

COMMITTEE ON SOLIDARITY: REGULAR MEETING

Tuesday January 14, 2025 7:00 PM

Members Present: Glenn “P J” Eason, Liz Hibino, Cynthia Tyler, Hope Jones, Nancy Goodwin

Also Present: Jennifer Billingsley (Library Director)

Members Absent: Kristy Fuller (Alternate), Shelly Nolan (Alternate)

Members of the Public Present: Jacquilyn (Jackie) Davis

1. **Call Meeting to Order:** Liz Hibino called meeting to order at 7:10 pm
2. **Approve Agenda:** Nancy motioned to approve agenda, seconded by Liz and voted unanimously.
3. **Correspondence/Public Comment**—Jenn reported that the Portland Board of Selectmen, recognizing the U.S. plan to, in 2026, commemorate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, has passed a resolution to establish the “America 250” Portland, CT Committee. Connecticut’s “Semiquincentennial Commission,” according to the January 10, 2025 Rivereast, “aims to enhance tourism, economic development and historic preservation while fostering civic and cultural education.” The new Portland Committee is expected to meet monthly and to hold public meetings. Members discussed how some present and future COS activities might well be included in the June 1, 2025 “action plan” that the 7-member, newly appointed, Portland Committee has been charged to produce. In future weeks and months, COS will consider how best to work collaboratively with Portland’s new committee and consider the inclusion of “Voices of Portland,” Pride and Juneteenth activities and SOBA discussions—all activities that reflect the rich and diverse community that is Portland. Liz also reported on a family-friendly Glastonbury program called “The Power of Hope” to honor Dr. Martin Luther King. The program will be on January 18th from 3-5pm.
4. **Approve Meeting Minutes:** December 10, 2024: Nancy motioned to approve and P.J. seconded. Minutes were unanimously approved.
5. **Donations and Budget Updates:** None
6. **Committee Leadership Roles:** Following up on preliminary discussions in our December meeting, members voted on the following COS role changes: Cindy to become committee chair—moved by Nancy/seconded by Liz and unanimously approved. Liz to become recording secretary—moved by Hope/seconded by Nancy and P.J. to become treasurer—moved by Liz and seconded by Nancy. Committee membership—Jackie Davis declared her interest in becoming a member of COS and members, most of whom had already worked with her on Pride events via the Pride Workgroup, welcomed her request and agreed that Liz would forward the nomination to the new First Selectman, Michael Pelton.

7. **Heritage Calendar:** Liz advised that she had updated the calendar previously provided by Hope and would send it to members after this meeting. COS agreed that we will monitor the calendar and work to include dates/events in our “Solidarity Corner” monthly space in the Rivereast. It was also acknowledged favorably that the Dr. Martin Luther King holiday had been noted on the town’s web page. It was agreed that Liz would encourage that a more robust announcement, with a picture of Dr. King, be placed on the page before the January 20 holiday.

While COS will continue with plans to recognize Asian Pacific American Heritage Month in May, 2025, the oral history component will be deferred to 2026 and will, ideally, become an extension of the “Voices of Portland” project co-sponsored with the Portland Historical Society. Members agreed that for 2025 we might honor the month with a library discussion group of the George Takei book: THEY CALLED US ENEMY.

8. **Equity and Inclusion Efforts in Portland Schools and Town Departments:** Liz is continuing her discussions with Sarah Spear about the ‘Equity & Inclusion Coalition’ at the Portland schools. One idea discussed was to host a once or twice yearly meeting to which all Portland departments and civic groups would be welcomed, in order to share efforts and collaborate where possible.

The group also noted the January 10th Rivereast article about the Connecticut River Connections (CRC) 2025-2026 school program in which 25 Portland students will be eligible to participate in a state Board of Education initiative “designed to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation by bringing students from diverse backgrounds together to conduct scientific investigations of the shared watershed, the Connecticut River.” Liz agreed to talk more with school and BOE officials about the program and, after obtaining more info, Nancy will send a letter to the Rivereast offering COS support for the program.

Liz shared that each school principal sends a weekly newsletter to parents and it was suggested to ask Dr. Britton if the principals can include info about the SOBA discussion group and describe that interested parents and/or students 14 and older can contact COS directly for more information about participation.

9. **S.O.B.A (State of Black America) 2024 Report**—The group reviewed and confirmed that we have a mailing list of approximately 12-15 people and will move quickly to get a message out to all of them ASAP. We confirmed with Jenn that a library room is now reserved for Thursday, February 27th at 6:30 pm. They also noted that coffee/refreshments might be offered (and are now allowed in library spaces) to encourage discussion on a cold winter PM. Members agreed to continue encouragement and outreach to potential discussants as soon as the invitation is sent. P.J. is editing the draft e-mail for a prompt mailing.

10. **Pride Workgroup Updates:** None

11. **Juneteenth Update:** Liz and Nancy reported on the most recent work group meeting and Nancy emphasized that planning for Juneteenth was “going well” and that the plan continues for a 12-5pm program on June 14th at the Middleschool—with program activities taking place in the auditorium. The plan includes

food vendors, a 'story walk' and musicians. Susan Bransfield (representing the Portland Historical Society) chaired the work group meeting.

12. **Voices of Portland:** Jenn advised that program planning is continuing and the date for this Black history panel event is Saturday, February 22, 2025 at Portland Middle School on High Street at 1PM. Jenn shared "save the date" postcards that will be mailed out soon (which credits funding from CT Humanities, an "America 250 Affiliate.")

13. **Social Work in Law Enforcement:** Tabled to a future meeting although group members agreed to informally gather information about social work needs throughout Portland.

14. **Solidarity in the Community:** Nancy reported on her recent participation in a statewide Zoom call sponsored by a group called: Social Justice Leadership of Connecticut. The group is currently working on both a mission statement and a vision statement. Nancy will keep us informed so we can determine whether/how COS might be involved with their work. Reports to Board of Selectmen: Liz- Jan., P.J.- Feb. and Hope- March.

15. **Open Discussion/Public Comment:** Liz again welcomed Jackie and invited her to tell the group about herself and her interests. She described that she and her partner had recently moved from Middletown to Portland and that one of her interests is in advocacy for queer youth. She will be doing a program called "True Colors" at UConn on March 20 and 21st where her presentation will be on how to be an adult advocate for LGBTQ+ youth.

16. **Adjourn Meeting:** Liz motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:51 pm, P.J. seconded and it was voted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Cindy Tyler
Liz Hibino