

**MEETING MINUTES FROM A REGULAR MEETING OF THE
MULTICULTURAL INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
HELD AT 7:00 P.M. ON SEPTEMBER 24, 2025
VIA ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE**

A. CALL TO ORDER *meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm by Michele Gruet*

B. STATEMENT REGARDING PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT - read by Michele Gruet

The notice requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act have been satisfied with respect to this meeting of the Multicultural Inclusion & Accessibility Advisory Committee which is being held via Zoom videoconferencing. This information, along with the public internet link and telephone call-in information was posted in the Municipal Building, and sent the official newspapers of the Township, the Verona-Cedar Grove Times and the Star Ledger and MyVeronaNJ.com, TAPinto and the Patch, the official online news source(s) of the Township, at least 48 hours preceding the start time of this meeting. A public comment period will be held in the order it is listed on the meeting agenda and instructions on how to comment will be provided at the appropriate time.

C. ROLL CALL

Present:

Michele Gruet
John Vajda
Rita Chevalier
P.J. Pimpinelli
Tovah Kopan
Christine McGrath - Council Representative
Diane DiGiuseppe - Superintendent of School

Absent:

Roxanna Tirado, Chairwoman
Kathleen Francis
Michelle O'Neill
Naura Reynoso
Michael McMahon – Verona Recreation
Claudine Pascale – Verona Public Library

D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The approval of the minutes from the August Meeting was postponed until the next meeting, as committee members could not recall receiving the August minutes to review.

E. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

F. STANDING MEETING ITEMS

1. Updates from Library Director
 - a. No update provided at this time.
2. Updates from School Superintendent

- a. Schools are getting ready to hold Hispanic Heritage Month across the district in October.
 - b. Schools will not be playing as big of a role in the AAPI and Lunar New Year programming this year, as it was demanding for the staff involved and “too much.”
 - i. C. McGrath followed up by thanking D. DiGiuseppe for setting boundaries.
 - c. Schools are working on restoring an initiative to advance restorative practices for the student code of conduct (e.g. conflict resolution and communication building among staff).
 - d. C. McGrath asked if there have been any changes to LGBTQ+ policies.
 - i. D. DiGiuseppe stated there have not been any changes.
 - e. M. Gruet inquired about GSA clubs at school and having MIAAC partner with clubs for more events.
 - i. D. DiGiuseppe stated that clubs are still running. GSA is the gender sexuality alliance in the high school. The middle school has the SAFE club.
3. Updates from Recreation Department – *read by Michele Gruet*
- a. The director of community services role has been filled by Pamela Priscoe as of this Monday.
 - b. The Verona Community Center Parking Lots are scheduled to be milled and repaved on 9/25/2025 and 9/26/2025 (weather permitting).
4. Updates from the Township of Verona
- a. The township received two strategic grants:
 - i. Create an age friendly community
 - ii. Inclusive healthy communities
 - a. Kickoff will be soon. R. Tirado will be invited to the meeting on 10/17/2025 to represent MIAAC. D. DiGiuseppe, C.H.I.L.D., and Recreation Advisory Committee will also be invited.
 - b. The grant is focused on making sure our community is fit for those living with a disability in the amount of \$250,000.
 - b. The Everett Field renovation is underway.
 - i. This will include an inclusive playground along with ADA accessibility (including ADA bathrooms and a walkway around the field).
 - c. The Italian American flag raising is scheduled for 10/15/2025 at 6pm and is run by UNICO.
 - d. Breast cancer awareness is on 10/6/2026 at 6:30pm.
 - e. C. McGrath provided clarity that flag raisings are approved by the town council but do not go through MIAAC. There are specific ordinances that are followed. If a flag needs to be raised that is not on the approved list, it must be approved by the town council. Flags are raised on a designated flagpole.

G. NEW BUSINESS

- 1. Q3 Events
 - a. Hispanic Heritage Month

- i. R. Chevalier shared that the event is on 10/4/2025 at 3:00pm. MIAAC will be supporting the library. There will be music, dance, kids crafts, refreshments (including empanadas (donated by The Empanada Lady) and cookies). This is a family friendly event. There will be a performance in the library. Volunteers are needed. M. Gruet offered to volunteer.
 - a. C. McGrath reminded MIAAC that the town council still needs to be invited.
 - b. Fall-O-Ween
 - i. M. Gruet shared that the event is on 10/25/2025. The first 30 minutes will be sensory-friendly, but nobody will be excluded. MIAAC will have a table which will include teal pumpkins and non-food treats to support those who may have food allergies. Costumes are encouraged.
 - 2. Q4 Events
 - a. Diwali
 - i. J. Vajda shared that the event is on 10/19/2025 at 6:00pm. There are budget negotiations occurring, as the entertainer is requesting \$500. Inventory on supplies left from prior years needs to be taken.
 - b. Hannukah
 - i. T. Kopan shared that MIAAC brought the donuts/coffee, organized the band, and Rabbi for the 2024 event. Planning is beginning and she plans to reach out to the Rabbi later this week, after Rosh Hashanah to help with finding a date. Location has not yet been determined. C. McGrath questioned menorah placement this year, as there will be trailers near where it has been placed in prior years. T. Kopan will reach out to Kevin O'Sullivan to ask about placement for 2025. C. McGrath suggested if event has an indoor component, the upper level balcony should be utilized for space.
 - ii. R. Chevalier added that last year there were also some crafts (dreidels that were painted) and other activities. Inventory will need to be looked at, but T. Kopan thinks there are some supplies left from last year.
 - c. Fair in the Square
 - i. M. Gruet shared that the event is scheduled for 12/6/2025. MIAACs involvement will be to volunteer on the day of to help with photo sessions with Santa. C.H.I.L.D. and the town organize the event.
 - 3. Verona Streetscape Improvement Committee feedback opportunity
 - a. M. Gruet read update from R. Tirado who attended a meeting on this to represent MIAAC. The project will be done in phases and is covered by a grant. Phase 1 will cover a small section of Bloomfield Avenue and will include rest areas for older residents and ADA accessibility.
 - b. Info can be found at <https://www.veronanj.org/bloomfieldaveimprovements>
 - c. C. McGrath shared that public engagement will be requested as the project continues.
 - 4. M. Gruet inquired about high school representatives for MIAAC.

- a. D. DiGiuseppe requested that the description be e-mailed to her again so that it is at the top of her inbox.
5. C. McGrath requested that MIAAC catches up on all minutes at the next meeting.
6. M. Gruet suggested having the next meeting date listed on future agendas. P. Pimpinelli agreed and suggested having the next few meeting dates on the agenda.

H. **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion to adjourn by J. Vajda. Seconded by P. Pimpinelli. Meeting adjourned at 7:57pm.