

Minutes for April 29, 2022 Zoom meeting of the Youth Advisory Council

In attendance remotely via Zoom were Chairwoman Lisa Raftery, Dr. Malcolm Astley, Wayland Youth Officer Shane Bowles, Wayland Det. Tyler Castagno, Ms. Allison Kates, Rabbi Louis Polisson and Mr. Jason Verhoosky. The minutes were taken by Mr. Peter Bochner.

Commented [PB1]:

Absent were Ms. Pamela Cerne, Ms. Dossie Kahn and Ms. Brenda Ross.

Chairperson Lisa Raftery made a motion to start the meeting. The motion was seconded by Det. Tyler Castagno. Ayes were said by Dr. Malcolm Astley, Ms. Alison Kates, Rabbi Pollison and Chairwoman Raftery. The meeting was started at 9:36 a.m. An attendance roll-call was taken. Youth Officer Shane Bowles, Det. Castagno, Dr. Astley, Mr. Jason Verhoosky, Ms. Kates and Rabbi Polisson all said, "Here."

Chairwoman Raftery proposed that the attendees take a moment to review the minutes from the March meeting. No edits or changes were proposed. Ms. Raftery made a motion to approve the minutes. Dr. Astley seconded the motion, and Det. Castagno, Ms. Kates, Rabbi Polisson and Lisa Raftery all voted to accept the minutes.

It was decided to "flip" the customary order of the agenda in order to allow more time for community updates, and comments from other YAC members. Chairperson Raftery asked Rabbi Polisson if he had anything to share. He said that we were at the end of a rare confluence of post-Passover, Easter and Ramadan (which ended that same day.) He said that earlier in the week, Ms. Dovie King became chair of the community's Human Rights Committee. He said there was a town meeting via Zoom to discuss diversity and equity, and that he was in a breakout session about cultural diversity and inclusion. He said that last year, the Board of Selectmen had denied a request to display a menorah on town property during the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. He said that he and other religious leaders were now working with the town to develop a more coherent policy that would take into account that the line between religion and culture is blurry and really doesn't exist, and that what may look religious on outside may really be an expression of heritage.

Dr. Astley said it is important to track that topic and its legal ambiguity. He pointed out that not long ago, there could not be town-sponsored Christmas lights. He said he did not understand the town's curveball about the menorah.

Rabbi Polisson said, "Thank you. We have time before this issue comes up again. The Board of Selectmen is aware of the hurt feelings."

Dr. Astley asked what their rationale was?

Rabbi Polisson said, "They said it was religious. Santa's Ride was thought to be sponsored by town, but it wasn't. However, I don't know what the actual rationale was."

Next, Mr. Verhoosky provided a clinical update. He said, “We continue to have a full caseload, although we starting to see a slight decline in requests for new services. Still, this leaves us above the pre-COVID norm. Dossie [Kahn] and Kelsey [Sanclemente] are able to maintain the caseload. They refer out when necessary. Dossie has a reduced-hours work schedule due to medical conditions. She can’t be seated in front of a computer for a long period of time. She is declining meetings. She is hoping to be back sometime this summer and back full-time next fall.”

Chairperson Raftery said, “I know I speak on behalf of the community in wishing her a speedy recovery.”

Dr. Astley said, “Checking on service levels, there are rumors that our data on needs is outpacing our ability to serve. Is there any data on that picture? Even if Dossie and Kelsey are able to handle the early referral process, are these people being referred to anyone who can pick them up?”

Mr. Verhoosky said, “If we refer out, we ensure that we refer to service providers who have capacity. Clinicians who do have openings are a rarity. This is a healthy amount of service providers in the area we live in, so we don’t just pass them on to someone without knowing they have capacity. We are trying not to take on new patients. . . I am typically one of the front line people they talk to. But we are not the first call. People are reporting that it takes dozens of calls.”

Ms. Kates said, “There are more calls from parents regarding their kids than from individuals calling on behalf of themselves. The majority of the calls are parents or guardians seeking services for their kids.

Dr. Astley said, “Can we be sure that all needs are being met? If we’re meeting the needs, that would be wonderful. . .and a surprise.”

Mr. Verhoosky said, “I can’t say that all needs being met. Some people are giving up on finding services. What we provide at the moment is effective. Wayland’s needs are being met to the best of their capability. The level of needs that a school sees day to day is much higher than it has been historically. More services are always welcome.”

Dr. Astley said, “It’s hard to get a clear picture. If we don’t know what our target is, it’s hard to hit it.”

Mr. Verhoosky said, “We could use one, two or three more full-time clinicians, in addition to Kelsey. We are tying up our Department of Public Health Funding, and it should be wrapped up by Monday. We will then subscribe to the INTERFACE service, which offers a database of clinicians and mental health providers. You can log in, and they will link you with service providers. We will be handing referrals over to clinicians that have space and capacity to work with these individuals, as well as insurance.

“The funding is just waiting for an administrative signature; it’s been approved by the Board of Selectmen. We are hoping to receive and have access to the money. Everything is in a holding pattern for INTERFACE.

Ms. Kates said that the Wayland high school guidance department is requesting a line item in budget, trying to get counseling support. [Superintendent of Wayland public schools] Dr. Easy is in agreement that the high school needs more straight-up counseling services.

Chairperson Raftery said, “And we should get information on the webpages about Wayland Family Services.

Mr. Verhoosky said, “As soon as we have access to INTERFACE we will shout it out everywhere.”

Chairperson Raftery said, “Moving on to Mental Health Awareness month.”

Mr. Verhoosky said, “May is Mental Health Awareness month. We will be doing social media shoutouts, also issuing a suicide prevention letter, as well as other resources about suicide prevention. We do have an offer from a neighboring community regarding QPR, which stands for question, prevent and refer. If anyone you know is at risk, you can intervene by persuasively stepping in to refer that person to prevent harm to themselves or anyone else. Then they can offer training to all of you and entire community.

Dr. Astley asked, “What’s our current data on suicide and suicide attempts?”

Mr. Verhoosky said he would have to pull that data, that a lot of the attempts are not documented or not public. He said he could have the data at the next YAC next meeting.

Dr. Astley said, “I’d like to see the data in an at-risk survey. I’d be interested in the trends.”

Mr. Verhoosky said, “We do have key indicator data, but I have a lot of concerns about the data.”

Chairperson Raftery asked for an update on violence prevention.

Dr. Astley said, “I don’t think it’d be me. I just hope we’ve moving on it. But it’s just status quo, the needs and targets are there, we are still trying to assemble the teamwork, finding out who’s in charge, and reducing or increasing overlap. Where are we? We continue to ask that.”

Mr. Verhoosky said, “Here’s an update on where we are. The policy task force is back in place and working. They restarted work with REACH and Jess Tepperow, trying to create a flowchart that clearly explains to individuals who are potentially victims of violence, what will happen in the scenarios of if you choose to report or to not report; what resources are available if you are in the process; and what Title 9 means to students, reporting on behalf of themselves.

“This has been developed from a youth perspective; it was done by a youth who is not named. That is in the review process. We are aiming for more succinct language, so that people are not overwhelmed. Once it is edited and goes through a legal review, it will be the student handbook. We are trying to move all this out of buried menus and make them more accessible. One thing I have learned is that for students and parents who have access to Google Classroom, all these resources are available with one or two clicks, they can see all reporting forms, with everything on the same page.

“This will include information about Wayland Family & Youth Services, counseling services at schools, MVP, RAD, with full units devoted to relational violence prevention, the referral process, and support of the Campbell app.”

Chairperson Raftery said, “I just want to thank you, Jason. We asked you to get a lot moving. It’s a superbusy time for high school counselors, administrators and you, in terms of what’s being created and finalized. I feel so fortunate to be on this, pulling together in a very busy month.”

Mr. Verhoosky said, “We have a tremendous team of people working on it.”

Dr. Astley said, “I just hope there’s energy and priority continuing. We’ve yet to resolve the linkage between our work, which is delivered through Jason alone, such as what’s our role in creating the design or affirming the existing design, what’s already in place and what do we need to add in terms of referral criteria for students at risk. I’d love to say it’s there, and it’s working, and it’s all right, but we don’t have enough data to say that. I know Jessica [Tepperow] is off to other career plans. There will be a vacuum there. Have the website issues been cleared up? Is it simple to get to help on the WHS website?

Mr. Verhoosky said, “The website’s navigability has been brought up. The goal is to ship out of the current menu, with a button on the home page. But most students are not going there through the WMS or WHS website, but through Google Classroom. All the information lives in its own little folder of resources. It won’t be more than one click away. So especially in time of crisis or need, you’re not going to have to dig that far to get it.”

Chairperson Raftery asked Youth Officer Bowles and Det. Castagno if they had anything to add?”

Youth Officer Bowles said, “The end of the senior year is a very busy time for me.”

Chairperson Raftery said, “Thank you both for all you do.”

Mr. Verhoosky said, “Before you guys take off, thank you for all your support. Shane and I will be at the high school next week to discussing vaping. And then we’ll be doing “Sticker Shock” in May.” He added, “I have no direct update on Campbell’s My App.

Chairperson Raftery said, “Before we discuss the May meeting and potentially June meeting, are there any other updates? Youth Leadership? It would be great if you could involve them to make

students more aware. Even the Wayland Student Press Network is involved. My daughter is involved in WSPN.

Mr. Verhoosky said that SADD's Sticker Shock campaign was moved from this weekend to May 19. The weekend before that, SADD is doing a fundraising car wash from 11 to 1. Previous to that, I will be going out with Shane and Tyler and SADD officers to offsite liquor sites, i.e., not bars and restaurants, placing stickers that say "21 Means 21" on beers and seltzer. Then on May 19, we will have the Mock Car Crash at the high school, with advisory sessions and a presentation. Then that evening, there will be a panel conversation with the community at large, focused on social host liability, and status of vaping at schools. But the big thing is reengaging youth, again talking about what is actually happening from the youth perspective. We're not looking to throw anyone under the bus but just to get an accurate perspective from what the kids face on a daily basis. We will have one or two former students who are now in recovery to tell their stories."

Chairwoman Raftery said, "Hearing the student perspectives was eye-opening. It's one thing for us adults to speculate what's going on.

Ms. Kates said, "I'm glad you're going to do the Mock Car Crash. I still remember seeing it in high school. It's extremely powerful. My son is a freshman. I would love for him to experience it at some point."

Mr. Verhoosky said, "Kudos to the fire and police departments and [SADD advisor] John Berry." He then said, "I have a brief WMS update. They are active in violence prevention work, and we finished conducting all of our internet safety meetings. Right now nothing else is lined up."

Chairperson Raftery said, "The meetings provided an excellent overview to WMS parents about internet safety. The presentation was fantastic. I hope parents got a lot out of it. We had a great turnout. As a parent I loved that I saw the same presentation as my child. It was a great opportunity to have that conversation."

Mr. Verhoosky said, "That was my goal, to start that conversation." He then offered a WaylandCares update. We want to remind everyone -- administrators, wellness staff, community members and parents, that WaylandCares exists, give them an overview, and get the ball rolling for when we return to in-person meetings in fall.

"We will do a mail campaign, as soon as we get our earmark funding, sending out postcards about parents who host, with a list of resources, and, at same time, around May 19, we will send out a mailing to families that have a youth 12 or older, as a reminder for graduation season."

Asked about the MetroWest Health Survey, Mr. Verhoosky said he had received key indicator reports. "To be bluntly honest, I was concerned when I saw them, because the data suggests that all our youths are making great and healthy decisions. Why that concerns me is that when we went to a regional substance abuse meeting, we were an anomaly. One of the biggest indicators

that was not accurate, between 2018 and now, is that vaping numbers are at an all-time low. That is not very accurate. We dug into other indicators, and saw that it was the same for alcohol, tobacco and marijuana. Every substance indicator is down, risky behavior is down, sexual behavior is down. MetroWest administered it, it was taken on school computers, and no, students were not admitting to everything. I questioned the effectiveness of survey data. And we did not even get data quicker from the survey being administered electronically. I would rather have a pen-and-paper survey where people feel they have anonymity, and wait for the results.”

Ms. Kates asked what were the reasons for administering it on computers, how was it presented, and why are they doing that?”

Mr. Verhoosky said, “The survey is given in November, in an extended homeroom block. Every teacher receives a script to read, that explains what the survey is, who the foundation is, that it is 100% anonymous, what the data is used for, and that its purpose is to check in on health and wellness of students.”

Chairperson Raftery said, “So there was no positive impact to taking the survey online. Maybe the students thought the survey would be traced back to them. I would recommend going back to paper.”

Mr. Verhoosky said, “I’m 100% with you. I know we need to embrace technology, but we need to see if we can develop a 20- to 30-question one-page survey that YFS gets out, collect the data anonymously, and compare it to the MetroWest Health survey, and see how far off we both are.” He added, “The MetroWest survey can’t be changed, it would interfere with trend data. But it is modifiable to provide a snapshot.”

Dr. Astley said, “Jason, thanks so much for your healthy skepticism.”

Mr. Verhoosky then turned to the high school screenings for the June SBIRT. He said, “They are usually done in the last week of May or the first week of June, and historically are done in one or two days. A student meets with a guidance counselor or someone who’s trained, who then asks questions about a small number of risk behaviors. If necessary, they will have a triage. The idea is not to catch anyone doing something risky, but to make positive connection with sophomores, so they know who’s who, and that we honestly care about their wellbeing.

“This year it’s a bit different because of COVID. The students will all receive an email that they need to schedule their SBIRT, that they can pick their counselor, pick a time. We have a plan in place for any student we know who has been flagged. We get that information off to the state.”

Chairperson Raftery announced that it was 10:34. Mr. Verhoosky said, “Historically, May is our last formal meeting, and June is more of a social get-together.

Chairperson Raftery made a motion to conclude the meeting. The motion was seconded by Dr. Astley. Ayes were said by Ms. Kates, Rabbi Polisson and Chairperson Raftery. The meeting was ended at 10:36 a.m.