

Brighton to address diversity and inclusion

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Structural racism is everywhere, even in an open and progressive town such as Brighton, said Brighton Town Supervisor William Moehle.

Moehle discussed racism and the recent race-related controversy that surfaced from a student in the Brighton Central School District at a press conference at 11 a.m. Friday at the Brighton Town Hall. Standing behind the podium Moehle discussed issues of diversity and inclusion and a desire for an advisory committee.

He listed events such as when “hate flyers” were distributed in neighborhoods and when bomb threats were called into the JCC, he stood against and rejected their hate, said Moehle.

Keniyah Vickers, a 14-year old who is enrolled at summer school at Brighton High School to improve her grades, said she was treated unfairly and Brighton has a lack of equality and equity.

She posted a 16-minute video to You-Tube about her grievances on July 12. She started the video with, “Yes I’m about to do a whole video on racism,” and continues that her school district is “entirely racist; if you’re not white, you’re in trouble.”

During a break at summer school, Vickers and a group of African-American friends were watching a video of comedian Kevin Hart, who used the Nword in his skit, when a white student reported it to school administration. Vickers, who is entering 10th grade, was admonished.

The video prompted residents to address concerns at the Town Board meeting Wednesday.

“I listened to the voice of a Brighton High School student, her authentic voice, and I heard members of the community raise concerns about racism in our schools and in our community,” Moehle said Friday.

These issues are why Brighton’s inclusion, diversity, and equity advisory board needs to start as soon as possible, he said.

Speaking in generality, Moehle said racism is a reality. Like all towns we’re not perfect he said. Though the town holds diversity, education, and sustainability as town priorities. “This is a great community but we must also acknowledge that we have work to do to advance our shared goal of inclusion,” he said.

At the next Town Board meeting, the supervisor will ask the board to approve 17 candidates to a diversity advisory committee. Before the latest controversy, the town was working on establishing the board. The application was opened earlier this year.

The town board considered appointing nine to the advisory committee but officials said 17, the total number of applicants, would be better.

Council member Robin Wilt said, “everybody who expressed an interest should be welcome.” The goals of the committee will encourage “that sense of radical inclusivity that we would like to see implemented throughout our town,” she said. “It is more important than ever that we begin this work and it is important to have all the voices.”

Members would work to represent, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latinos, faith groups, LGBTQ and disability advocates.

The committee will advise the town. Goals of the board would be to develop best practices and create a diversity plan, engaging many stakeholders.

“We must be vigilant. We must be intentional in our work toward diversity and inclusion, against those who would tear us apart,” Moehle said.

“We have a society that suffers from institutional racism, institutional bias and so to say that you can be in this society and somehow be isolated from that is a falsehood,” Wilt said.

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Moehle