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**Coalition on Diversity and Equity (CoDE)**

The Coalition on Diversity and Equity (CoDE) was formed in July 2020 by a group of town residents following the death of George Floyd and the first-ever rally for racial justice in Hebron. Since then, we expanded our focus to include not only Hebron, but also Andover, Marlborough and Columbia, and surrounding communities. **Our mission** is to build more diverse, equitable and vibrant communities. **Our goals** include increasing community awareness and equal access to housing, education and jobs.

CoDE members are each personally invested in Hebron and many of us have lived here for decades, raising families, participating in town committees and organizations, and growing networks of friends. There is much to love about Hebron, but also ways in which we can improve. We believe that living in a diverse town and having children learn in a diverse educational system is good for all.

To achieve these goals, we partner with and support the work of Town Committees and Commissions, Boards of Education and school leadership, faith communities, and nonprofit organizations. Members of CoDE meet bi-weekly to move our agenda forward.

**Achievements and initiatives to date**:

We have conducted seven successful virtual **Community Conversations**:

1) ***Housing*** featuring Erin Boggs of Open Communities Alliance, Mike O’Leary, Hebron Town Planner, and Rob King, Hebron resident;

2) ***How diversity affects the quality of life in towns***, featuring Jay Williams, executive director of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving; Bill Howe, head of Multicultural Dimensions; Erin Siegel, policy director of Health Equity Solutions, and Catharine Freeman, attorney, entrepreneur and Grassroots Co-Founder of CT Urban Cities COVID-19 Taskforce;

3) ***Segregation in our Towns***, featuring Sara Bronin of Desegregate CT, Sean Ghio of Partnership for Strong Communities; and Erin Boggs and Taniqua Huguley of Open Communities Alliance;

4) ***Equity from a Faith Perspective***, featuring Dr. Benjamin Foster, Jr., public intellectual and lecturer in African American studies and religion at Central Connecticut State University; Rev. Ronald Kolanowski, rector, St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, Hebron; Rev. Dr. Denise Esslinger, pastor, Gilead Congregational Church, Hebron; and Diane Maran, cantor, United Brethren of Hebron Synagogue;

5) ***How to be an Ally***, featuring; Rev. Dr. Shelley D. Best, President & CEO, The Conference of Churches/The 224 EcoSpace; John Dankosky, Director of News and Radio Projects at Science Friday; Melinda Johnson, Director, Community Engagement & Advocacy, YWCA Hartford Region; Bonnie Malley, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving; and Anita Ford Saunders, APR, Co-chair, Public Relations Society of America Diversity & Inclusion Committee;

6) ***Creating Housing Choices in Rural Towns***, featuring Kate Briggs Johnson, President of The Foundation for Norfolk Living; Jim Crawford, Advisory Council member of the HOPE Partnership, which serves Middlesex County; and Matthew Straub and Kasey LaFlam from Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), which helps towns and cities create affordable housing.

7) ***Hebron’s Plan for Housing Choices***: an opportunity for the community to learn about and provide feedback on**;** Hebron Town Planner Patrick Gallagher presented.

We also partnered with St. Peter’s Episcopal Church of Hebron to offer ***This is Sacred Ground: Building Racial Reconciliation through Education and Understanding***. The program, created by The Episcopal Church, consisted of 11 intensive sessions on Monday evenings from November 1, 2021 to April 4, 2022. Each educational session was moderated by professional scholars, Dr. Walton Brown-Foster and Dr. Benjamin Foster, Jr., and followed by small group discussions led by community volunteers. The program was made possible by a grant from the Hebron Greater Together Community Fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Feedback from the 40 participants demonstrated that many learned a great deal, their perceptions on changed, and many intended to continue their learning or get involved in social justice activities.

Over 600 people, including 75 members of the Peters family (descendants of formerly enslaved resident Cesar Peters) attended our **Juneteenth Celebration**, held in collaboration with Hebron Day on Saturday, June 18 at Burnt Hill Park. Many expressed how much they learned about the history of African Americans in Hebron, which they had never known. Participants enjoyed music, drumming and dancing, and toured the historic Peters House and read about the Cesar and Lowis Peters and other enslaved families who made Hebron their home, and participated in a heartwarming and moving dedication ceremony at the Wall Street Cemetery, where CoDE members had cleaned up the preciously overgrown African American section.

Live music was provided by: EvaE Peart and Nia Arts (African drumming and dancing); Nekita Waller (singing songs of Freedom); and Hartford’s Proud (drumming).

RHAM Middle School students read and displayed written pieces, videos and artwork based on their research of Cesar and Lowis Peters and Pomp Mundo.

Kids enjoyed the Story Walk, quilt square making, scavenger hunt, African games, and drumming.

Partners included Hebron Parks and Recreation Department, ShopBlackCT, and Douglas Library. Funding was provided by: CT Humanities; William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund; [Northeast Family Federal Credit Union](https://nefamily.coop/); Berkshire Bank; Perfect Poundcakes.

We have been **educated and informed** by many statewide and regional organizations, including the State Department of Education, CREC, EASTCONN, CT Center for School Change, RE-Center Race & Equity in Education, Open Communities Alliance, Health Equity Solutions, Desegregate CT, and Partnership for Strong Communities.

We’ve learned how zoning shapes our lives and our community in vital and often unseen ways and have **advocated for reducing barriers to the creation of affordable housing**. We know that in recent years Hebron and its Planning and Zoning Commission have made some key changes to bring more vitality and diversity to our town, especially our town center. We’d like to build on those efforts to keep that progress going. We’ve testified on four housing and zoning reform bills and continue to advocate for measures to reduce segregation in our state and our town. We served on Hebron’s Affordable Housing Workgroup to create the town’s first Plan for Housing Choices. We received a $10,000 grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for community education about housing. We are a coalition member of Desegregate CT and Open Communities Alliance. We are **actively supporting the creation of Hebron’s first affordable housing development** by the Commons Community Development Corporation (CDC) on land owned by St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Hebron.

We realize that housing, education, and economic development are intertwined to build a vibrant and successful town that is welcoming to people of all ages, races and ethnicities, and economic status. We’ve conducted extensive research into **strategies to increase diversity and cultural competence in our school districts and classrooms**. We presented to the Shared Services Advisory Group, a group comprised of Board of Education members from Hebron, Marlborough and Andover; RHAM Board of Education; both Superintendents; and town leaders. We will be working to support the creation of an Equity Council at RHAM.

We were pleased that the **Board of Selectmen** has committed to working with CoDE to identify and work toward mutual goals related to diversity and equity.

**Hebron CoDE co-chairs:**

Amy D’Amaddio

Donna Jolly

Website: [code-diversity.org](http://code-diversity.org)

Email: CoDE.diversity1@gmail.com

[Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/Hebron-CoDE-104649288341385)

[YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEADhJobKPpp5A7DsjUzXXg)