknowledgment.
- Decisions around religious symbols (e.g., menorah, school holidays) have created tension.

2. Communication and Information Gaps

Challenges included:

- No centralized newcomer portal.
- Town employees do not receive general event information.
- Reliance on word-of-mouth or fragmented communications.
- Difficulty navigating Town systems as a new resident.

3. Perceived Social and Cultural Barriers

Several participants described:

- Feeling uncomfortable due to socio-economic assumptions or stereotypes about Wellesley.
- Discomfort attending events where they are the only person of color.
- Feeling that Town Meeting or committees skew toward a narrow demographic.

4. Logistical Barriers

Residents identified:

- Work schedules (especially for those commuting to Boston).
- Childcare responsibilities.
- Cost or accessibility of some events.
- COVID-era disruptions that created disconnection, particularly for METCO families.

5. Experiences of Bias or Microaggressions

These incidents—even when isolated—create lasting feelings of exclusion and reluctance to attend community events.

Conclusion: Key Takeaways and Overarching Themes

Across all questions and for both the in-person and virtual dialogues, several clear themes emerge:

1. Representation Matters Deeply

People feel included when they see their cultural, religious, neighborhood, and family traditions represented in public spaces and events. When symbols or events privilege a single tradition/observance/faith, others feel intentionally excluded or left behind.

2. Schools Provide the Strongest Source of Community

School communities—through diversity nights, concerts, field trips, and committees—are where many residents experience their most meaningful connections. Many participants indicated that Wellesley Public Schools provide the easiest way to “build community.” However, they noted that it is challenging to maintain a community once your children leave the school system or if you do not have children in the schools.

3. Connection Requires Intentional Design

Events feel inclusive when structured with:

- A broad range of cultures
- Clear and consistent communication
- Opportunities for active participation

- Conscious attention to symbolism, language, and invitations

4. Newcomers and Non-Residents Need Clear On-Ramps

A lack of central information and welcoming systems disproportionately impacts:

- New residents
- METCO families
- Town employees
- Working parents

5. Microaggressions and Bias Undermine Belonging

Even a few incidents can create a cloud of exclusion. The community notices—and remembers—when identity-based hostility occurs.

Recommendations for the Town of Wellesley

1. Establish a Digital Central “Welcome & Belonging” Hub

- A single portal listing events, resources, cultural celebrations, and ways to get involved. Many participants complimented “The W,” which was launched earlier this year. Build on the success of the newsletter and coordinate closely with Public Information Officer/Select Board office on clear messaging.
- Tailored guidance on ways to engage in the community, participate in local government, and connect with neighbors and other Town stakeholders for newcomers, METCO families, and Town staff.

Improve channels of communication and opportunities for neighborhood interaction/resident-to-resident support and cooperation. A community “message board” for residents to post advertisements for services, etc.

2. Attract and Retain Diverse Talent in Municipal Government

- Expand efforts to create equal employment opportunities in the municipal workforce and to attract a competitive pool of qualified candidates, including females and people of color, who are currently significantly underrepresented.
- Expand internship opportunities to allow for career exploration and development.

- Collect data on the demographic composition of Town boards, committees, and commissions (elected and appointed) to establish a baseline.

3. Expand Cultural Representation in Events and Traditions

- Support multicultural, interfaith, and identity-affirming events (e.g., Pride, Diwali, Lunar New Year). Leverage existing community and cultural organizations (e.g. faith communities, Council on Aging, Wellesley Cultural Council, World of Wellesley, Wellesley Chinese Language School, Art Wellesley) to co-sponsor and co-organize community events that are welcoming and inclusive.
- Ensure holiday decorations and public programming reflect the diversity of residents. Work with the Select Board to update the Holiday Decorations policy to better reflect Wellesley's current diversity.

4. Increase Participation Pathways

- Offer small, low-barrier participation roles for community members at major events. Expand opportunities for community members to volunteer to organize and support events and advertise those opportunities across every available platform.
- Provide stipends, transportation, or childcare options for volunteers when economically feasible. Town should provide more formal assistance and structure to residents/community groups who need support for holding community events and programs.
- Invite cultural groups, student organizations, and neighborhood leaders to co-create events. Strengthen relationships with colleges and collaborate with them to improve sense of belonging for all student populations.
- Intentionality – promote and organize events, programs, and groups that engage with and attract residents, students, business owners, and visitors who traditionally do not participate in community functions.

5. Improve Communication

- Share event information broadly and consistently across channels (web, newsletters, social media, schools).
- Ensure Town employees receive the same information as residents.
- Reinforce the importance of resident involvement, volunteerism, and attendance at Town-sponsored and other community events and programming through promotional materials, volunteer recruitment, and event/program management.

6. Advance Inclusive Training and Norms

- Provide training as needed for staff, volunteers, and event hosts on welcoming practices and cultural awareness and inclusivity.
- Develop clear guidelines, through the Select Board/Select Board Policy Subcommittee, for inclusive holiday observances and non-sectarian practices in civic spaces (Town Meeting, school calendars, public events).

7. Support Affinity-Based and Identity-Affirming Events

- Revisit policies around Pride and other identity-based celebrations.
- Consider a community mini-grant program for cultural groups to host events (in coordination with the Wellesley Cultural Council).
- Strengthen connections between residents/community stakeholders and the faith communities.

8. Strengthen Neighborhood-Based Engagement

- Promote block parties, neighbor-to-neighbor programs, and micro-events where residents gather informally.
- A “Neighborhood 311” Program so residents can learn how to run their own events and where to find specific information (block party applications, etc.)