

Approved by  
the Select Board on:

10/4/2021

## BELMONT SELECT BOARD MEETING

### REMOTE PUBLIC FORUM

### MEND BELMONT WEBINAR

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2021

7:00 PM

**RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: October 13, 2021

TIME: 2:38 PM

#### CALL TO ORDER

A meeting of the Select Board was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chair Adam Dash. Vice Chair Roy Epstein, and Mark Paolillo were present, along with Town Administrator Patrice Garvin.

#### OPENING REMARKS

Adam Dash announced that this is the second Mend Belmont forum. He said the first forum was in February 2021. This is a fitting day to hold this meeting because it is International Peace Day.

#### INTRODUCTION OF FACILITATOR, MR. ROBERT JONES

The facilitator is Robert T. Jones, a multi-faceted consultant in the inclusion and diversity and organizational effectiveness industry. He also worked as the associate director of multicultural education at the College of the Holy Cross. He has conducted a wide range of strategic development sessions for international clients and colleges, religious organizations and Fortune 500 companies.

Robert Jones welcomed all the attendees from the various Belmont committees, departments and the public. He said you can speak by raising your Zoom hand or you can type in your written comments or questions using the Q&A button. Any specific questions should be sent to townadministrator@Belmont-ma.gov.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Mr. Jones stated that tonight's session is for listening and speaking about race and inclusion. Each participant will have three minutes to speak. He would like to see everyone speak from their own personal experience and be open to new and different perspectives.

#### PUBLIC FORUM – MEND BELMONT

Wendy Murphy thanked Robert for being here. She has lived in Belmont for 20 years. Her son was beaten by three men of color in Boston this summer. There seemed to be no apparent motive. She said this was a confusing situation for her because she is a proponent of inclusion and diversity. She reached out to the Town and asked the community to condemn this incident. One of the people she reached out to is a leader in the community on issues of racism. She didn't agree to condemn the incident.

Mark G wrote that he would like the facilitator to frame the broader issue. Mr. Jones reiterated parts of his original introduction.

An anonymous attendee wrote that it seems people in Town are concerned about equity and inclusion. He would like to know the reason for opposing equity and inclusion.

Dorothy Stoneman said she was born here 79 years ago. Her mother worked hard to change housing policies for more affordable housing. The Belmont community was segregated in the past. Dorothy said she has been participating in the Beyond Ferguson group at the First Church ever since the Michael Brown incident. After 24 years living in Harlem NY she was surprised to return home to Belmont to find a lot of people in the community were dedicated to inclusion. She thinks it's important to talk about the policies we need to foster diversity in the community.

Jason Ketola spoke about his experience on the screening committee for the new Director of Diversity and Inclusion in the schools. He feels the Town is deferring decisions that we could be discussing and implementing right now. We could implement policy that would not give candidates applying for positions in the Town and schools the benefits gleaned from Town connections. We could also reduce unnecessary credential requirements. He would also like to see the Town revisit some zoning policies; in particular the moratorium on building multi-family houses. Class and race issues intersect and this could lead the way for Belmont to become more inclusionary. He hopes that policy discussions around diversity and inclusion are undertaken on a regular basis.

Kersten wrote that she was sorry to hear about Wendy Murphy's experience. Violence is never acceptable. She said she is concerned about programs in the schools that approach social justice through a social lens. She feels this often causes more divisiveness.

Ye Pogue said that Asians also feel discriminated against in Town. She said it's important that we realize that we have much more in common than we have differences. We should not look at color because that divides us.

An anonymous attendee wrote that the person that Wendy Murphy said did not support her was not a town official.

Wendy Murphy wrote to confirm that the person she spoke with who did not support her was not a Town official it was a private citizen who heads a diversity group in Belmont.

Tommasina Olson, Town Meeting member, just finished the Payson Park Music Festival which was quite diverse. She said the person who Wendy spoke with was an appointed official of a Town committee.

Jennifer Burgess said that her family emigrated here in the 50s from Jamaica. Her concerns are that in the meetings she has attended about race inclusivity that certain people talk more than others. Regardless what group we are from, everyone should listen to black leadership. She feels we need to give marginalized citizens a voice.

Jennifer said what she knows about the incident is awful. But said that Wendy chose to leave a program she was involved in because of the incident with her son, and she feels the better choice was to stay in the group and try to help others.

Jane Shapiro said she grew up in Somerville and learned to be open minded because of her mother's teachings. She hopes things get better in Belmont.

Sarah and Mike Max wrote that they support Jennifer Burgess.

Wendy Murphy wrote that the woman who said that some people need to be beaten was an advocate in the courts against her son. She also thanked Jennifer for her comments.

