

RECEIVED  
COLCHESTER, CT  
JUL 28 PM 5:15  
Gayle Furman  
TOWN CLERK

CORE Commission  
July 11, 2022 – Special Meeting via Zoom

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Shawn Pelletier, Vice Chair Amy Domeika, Judith Barnes, Kymberly Cianci, Nancy Nelson, Jah-Marley Wright, Jeffrey Koonankeil

MEMBERS NOT PRESENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: Board of Selectman liaison Denise Turner

1. **Call to Order**

Chair Shawn Pelletier called the meeting to order at 6:37pm with a roll call to establish a quorum.

2. **Pledge of Allegiance** led by J. Barnes

3. **ADDITIONS/CHANGES TO THE AGENDA** - none

4. **Citizens Comment**

4a. Joanne Rose, Reservoir Road, parent of a transgender child spoke in favor of the CORE Commission issuing a statement of support for the LGBTQ+ community and the library.

4b. Mary Byline, Shadbush Drive, former First Selectman, lesbian, married woman, and parent of a gay man/parent asks the commission to advocate for the gay community with a statement to address inequities. She spoke of her time as the former first selectman of Colchester and demanded that the CORE commission take action. She further feels that this action was an assault on her rights.

4c. MJ Lawton, Deer Run Drive, first time attending CORE and spoke about racial and LGBTQ+ issues, actions from the first selectman about a variety of issues that she believes are wrong and read a Martin Niemoller poem."

5. **New Business**

**5a. Discuss issuing a formal statement from CORE on recent events of the RuPaul book.**

Chair Pelletier read the Core Mission statement.

Discussed if CORE should make a statement on the recent events, in addition to what has already been said on social media, news media, residents, etc. Chair Pelletier asked the commission "Is there anything that we can add, in addition to what has already been stated that would be of value?" Chair Pelletier asked each member to comment.

**Member Nancy Nelson** said she was glad so many people joined and spoke in favor of a CORE statement and recommends it be factual.

**Member Jah-Marley Wright** spoke in favor of a statement in support of the LGBT community as the goal of our committee is to make sure all of our community members feel welcomed and that they belong here.

**Member Judith Barnes** spoke against issuing a statement and said she felt that it has been escalated by people with agendas. Believes this was an honest mistake by the first selectman and says she is not diminishing other people's rights about their choices. Thinks youth could be confused by this and that there is a lot of material that can confuse a child and while parents can assist in obtaining a book, feels like this is a misunderstanding. Stated that even Barnes & Noble has books separated by age appropriateness.

**Member Kim Cianci** spoke in favor of a statement in support of the LGBTQ community. Based on feedback from the community, it sounds like people are feeling targeted and singled out, and it's important that we stand as allies – walk the walk not just talk the talk. Our charge as a commission is to be responsive to the community.

**Member Jeffrey Koonankeil** spoke against issuing a statement and wants to focus on the facts, as the first selectman said it has nothing to do with anybody's sexual preference or gender identity, it was about sexually provocative material in a book. While the first selectman did not follow the library's procedure, he doesn't feel that it was a homosexual/heterosexual thing, it's whether sexually explicit material is appropriate for seven-year-old.

**Chair Shawn Pelletier** spoke that she likes facts, and she supports issuing a statement from CORE but it needs to be fair, state the facts, and not opinions. She supports all Colchester community members (LGBTQIA, parents, youth) and feels the language needs to be inclusive. She doesn't support attacking an elected official or accusing the first selectman of saying things that he didn't say.

**Vice Chair Amy Domeika** spoke about the need for a statement from CORE in support of the LGBTQ community as this directive to remove the RuPaul book came from a position of authority.

Unofficial poll of Core members voted on item 5a (issue a statement from CORE)

Voted Yes: Amy Domeika, Jah-Marley Wright, Kymberly Cianci, Shawn Pelletier

Voted No: Judith Barnes, Jeff Koonankeil

Vice Chair Domeika shared a DRAFT statement she had prepared. There was further discussion on the charge of the CORE Commission and how the commission will go about drafting a statement. After much discussion, it was determined that each member would draft their own statement for group discussion at the July 20 meeting. Organizing another date before July 20 was discussed but could not be arranged due to scheduling / travel conflicts.

Motion by: Nancy Nelson for commission members to work on a statement to be presented and voted on at July 20<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Second by: Kymberly Cianci

Voted Yes: Amy Domeika, Judith Barnes, Jah-Marley Wright, Kymberly Cianci, Shawn Pelletier

Voted No: Jeff Koonankeil

#### **5b. Provide educational links on banned books, etc. and post to the CORE section of the Town website**

Discussed whether or not CORE should be providing links and resources on the town website that will support the statement, as well as help the community. The discussion included if these links should be separate from the library or similar. Suggestions included the National Library Association as food for thought on our site because we are not the experts.

