

Hartford Committee on Racial Equity and Inclusion
January 15, 2025
Respectfully submitted by
Mary Erdei, Selectboard Liaison

Attendance: In person: Pat Autilio - Chair, Susan Mullens - Vice-Chair, Mary Erdei - SB Liaison,
Sara Campbell - member, Jasmine Hawkins - community guest
Online: Guest Kendra LaRoche, and Kim Souza, SB member guest
Absent: Nancy Russell - Schoolboard Liaison, Tatum Barnes – staff liaison
2 Vacancies: 1 student and 1 member

Due to excess work demands, Joe Major has resigned from the board. Steps are being taken to invite new community members to apply to fill the vacant position.

Motion to approve Minutes of October 16, 2024 by Mary Erdei, second by Sara Campbell;
(unanimous)

Welcome to community members Jasmine Hawkins and Kim Souza.

Also a welcome to our speaker of the evening, Dr. Kendra LaRoche, Executive Director of SNSC (Special Needs Support Center) who is approaching Hartford's HCoreI to encourage support for individuals with disabilities. In existence since 1979, SNSC was previously located in Lebanon, but now has moved to Hartford, remaining a steadfast server of the areas of Hartford, Lebanon and Hanover and other Upper Valley towns in need. Kendra explained that advocacy is a broad concept and that SNSC is currently working with businesses, organizations, nonprofits and municipalities to become Certified as Disability-Friendly. Their mission includes 13 goals as well as offering support that is free to our town for the outcome that Hartford would become an "Disability-Friendly Certified" town (attached). The first step in this process of certification would be to present a Resolution; then, once passed, co-writing grants together would follow, as well as audits, training, etc. Kendra provided a draft resolution (attached) At the next HCoreI meeting, the committee review and tailor the draft resolution as needed in preparation for presenting it to the Select Board for approval.

An HCoreI calendar of meetings for 2025 was reviewed. A motion was made by Susan Mullens and a second was provided by Sara Campbell and passed with a unanimous vote.

Planning goals for 2025 were presented by Pat Autilio.

Sara Campbell will be meeting with Becky Whitney to discuss the future Hartford student award (Ann Raynolds Memorial) for a socially conscious student.

Sara Campbell moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:29 pm and Pat seconded the motion. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned.



January 15, 2025

Dear Town of Hartford Committee on Racial Equity and Inclusion,

The Special Needs Support Center has been serving the Upper Valley since 1979. While we have always provided advocacy support for individuals with disabilities, we have recently redefined advocacy to be broader in scope, including working with businesses, organizations, nonprofits, and municipalities to become Certified as Disability-Friendly.

I write today to offer our support with Hartford DEI initiatives around disability. This support could also result in being declared a Disability-Friendly city, which could be marketed to draw more people to Hartford. SNSC is not charging for the support offered. SNSC is willing to collaborate with Hartford to write grants that could both fund our support/services and Hartford's implementation of recommendations. Below I reference a number of possible goals for the town Equity Plan and the support we could provide to fulfill those goals. We are willing to collaborate on any and all goals listed (and others as well!)

Goal 1: Provide contractors and homeowners with information about making residences more accessible to people with disabilities.

- SNSC can create a draft of this information, pulled from reputable sources for the Planning, Zoning, and Codes Department to send to contractors and homeowners.

Goal 2: Implement universal design so the downtown is accessible and can accommodate everybody.

- SNSC can provide an audit of the downtown area with recommendations to make it accessible to all

Goal 3: Identify opportunities to renovate or create public gathering spaces in the downtown, including requiring accessible public spaces in new developments and major renovations.

- SNSC can provide an audit of all current and proposed public spaces with recommendations to become accessible for all

Goal 4: Audit and inventory disability-friendly establishments and restrooms.

- SNSC can partner with the Planning, Zoning, and Codes Department to audit public establishments and restrooms for disability-friendliness. This audit would be part of the process for the establishment to become Certified as Disability-Friendly. Organizations passing the audit would be listed on our public website as Disability-Friendly.
- SNSC offers the free Disability-Friendly Certification process, which includes walk-throughs of physical and digital spaces by lived-expertise consultants, resulting in a list of recommendations; Staff training of all employees in Disability Awareness, which can address either working with customers with disabilities or employing individuals with disabilities; and the signing of a pledge in which the organization commits to becoming more inclusive.

Goal 5: Develop a branding campaign highlighting Hartford as an Accessible City.



- SNSC can partner with the Town Manager to brand Hartford as an Accessible City.

Goal 6: Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Town's provision of services.

- SNSC already trains Emergency Responders in Hartford on Disability Awareness and De-escalation Processes; SNSC conducted similar training to the VT Emergency Management Team.

Goal 7: Consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), address the shortage of accessible public restrooms; continue to implement ADA-compliant streetscape and sidewalks; and modify municipally- owned outdoor gathering spaces and furnishings to be ADA-ADA-accommodating

- SNSC offers a sidewalk, public restrooms, and outdoor spaces/furnishings audit, which results in a list of recommendations for the town to consider.

Goal 8: Ensure that the community's diversity is reflected in its recreational offerings.

- SNSC collaborates with the Parks and Recreation Department on creating recreational offerings that are accessible to multiple disabilities, this includes new developments for FY25.

Goal 9: Develop a comprehensive recreational facility plan that assesses accessibility and safety (e.g., sidewalk presence/maintenance, crosswalks, lighting, provision of shaded spaces, etc.).