Stephanie Buckler said what is concerning to her is that we are using a horrible incident to try to move forward with. We must look at all the facts about the incident. She feels the young perpetrators should be supported and we need to all come together. We really don't know what caused the violence.

An anonymous attendee writes that they hope the Murphy situation could be terminated in this discussion because it's stealing the real issues of the meeting.

Jennifer Burgess said that no one is supporting the perpetrators. She feels that people should not make decisions that affect young lives.

Robert Jones asked that people refrain from using the Q&A to go back and forth. Once a person has spoken, he would like to them not to use the Q&A. We need to hear new voices. You can speak again later.

Joe Bernard said it seems what we are talking about is restorative justice. Chief MacIsaac has talked about this approach. Joe read the definition of restorative justice from the Mass. General laws. Joe also read a Belmont press release that said that the Belmont Police Department had entered into partnership with C4RJ. C4RJ is a community police partnership that offers restorative justice for those who are affected by crime. C4RJ has trained volunteers and listens to victims to help restore faith in the community. Offenders are given the ability to rectify their actions and avoid a criminal conviction. The Police recommend cases to C4RJ. He said he will drop the article in the Q&A box for people to read. It will also be on the Belmont Town website (Google Belmont Police/Restorative Justice).

A comment was tabled because it was someone who had already spoken. Robert said that person could speak later if they want to. He said if no one raises their hand, then they can open up the mike for others who have already spoken.

Michael Collins is a member of Belmont Against Racism. The group was created after the verdict in 1992 regarding police violence in LA. He feels it's hard for police to instill justice. He said restorative justice is the preferred way to handle many incidents. We are always left with perpetrators and victims. Hopefully there are opportunities for people to reconcile and move forward. He hopes we have no more incidents that could drive us apart.

Bonnie Freeman wrote that the restorative justice agency website in Mass is: [www.RJCMA.org](http://www.RJCMA.org). You can also go to [www.C4RJ.org](http://www.C4RJ.org).

An anonymous writer said Belmont should be a welcoming community and that is not always true for people of color. Belmont should embrace increasing diversity without fear.

Joe Weiner wrote we should all strive to eliminate racism in Belmont. We need a safe community but we can't do it with critical theory. We have to recognize common humanity.

Betsy Lipson stated that there are pathways for getting involved in the Town. Dorothy Stoneman has been involved for years with Beyond Ferguson. The problem as a society is how to step up with courage and have conversations across differences. There are macro solutions like changing zoning and

redistricting schools. Sometimes it feels uncomfortable to have the dialogue but anyone can step in and just listen. Everyone is welcome to Belmont meetings and they can ask the hard questions.

Wendy Murphy spoke about points people have brought up. She resents the person that said let's table the Murphy conversation. He has disabilities and that's why her rage grew toward the woman that did not acknowledge her anger. She said she still cares about restorative justice, not for the older man, but she thinks it could be viable for the younger perpetrators. Violence in Belmont happens more to women in Belmont. And there isn't even a group to listen to them. She is concerned about divisive ideologies. We can't stop talking about the my son's situation. It's the wrong thing to do and often the cause of more problems.

Tommasina Olson said that one of the reasons that Wendy's situation was so personal to her is because the same thing happened to her son in Boston. He was kicked in the head and had to go to the ER. It hurts when you see your kid being beaten. Unfortunately the Boston police didn't feel it was important. She feels we should not do this in Belmont. People who take advantage of the system by beating up people need to be held accountable whether it's with restorative justice or in other ways.

An anonymous written comment said they feel they are lacking information about discussions and want to educate themselves. Are there places they can go where there is history on the issues raised tonight?

Gaye Ozpinar is on the Human Rights commission. She said that these things do happen in Belmont. Henry Tapia was run over in Belmont and her friend heard a racial slur being uttered before it happened. We need a space for public grief and reflection. She feels the renaming of the space where the crime occurred should be named after Henry Tapia to help reflect on what has been happening. Many black mothers feel that every day.

Jennipher Burgess talked about Wendy Murphy's statement. She wants to make sure accurate info is being relayed. One of the aggressors in the incident is 18 years old. When we talk about social and racial justice, maybe we should consider that the assailants had disabilities. Restorative justice may be the way to approach this. She doesn't like to hear divisive words like "the other side." She doesn't believe that the perpetrators were taking advantage of the system by violating someone. The people responsible are being held accountable. I work with Reach, a domestic violence organization in Waltham and she could help connect people with this group.