Motion by: Nancy Nelson to research websites about removal, banning, segregating of books in a public library for repurposing on our website page

Second by: Kymberly Cianci

Vote: Unanimous to approve

**5c. Discuss process for CORE members to work as a team when taking action on DE&I issues.**

Discussed if CORE should have a process in place for responding to issues that happen in the town, such as the recent event at the library on June 26, 2022. Chair Pelletier and member Koonankeil felt that Vice Chair Domeika should not have gone on the “What’s Happening in Colchester Facebook Live” program on June 30 because the CORE Commission decided that there was not enough support among the members to participate on that date. The decision was communicated to CORE members via email on June 29 from Chair Pelletier, which included a request for cooperation to comply with that decision. Vice Chair Domeika stated that she went on the show as an individual and has not given up the right to speak out. Vice Chair Domeika pointed out that she told Chair Pelletier before going on the show that she would be speaking. Chair Pelletier, and members Koonankeil, and Barnes stated that if the CORE Commission makes a decision, all members should honor that decision. Vice Chair Domeika disagreed with that and stated as a CORE member she has not given up her right to speak as an individual. Chair Pelletier clarified that no CORE member has given up their right to speak as an individual. Member Nelson stated that she wanted to move away from the events of last week and work on a procedure that all could agree to. Member Cianci stated that she watched the FB live recording and that Domeika did appear as an individual and that even though the commission did not have consensus, it’s important to put personal morals and what you feel is best for Colchester first. Member Wright stated that we have to respect each other in the group but we are all individuals in this community. Stated that he does his own events in the community not representing CORE and saying that if you’re in this group you can’t share your thoughts defeats the purpose.

No action taken as agreement was not obtained for having a procedure in place when issues arise in the town.

**6. Chair Closing Comments**

Chair Pelletier closed the meeting with a quote from Henry Ford on coming together, working together, staying together.

**7. Adjournment**

Chair Pelletier adjourned the meeting at 8:11pm.

**Addendum:**

Chat from Zoom meeting

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to All Panelists 06:31 PM

no

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to All Panelists 06:53 PM

I'm seeing a letter to Shawn - not the mission statement

From Kymberly Cianci to Everyone 06:53 PM

The mission statement is on the 2nd page, MJ

From Jeffrey Koonankeil to All Panelists 06:53 PM

The mission statement is on the town website. <https://www.colchesterct.gov/your-government/core-commission>

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to All Panelists 06:54 PM

I can't scroll - it's Amy's screen that's showing

From Gayle Furman to Everyone 06:59 PM

I feel you should make a statement!

It was not a mistake as he knew about this before the complaint was made officially. Friday before

From Sheila Horvitz to Everyone 07:01 PM

First Selectman did not acknowledge mistake. Did he not reiterate his call for an audit of children's books in his latest letter in the RiverEast?

From Gayle Furman to Everyone 07:02 PM

Sexually explicit in his eyes not everyone's.

From Gayle Furman to Everyone 07:08 PM

It's not sexually explicit

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to Everyone 07:08 PM

That image was literally on TV

From Sheila Horvitz to Everyone 07:09 PM

Questions: What and where is the intersection between CORE, its values and mission - vis a vis town government behavior.

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to Everyone 07:12 PM

A committee purporting to stand for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion MUST speak truth to power for all in the community or it is a joke.

From Gayle Furman to Everyone 07:12 PM

opinion!

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to Everyone 07:19 PM

It would be good if the members had their facts straight after talking so much about being objective as well.

You need to speak directly to the affected community. This is not a general issue - it is about the LGBTQIA+ community. Maybe you should be asking them how they feel and then listening intently and with purpose to what they say and then acting accordingly.

Wow - an equity committee that doesn't care about how marginalized communities feel? This sounds like a sham committee to make it appear that the town cares - real caring also validates feelings of those in the minority.

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to Everyone 07:26 PM

People in majorities need to ask minority groups what they want and how they feel and then stop talking and listen. And then they need to amplify that message. It seems people working in DEIB would know that and be passionate about it. Very disappointing. This group should be a safe place of people who are passionate about doing the right thing no matter how uncomfortable.

That's a very privileged position to come from.

From Russell Melmed to Everyone 07:27 PM

What the commission should emphasize in any statement is that policies and procedures, whether in our Library or elsewhere in our government, must be strengthened in order to promote equity in our community, and avoid another situation like this that results in feelings of marginalization among vulnerable and historically oppressed residents.

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to Everyone 07:31 PM

Yes, Amy...exactly.

So disingenuous.

And why do you think that is? Could it be that it's not a friendly place for people who are different?? Just a thought.

From Gayle Furman to Everyone 07:32 PM

I don't think it was blown out of proportion. It was instigated and replied too by the public.

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to Everyone 07:33 PM

Thank god for people who actually care about their marginalized neighbors in this town. This committee doesn't seem committed to them at all.

WORDS MATTER

Exactly Jah.

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to Everyone 07:40 PM

CT Library Association president, Douglas Lord - "egregious act of governmental overreach" "attack on first amendment rights of Colchester's residents to access free speech in the library"

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to Everyone 07:51 PM

[diversebooks.org](http://diversebooks.org). [everylibrary.org](http://everylibrary.org). [bannedbooksweek.org](http://bannedbooksweek.org)

Censoring

From susan banning to All Panelists 07:52 PM

We pay our taxes to this town because 50% of us in this house work in the newspaper industry. I find that comment that info sourced from a newspaper would not be trustworthy to be ignorant and insulting.

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to Everyone 07:56 PM

A gag order if a member doesn't agree with you? Thank you, Amy for speaking for others without that voice.

From Rosemary Coyle to Everyone 07:59 PM

As members of Boards and Commissions and as an elected official, we are still individuals and don't give up those rights. That allows us to write letters to the editor, speak on issues, and advocate for our beliefs.

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to Everyone 08:01 PM

Are any members of this committee paid? Who does this group report to in the chain of command?



From Rosemary Coyle to Everyone 08:03 PM

By Charter section C-402 H "The BOS shall oversee the internal operations of all Town Departments and Town Appointed Boards."

From MJ Lawton (she/her/hers) to Everyone 08:04 PM

Thank you, Rosemary.

How does the chair become the chair out of curiosity?

When I don't know a procedure I don't act and then brag on social media and mainstream media.