

Committee on Equity and Inclusion

Purpose: The committee shall promote awareness and action in Somerset on concerns relevant to ethnic, racial and cultural differences (broadly defined also to include sexual orientation and gender role, disability status and age). The focus should be on finding ways to foster understanding, and harmonious relationships across these differences both in Somerset and in the broader environment. The committee should provide a platform for community engagement and policy recommendations that are aimed to promote appreciation for these differences, as well as collaborative efforts to achieve equity and inclusion both in Somerset and in our broader community.

Goals

- After appropriate information gathering from our Town, from the experiences of other communities, and through expert advice, the committee should develop recommendations, including policy recommendations that the Town can take to address concerns about how differences are seen, accommodated, or perceived as barriers, in Town life. The committee's recommendations may include exploring means to celebrate and capitalize on our differences in Town events, and in Town committees, as well as through increasing appreciation and accommodation for racial, ethnic, and cultural differences in the Town's own business processes.
- The committee should research and publicize the Town's origin and history starting from when the original homes were built here in the 1890s with particular focus on how that history has contributed to shaping our earlier and current mix of residents, including prevailing or introduced factors that may have contributed to the cultural, socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial background of residents. The history may also include systemic factors whether formal, (established in official documents) or implicit (apparent from results only, no formal statement), as well as other development issues e.g., appropriate political representation) that have impacted Somerset life, and life in the broader community. The committee should consider ways to convey that history, possibly including units that would be appropriate for family discussion in Somerset. The committee should support and encourage informal community efforts to encourage appreciation and understanding of diversity in Somerset.
- The committee should consider and recommend if appropriate, whether the Town should advocate for more inclusive policies in the County and State on policing, on zoning, on housing, on public health, or on other local government issues as part of its role. Such advocacy may include working with other municipalities to achieve common goals.

Membership: The committee shall consist of a chair and up to eight additional members. The group will include a non-voting Council liaison member and alternate. The chair and members will be nominated by the mayor and approved by the Town Council.

Term: The committee is established for 24 months and may, after that time, be converted into a standing committee of the Town.

Actions:

- The committee should meet at least six times in each twelve-month period. The committee should convene at least one Town meeting in each of the two years and up to four Town meetings altogether across the twenty-four-month term of the committee. The Town meetings should inform residents in the Town about policies (e.g., zoning ordinances, building codes) and practices (e.g., resource allocation, police training and deployment) as well as their impacts on diversity-related issues relevant to Somerset as revealed through the Committee's examination and provide an opportunity for residents in the Town to have input and suggest direction and focus to the committee, together with other constructive feedback. Meetings may be virtual or in person.
- The committee should develop recommendations to present to the Town Council for actions that the Town may take. Recommendations may be presented separately at different Council meetings or all together at one meeting. Recommendations should be presented at least annually within the committee's twenty-four-month term.
- At the end of the twenty-four-month term the committee should recommend to the Council whether its term should be extended or whether the group should be established as a standing committee of the Town, or, should be terminated with its function complete.

Meetings:

Committee meetings shall be conducted in compliance with the Maryland Open Meetings Act. With the assistance of the Town Manager, public notice and an agenda shall be issued prior to the holding of a meeting subject to the Act. Minutes of the meeting shall be promptly prepared, as required by the Act. Once approved by the committee, the meeting minutes shall be given to the Town Manager.

As required by the Act, at least one member of the committee shall complete the online training offered by the Open Meetings Compliance Board. The trainee shall inform the Town Manager once the training has been completed. All members are encouraged to complete the training. The training is available here:

https://www.igsr.umd.edu/VLC/OMA/class_oma_title.php.

Records

Records of the committee shall be retained in accordance with the Maryland Public Information Act. Committee members shall review the Town's Document Retention Schedule and make certain records are retained in accordance therewith.