Suzanne Johannet said she is white and doesn't know what it is like to live with racism. But she wants to learn what it is like. It's important for all of us to remember that we have not all lived those experiences.

Stephanie Buckler made a written comment to say that it would be helpful for future listening sessions to offer more information about the goals of the forum.

Wendy Murphy said that she wants to respond to what Jennipher said. The three men who attacked her son used offensive language. Her son was not offensive to these men before they attacked him. They smashed his cell phone, but the videotape went to the Cloud. The racist language is on videotape. She wants the conversation to be about whether violence is acceptable. She doesn't want to make this an "us" vs. "them" situation. Diversity in Belmont has to be a two-way street if we want to be inclusionary. The ages of the offenders in her son's incident were not given because certain people in the diversity community in Belmont stopped it from hitting the press.

Jennifer Burgess said she would try to connect with Wendy offline.

Ye Pogue said she is member of the Belmont Human Rights commission. She read a quote from Martin Luther King and suggested that we need to revisit Martin Luther King's teachings. We need to view each other's vulnerabilities with a human heart.

An anonymous writer asked if this forum was conducted to learn about the attack on the young men or to explore solutions on inclusivity and diversity?

Robert Jones answered that it's a listening session under the construct of race and inclusivity in Belmont. He said we have heard from several people. Please raise your hand to let your voice be heard because we are listening.

He reminded people that you they can send questions to [townadministrator@belmont-ma.gov](mailto:townadministrator@belmont-ma.gov). Any question sent in will be answered. The questions will be directed to the appropriate person.

Jeanne Mooney spoke and suggested that in the spirit of diversity that we should encourage people to run for Town Meeting. We need Town Meeting to be more reflective of Belmont's diversity.

Dorothy Stoneman wrote that if anyone is interested in the Beyond Ferguson, to develop an agenda of policy and practice in Belmont please Google "Beyond Ferguson Belmont" and find that information.

Kim Haley-Jackson wrote that during the school year students have experienced hurtful incidents due to their race. The schools have taken steps to address racial equity. She would like to see the Town take a similar approach. The Town leaders need to affirm the importance of this work.

A written comment from Wendy Murphy said that the most common class-based offense is violence against women in Belmont. We need to elevate this issue.

An anonymous written comment asked how has the Select Board changed their attitude towards race and inclusion since prior to George Floyd's murder? Robert Jones said that question could be addressed to the Town administrator e-mail.

Ann Mahon wrote that she is happy that we have Communities Organized for Solidarity in Belmont. The Asian community is having problems too and we need to behave like real neighbors and come together.

An anonymous attendee wrote that it is their observation that the Select Board has not changed its approach. We need a statement of leadership from the Select Board to have clear guidance for Town committees to prioritize race and to include equity and inclusion in their work.

Donna Ruvolo said she had the opportunity to work on a Town Community Preservation project and she said that Belmont's public facilities are a gathering place for diverse populations of our community. We should focus on building more commonalities through our public facilities.

An anonymous attendee wrote that they heard someone at the forum tonight say the people who are speaking up to address anti-racism should listen more to black leadership. I hope the intention was not to say that these people should refrain from speaking up.

An anonymous attendee wrote that they wished our adults would get along as well as the Belmont youth.

Joe Bernard said that because Belmont is close to Boston, and we should not be closing ourselves off from the problems of Boston. We should be good neighbors of the city. He suggested that one way to do this would be adding affordable housing. The Mass-Cass homeless problem in Boston may demand regional collaboration. It's not just a Boston problem and they will be calling on other towns to solve the problem of homelessness.

Dorothy Stoneman commented that the link doesn't work for Beyond Ferguson. She said they will try to fix it.

An anonymous attendee wrote that they hope we can do more of these meetings to realize that racism is real.

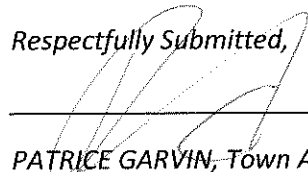
Jason Ketola said he hopes that there will be continued discussions on equity issues especially in regards to advanced math opportunities at the Middle School. Advanced math programs were originally removed because of equity concerns. He thinks a strong equity case could be made for keeping advanced math. Belmont should try to do something like the Calculus Project from Brookline which has a great record of offering a path for students not doing well in math to achieve an advanced math level.

Robert Jones thanked everyone for this opportunity. He said he feels that there are great opportunities to move this discussion forward in Belmont.

Dash thanked everyone who attended tonight. He said the group peaked at 71 attendees. He thinks this was a good second event in the Mend Belmont series of forums.

*Motion was made to adjourn. Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.*

*Respectfully Submitted,*



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PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator