

REMARKS BY MADONNA MCKENZIE AT TOWN MEETING ON MARCH 25, 2023,
ON BEHALF OF THE DEI COMMITTEE REGARDING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY.

Thank you, Madam Moderator. My name is Madonna McKenzie and I live at 28 Cold Spring Rd. I am here today representing Westford's DEI Committee, a panel established by the Westford Select Board to serve as an advisory committee to the Town generally and to advise the School Committee and the Select Board on matters related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

In the Fall of 2020, the question of Indigenous Peoples Day was addressed at Town Meeting. The resulting discussion ended with Town Meeting asking the DEI Committee to research Indigenous Peoples Day and make a recommendation to the Select Board.

The charge of the Committee is in part: To identify needs around fostering acceptance, valuing diversity, and to discourage prejudice and discrimination against any person, group, or any other status protected by law on account of race, creed, color, income, religion, national origin, ancestry, gender, sexual orientation, veteran status, age, or disability.

The DEI Committee took the charge of the Fall 2020 Town Meeting seriously and with open minds. We did not make this recommendation to the Select Board for light or transient reasons. We made the recommendation and urge your support partially because of our increasing awareness and understanding of the important and growing recognition that indigenous people have suffered for centuries in this country. We need to understand their history and embrace their culture as an important step toward the overall recognition of the intolerance this state and country have engaged in.

Like other cities and towns in the Commonwealth, Westford sits on land once occupied by Indigenous People - in our case the ancestral lands of the Nipmuc People – the committee began a thorough and open process including:

- Connecting with individuals and groups representing Indigenous Populations
- Conducted an online survey in the Fall of 2021 and a virtual community listening session in the Summer of 2022. The results of each were mixed with respondents and participants expressing support for and opposition to Indigenous Peoples Day and others suggesting that Indigenous Peoples Day and Columbus Day be celebrated on different days.
- Engaged in multiple discussions at our DEI Committee meetings
- Researched Indigenous Peoples Day proposals in other Massachusetts Cities and Towns
- Reviewed the legislation offered at the Massachusetts State House to establish an Indigenous Peoples Day statewide

- Presented findings and recommendations to the Select Board which acted to provide the voters with the opportunity to consider this very important question
- Developed ballot question language for Select Board approval in August of 2020

On March 13th of this year The Westford School Committee voted to express its support for the Indigenous Peoples Day Ballot Question in the form of a Resolution which is included in the our handout. Please pick one up on your way out if you have not already done so.

On March 14th of this year the Select Board approved the language to appear on the ballot as: **Question 3** - Shall the Westford Select Board declare the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples Day, superseding local references to Columbus Day, and recommend that it be observed by the people of Westford, with appropriate exercises in the schools and otherwise, to acknowledge the history of genocide and discrimination against Indigenous peoples, and to recognize and celebrate the thriving cultures and continued resistance and resilience of Indigenous peoples and their tribal nations?

We are grateful to the Select Board for setting out a public structure for consideration of the question and to the School Committee for its support of the ballot question.

We want you to understand that establishing Indigenous Peoples Day in Westford, superseding Columbus Day, does not ignore the history of the age of exploration. In fact, it does the opposite by inspiring a deeper and more critical examination of the age of exploration in which Columbus was just one participant.

It is the hope of the DEI committee and the School Committee that the voters of Westford approve the Indigenous Peoples Day ballot question on May 2nd and join over 20 other Massachusetts cities and towns and over 130 across the country in doing so. A town-wide vote in favor of Indigenous Peoples Day would also anticipate the successful passage of pending state legislation to do the same and firmly establish Westford as a peaceable community that embraces diversity, abhors intolerance, celebrates difference, and fosters belonging.

Please cast your vote on May 2nd for Indigenous Peoples Day in Westford.

Thank you.