

## Decision To 'Study' Inclusivity Statement Speaks Volumes

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I moved to Vermont in 2006 and have lived in Charlotte since 2015. In that time, I have seen the town reject proposals for bike paths for kids around the fields at the town beach, reject discussion of sidewalks and crossings in the town center and dismiss calls for greater safety along roads and around the elementary school.

I've seen the town effectively force out the Charlotte Health Center, which had been a longstanding resource and neighbor to this community, and dismiss, out of hand, proposals for potential community centers. Now, the selectboard has declined to affirm a statement of inclusivity because of concerns over "terrible precedent setting," worries about new mandates and concerns over property taxes.

What happens in town hall is an expression of this town's values. By declining to affirm the statement of inclusivity, the town has communicated that it is not quite sure if it wants to include people of color. The Clemmons Family Farm is one of the most — maybe the most vibrant — multi-cultural arts centers in the state and has been a pillar of this community for about 70 years, but Charlotte is not sure it wants to include it yet.

If you are gay or trans, if you're of a non-dominant religion, we're not quite sure about you yet. We must have a working group look into it. What does this say to the kids in this community who are Black, Asian, Hispanic, queer? How do you think this affects families of color who live here to be told that, on the question of whether they belong here, the town'll get back to them in about six months.

To those who are worried about what will be mandated by this statement, please read the statement. The text says that as a community we are committed to giving attention to fairness and equity in hiring practices, town policies, police practices and when applying legislation.

If, as a selectboard member, you are not willing to affirm (or disapprove) this without a blessing from a town vote, I maintain that you are not doing your job. You were sent this proposal prior to the Aug. 12 meeting, you had time to review it and potentially discuss it, and you had time to decide on your position. The selectboard votes on things all the time that do things and express town values. To decline to take this up meaningfully is poor leadership.

To those worried about property taxes, I ask you to show me the data. No one in opposition to this statement provided any findings of any study showing that adopting a statement of inclusivity results in out-of-control taxes. This is absurd. Also, I would ask everyone here to actually think about what this point of opposition implies: We as a town are willing to include people of color in our community as long as it doesn't cost too much. To this point I would ask, how much would you pay for our town to not be racist?

To those who say that a statement of inclusivity sets a terrible precedent ... well, I'll just let that sit there. How is an expression that as a town we include everyone and that everyone is welcome

terrible? The suggestion that being open to all is a terrible thing is truly, I hope, in opposition to all that this community stands for.

Finally, regarding the idea of setting up a working group to study this statement and then putting this on a ballot six months from now, I would ask what it is that this group is looking for? What is the scenario in which the town decides against including people of color in the community? The selectboard makes all kinds of decisions expressing this town's values. By declining to wholeheartedly affirm that this town wants to be welcoming to everyone and that it values everyone already expressed volumes.

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