

TOWN OF MARLBORO
OFFICE OF THE SELECT BOARD
PO Box 518, Marlboro, VT 05344
marlboroselectboard@gmail.com

August 21, 2020

Vermont Council on Rural Development
Paul Costello, Executive Director
43 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

Dear Mr. Costello:

The Select Board believes that sustained, open, and honest dialogue is vital to the overall wellbeing of the Marlboro community. Given VCRD's advanced training in community-based facilitation, we are writing to request your services to plan and host a mediated forum to help navigate this historic juncture in our town's history.

After nearly 75 years, the closure of Marlboro College, and the sale of its campus to Degrees of Freedom (DOF) has been discussed at great length at recent Select Board meetings. On June 25, DOF Founder Seth Andrew shared his vision for the low-residency pilot program tailored to low-income, first-generation college students.

On July 1, the Select Board received a letter from Black N Brown at DP (BNBDP), "a collective of African American, Afro-Latinx, and Latinx Democracy Prep Alumni", detailing alleged racist and abusive practices at the charter school network founded by Mr. Andrew. On July 9, representatives of BNBDP participated in public comment to expand on its contents. Marlboro residents also expressed concerns about the letter and urged the Select Board to take action. In response, we asked the Marlboro College Board of Trustees and Vermont Attorney General to conduct a thorough investigation of the allegations made by the collective, and issue a public statement about its findings. We also approved a motion to coordinate a professionally-mediated community forum to address the collective grief related to the closure of Marlboro College, and the allegations directed at Mr. Andrew and Democracy Prep.

On July 20, the DOF design team requested a special meeting with the Select Board to discuss the allegations and its pilot program. The meeting attracted 305 attendees and spanned three-and-a-half hours, and included a great deal of public participation. Questions submitted by attendees were shared with the DOF design team, which indicated it will respond through its own channels at a later date. The minutes and audio/video recordings of all aforementioned meetings can be accessed at www.marlbortvt.us.

To help all respective parties move forward constructively, there has been some discussion about the creation of a Town-gown committee. Kevin Ellis, a public relations consultant representing Mr. Andrew is "compiling a list of key people with who [sic] we should all meet to discuss ways to make this work," and suggested "a Town-gown committee would be a good place to start." In response to BNBDP's letter, the Marlboro College Board of Trustees also issued a statement proposing the formation of a similar working group:

"We have arranged for a meeting between representatives of Democracy Builders' team and residents of Marlboro, as well as present and past College personnel and alumni, to start an ongoing working relationship. We believe this will provide opportunity for fruitful dialogue about engaging in antiracist work as a community, use of the campus by its neighbors, and what is needed to produce a successful program on Potash Hill that will serve future first generation college students."

There seems to be a general consensus that the formation of a Town-gown committee or ad-hoc working group would be beneficial, and the planning of a facilitated dialogue seems like a logical next step. Ultimately, its scope and structure should be determined by the committee, which may be comprised of, but not limited to, representatives of the Town of Marlboro, Degrees of Freedom, Marlboro College, Black N Brown at DP, and other affiliated parties.

We understand your time and resources are limited, but would greatly appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Jesse Kreitzer, Chair

Julia von Ranson, Vice-Chair

Aaron Betts, Member