

TOWN OF AMHERST, NEW YORK
Amherst Community Diversity Commission

Town Supervisor

Mr. Brian Kulpa

Town Board Liaison

Dr. Debbie Bucki

Administrative Assistant

Dawn Cerra

2022 Annual Report

Mission Statement

The purpose of this coalition is to enhance and increase cooperation, understanding and dialogue among residents of diverse cultural, religious, socioeconomic, and racial backgrounds, and to promote inclusion throughout the town. Some of the responsibilities of the coalition will be to study the demographics of Amherst: promote town-wide events that foster cultural minority participation on governmental board and committees and in the town workplace; and to facilitate meetings designed to promote a better understanding of who Amherst community is.

Commission Membership

Mohan S. Devgun Chair (since April 2022)
Pam Bos Kefi – Vice Chair (since April 2022)
Melissa Abel
Anne Rohrer
Cynthia Bass
Gul Rahman
Heidi Nicklaus Lefebvre
Joseph Sankoh
Mohammed Khan
Maria-Rosario Cala
Prachee Samant
Thomas Lucia
Zhen Liu
Khalid Qazi– Chair Emeritus

Dr. Debbie Bucki – Town of Amherst Liaison
Dawn Cerra – Administrative Assistant

Task Accomplished

1. (a) Diversity Commission members attended a vigil held on May 17th, 2022, for the May 14th, 2022, event of mass shooting in Buffalo, New York at the Tops Friendly market in Eastside neighborhood. The ceremony covered speeches by various dignitaries, choir by multiracial attendees, and media coverage.

2. In December 2022 Commission members created an international holiday window display at Clearfield Library. Artifacts, decorations, and printed stories about holidays were on display for about a month.

This culminated in a New Year themed children's program on Thursday, December 29th, 2022, at the same library, where families participated in free activities, crafts and sampled international foods provided by the ACDC. An estimate of 75 people attended this event.

3. The Commission is collaborating with three school districts located within the Town of Amherst: Williamsville Central School District, Sweet Home School District and Amherst School District. Each school district was sent a copy of the 2022 Diversity calendar and was invited to attend Juneteenth event. Members also participated in "Taste of Williamsville North Diversity event", attended "Williamsville East Diversity program" and "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion meeting at both Williamsville and Sweet Home school District. Williamsville Central School District now has a committee of Cultural Diversity and Religion with 56 members. The issue of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Williamsville Central School District was discussed along with Critical Race Theory. Please see the following link for more information:
https://www.williamsvillek12.org/resources/cultural_diversity/index.php
4. The commission set up a collaborative Google sheet for members to edit local events and organization information.
5. Prepared the 2023 Diversity Calendar, covering cultural, religious, and special holidays and festivals celebrated by different ethnic groups, in addition to Federal and State holidays.
6. Promoted the Commission identity with the Town of Amherst and contacted the Amherst Bee with dates of events and various community activities. With a budget from the Amherst Town Board, the Commission has prepared publicity material such as table cover, name tags and banner to be used at all-commission representations.
7. On September 26th, 2022, several Commission members, together with Dr. Bucki, met with Town of Amherst Supervisor Kulpa to see how the commission can integrate its work with different projects currently under way in the supervisor's office. Two commission members have volunteered to join the Amherst Central Park Task force.
8. Collaboration with National Federation of Just Communities of WNY: Rene Petties-Jones (president) attended Commission meeting on November 14, 2022, and gave a brief presentation of her work with different ethnic groups within the Western New York. Although we would have liked to hear her views on "RENAMING OF AUDUBON PARKWAYS" in detail but "Renaming of Audubon Parkways was briefly mentioned during this meeting. This was followed by an online article about this topic.

The Commission is also in contact with a trustee from the Village of Williamsville for possible collaborative work between two entities.

9. To recognize enormous gratitude and the contributions of General Casimir Pulaski to the cause of American freedom and independence, the Commission prepared and delivered a Proclamation that the Town of Amherst Board declares Tuesday October 11, 2022, to be Pulaski Day in the Town of Amherst.
10. On June 17th, 2022, the Commission had the opportunity to celebrate one of America's significant historical event – Juneteenth, at the Amherst Senior Center. Two students from the Daemen University researched the topic “American and Black History” i.e., the day blacks were freed from slavery and made presentation to the community. Introduction to this event was provided by Mr. Derek Baker, Assistant Principal from Sweet Home Middle School. Cynthia Bass, Director of the office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for the Erie County Medical Center was the keynote speaker and provided a thought provoking and inspiring message. We are pleased to say that Cynthia Bass has decided to join our commission since then.

The welcoming venue for this occasion was offered by the Amherst Senior Center and provided lunch for about 150 attendees. Amherst Youth Engaged in Volunteer Service assisted in serving lunch. This celebration was attended by several Amherst Town Board members, diverse community members and members from the three school districts. Town Board liaison Dr. Debbie Bucki presented a proclamation to honor Juneteenth and all participating groups.

The Commission is extremely grateful to the administration of the Amherst Senior Center for providing such a welcoming atmosphere for our events.

Finally, the Commission members would like to thank Mr. Brian Kulpa, Amherst Town Supervisor, Town Board Members, in particular Dr. Debbie Bucki (Town Board liaison), and the Town of Amherst's IT, legal and administrative departments for their continued and sustained support to accomplish MISSION of the Amherst Diversity Commission. Special thanks to: Director of Information Technology David Willer and his dedicated staff for their help by posting pertinent Diversity Commission materials on the Town website, Stanley Sliwa (Town Attorney) and Ann Demopoulos (Deputy Town Attorney) who provided legal assistant during the year, and Joseph McMahon (Chief of Staff), and Jessica O'Neil (Communication Coordinator) for additional assistance in meeting the MISSION of this Commission. My deep appreciation goes to Dawn Cerra for her help with all email messages and setting up ALL ZOOM meetings for our Commission. As a Chair, I want to express my sincere appreciation to the COMMISSION MEMBERS who have worked so hard (in volunteer capacity) to perform these tasks and to achieve the MISSION of our COMMISSION.

Respectfully submitted.

Dr. Mohan Devgun
Chair
Town of Amherst Community Diversity Commission
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