

In the Amherst Town Council, December 2020,

Upon the recommendation of: Councilors Bahl-Milne, Brewer, and De Angelis

A RESOLUTION AFFIRMING THE TOWN OF AMHERST'S COMMITMENT TO END STRUCTURAL RACISM AND ACHIEVE RACIAL EQUITY FOR BLACK RESIDENTS

WHEREAS, the Town of Amherst embraces its racial diversity and seeks to continue to implement policies and procedures that address racial equity and social justice consistent with the Town Council Resolution in the Aftermath of the Murder of Mr. George Floyd adopted on June 1, 2020; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Amherst recognizes that there is an escalation of hatred, bigotry, and overt racism in our country; and

WHEREAS, while this Resolution addresses anti-Black racism in particular, the Town of Amherst acknowledges that much more work is needed to address the impact of racism on other groups; and

WHEREAS, for the Town of Amherst to fully embrace the changes necessary to move our community forward, it is necessary to acknowledge and apologize for its own history of discrimination and racial injustice; and

WHEREAS, since its inception the Town of Amherst has enacted, supported, and permitted official and unofficial policies and practices that have perpetuated the fallacy of white supremacy that have caused serious harm to members of the Black community and have fostered a persistent racial equity gap in the Town; and

WHEREAS, Massachusetts was the first colony to legalize slavery in 1641; and

WHEREAS, there is clear evidence that several prominent Amherst families and spiritual leaders, some of whom are memorialized in the names of streets and buildings, owned African slaves or supported the slave trade; and

WHEREAS, despite the long history of civic, cultural, and economic engagement and participation of Black residents in the Town of Amherst, there are almost no Town of Amherst streets, parks, or buildings named after Black residents; and

WHEREAS, on New Years Day of 1762 the Town Selectmen ordered the first free Blacks of record to leave town, "considering them likely paupers if they were allowed to stay in Amherst as residents", and a statewide law passed in 1788 required all non-resident Blacks and Indians to leave the state of Massachusetts and forbade non-resident free Blacks from entering the state; and

WHEREAS, as late as 1948, the first African American faculty member hired at University of Massachusetts at Amherst was unable to find housing for himself and his wife in Amherst because of their race; and

WHEREAS, as late as 1950 racial covenants existed in Amherst that prohibited property -- for example land on Blue Hills Road -- from being "sold or rented to any person or persons of color"; and

WHEREAS, in a 1964 University of Massachusetts at Amherst freshman class of nearly 2,500, only twelve students were of color, and of those twelve, eight would go on to graduate, and two years later, the entire Black student population at University of Massachusetts at Amherst was around fifty people, or about 0.37% of the student body; and

WHEREAS, in a 1994 public meeting held in Amherst, the NAACP decried Amherst schools as “lacking in teachers who reflect the students’ racial and ethnic makeup and in sensitivity to those students’ concerns”; and

WHEREAS, in 2001 a crowd of over 250 people, including Town officials, the Chief of Police, local business owners, and members of the school and religious communities, showed up on the Amherst Town Common for a “Rally for Unity” following the vandalization of a Black-owned store, only five years after a similarly egregious event occurred at the same store; and

WHEREAS, in 2015 more than 100 people gathered on the Town common in support of a Black Amherst Regional High School teacher, recognized by the District as “a dedicated and professional Teacher of Mathematics who provided exemplary instruction to our students,” after, according to the District, she was “subjected to harassing and hurtful events and notes” during the course of her employment; and

WHEREAS, in 2018 University of Massachusetts at Amherst denounced “acts of hate and intimidation” and launched an investigation after fliers and stickers from a white-nationalist hate group were found posted on campus the same day that author and historian Ibram X. Kendi, a leading scholar of race and discriminatory policy, visited campus and delivered a lecture at the UMass Fine Arts Center on how to be an antiracist; and

WHEREAS, in 2019 in Amherst the median family income for white families was 2.4 times greater than the median family income for Black families, 51% of the Black population in Amherst was reported as being below the poverty line, compared with 30% for the white population, and white residents in Amherst were four times more likely to own a home than Black residents; and

WHEREAS, the percentage of Black high school seniors that dropped out of school was nearly three times that of white seniors, and while 40% of high school seniors went on to attend a private, four-year college or university, none of them were Black; and

WHEREAS, in 2020 following the national outcry in response to the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, dozens of Amherst residents spoke at a Town Council meeting and shared deeply painful personal stories about racial discrimination in policing, and strongly urged the Town to hear their concerns and bring about change; and

WHEREAS, the Amherst Town Council acknowledges the trauma inflicted on Blacks by persistent white supremacist ideology results in psychological harm affecting educational, economic, health, and social outcomes and conjures painful memories of our Town’s past not only for those who lived through these experiences, but also for the generations that have followed; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Amherst acknowledges this is a partial list which represents only a small sampling of Amherst’s history of anti-Black racism.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that, in accordance with the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence, which asserts that all people “are created equal and are endowed with the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” the Amherst Town Council acknowledges the Town’s history of racially motivated policies and practices and apologizes for the damage this history has caused the Town, particularly its Black residents.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Amherst Town Council hereby rejects prejudice and bigotry, including the idea that white people are inherently better or more worthy than any other group of people and declares that it stands against white supremacy.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Amherst Town Council hereby condemns the actions, speech, and attitudes of those who promote hate or any effort to interfere with the unalienable rights of any human being and hereby declares that it reaffirms its commitment, in collaboration with all residents, to pursue policies and take action to ensure civil and human rights to all individuals.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Amherst Town Council hereby affirms its commitment to eradicating the effects of systemically racist practices of Town government and Town-affiliated organizations, and will review and revise its policies, procedures, bylaws, values, goals, and missions through an anti-racism lens to foster an unbiased and inclusive environment that is free of discrimination, harassment, and negative stereotyping toward any person or group.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Amherst Town Council will engage in individual and collective work to understand bias and the historical role racism has played in Amherst and the community at large in order to better lead a Town which is a safe, welcoming, and equitable place for all people.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Amherst Town Council is committed to engaging in a path of remedy for Black Amherst residents who have been injured or harmed by discrimination and racial injustice.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Amherst Town Council acknowledges this Resolution as a first step in the reparative process and understands there is substantial work to be done, which will take considerable time and commitment, to meet its goal of being an anti-racist Town.

Voted this ___ day of _____, 2020

On Behalf of the Town Council

J. Lynn Griesemer

Town Council President