- SNSC offers free consulting services to ensure accessibility and inclusion in the facility plan.

Goal 10: Increase diversity amongst the Town's officials, employees, and volunteers by setting diversity targets, followed by practical initiatives that include outreach to prospective candidates, enhancing hiring or volunteer pools, and encouraging sponsorship or mentorship opportunities.

- SNSC offers training to the Human Resources Department on disability awareness and HR practices that best ensure accessibility for those with disabilities.

Goal 11: Support inclusion within the Town's labor force by offering unconscious bias training, providing ongoing related reminders and tips, and celebrating diversity through visible actions.

- SNSC offers free Disability Awareness Training to all town employees, board members, and volunteers.
- Harvard's [Implicit Bias Tests](#) (IATs) find that "76 percent of respondents showed an implicit preference for people without disabilities, compared to nine percent for people with disabilities. Even test takers with disabilities showed a preference for people without disabilities."

Goal 12: Develop an inclusive meeting guide and share it with the Town's board and commissions to increase participation and to better accommodate diverse voices.

- SNSC offers to develop an inclusive meeting guide based on Harvard's example and share it with the appropriate offices.



Goal 13: Adopt procurement practices that encourage qualified diverse business enterprises to become part of the Town's supply chain and prioritize local business enterprises.

- SNSC asks the Town Manager to consider organizations that become Certified as Disability-Friendly to be included on a list of prioritized local businesses for the town's supply chain.

Our Expertise:

We are a disability-run organization. The executive director and some staff members have developmental disabilities, and other staff members represent other disabilities. Our board has seats reserved for our clients, including two current board members with developmental disabilities.

In 2023, the Endowment for Health funded our creation of a panel of experts to develop recommendations and training for the Disability-Friendly Certification.

Our Executive Director is uniquely qualified to lead this work. We have existed since 1979 and have a history of national and federal organizations recognizing us as the experts to create and implement training sessions for communities to work with and individuals with disabilities, such as AARP, Christopher Reeve Foundation, and the Endowment for Health. We are affiliated currently with the Endowment for the Arts federal funding to build the capacity of VT/NH arts agencies to serve and employ individuals with disabilities. We also have a grant from the NH Children's Foundation to specifically consult with NH Parks and Recs Departments in favor of Universally Designed Playspaces. We are most qualified to take on this project because we are experts in both the creation of training materials and we are people with disabilities. We are not usurping the voices of the disabled but are instead some of the voices to be heard.

Dr. Kendra LaRoche, Ed.D. is a leader in the education world with over 20 years of experience, the most recent as the assistant principal in charge of special education and behavior at Manchester Elementary/Middle School. Kendra was a first-generation college student who worked her way up to master's degrees from both Harvard University and Middlebury College and a doctoral degree from SNHU. This experience fueled her lifelong passion for working with historically marginalized populations. As a Rowland Fellow in 2011, she addressed equity, the "elephant in the room issue" and radically changed the culture and climate of Burr and Burton Academy in Vermont. Since that point, she has worked with schools and districts to focus their thinking on issues through data-driven decision-making. While others also work with data, her strong emotional intelligence and commitment to spotlighting local culture give her work a lasting change. Her doctoral dissertation used the positive deviance research approach, giving individuals voices to define their success and giving space for the resulting successful findings to be implemented at the local level.



Carmen Lachle is an Autism Specialist certified by IBCCES. She has worked at the Special Needs Support Center for a long time and is SNSC's Director of Community Outreach. Carmen, with the expert assistance of Speech and Language Pathologists (SLP), Special Educators (SPED), and Board-Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA), developed and implemented the training of community businesses and organizations. She is the lead trainer for both the AARP and NEA grant-funded programs.

Emma Woloshin is a Special Educator with five years of experience at SNSC and is our Programs Director. Emma assists with the Disability-Friendly Certification process doing walkthroughs of organizations, supplying recommendations, and training employees.

I look forward to future collaboration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kendra LaRoche
Executive Director
Special Needs Support Center
kendra@snsc-uv.org



RESOLUTION ON DISABILITY-INCLUSIVITY



WHEREAS, THE HARTFORD CITY COUNCIL RECOGNIZES THAT, FOR THE CITY OF HARTFORD TO TRULY THRIVE, EVERY COMMUNITY MEMBER MUST BE ABLE TO FULLY AND MEANINGFULLY PARTICIPATE IN EVERY ASPECT OF PUBLIC LIFE, FROM CIVIC TO ECONOMIC TO RECREATIONAL, AND

WHEREAS, THE HARTFORD CITY COUNCIL RECOGNIZES THAT PROACTIVELY WORKING TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO FULL AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION FOR DISABLED MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY IS OF VITAL IMPORTANCE TO ACHIEVING THAT GOAL,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT, THE HARTFORD CITY COUNCIL COMMITS TO PURSUE THE FOLLOWING PRELIMINARY DISABILITY INCLUSION ACTIONS, WHICH WILL TAKE THE CITY OF HARTFORD BEYOND THE MINIMUM LEGAL ADA REQUIREMENTS:

SECTION 1: THE HARTFORD CITY COUNCIL ENCOURAGES LOCAL BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS TO BECOME CERTIFIED DISABILITY-FRIENDLY TO CREATE A COMMUNITY OF BELONGING FOR ALL, AND

SECTION 2: THE HARTFORD CITY COUNCIL ENCOURAGES THE CITY TO ADOPT BEST PRACTICES THAT WILL HELP IT TO SERVE AS A MODEL FOR DISABILITY INCLUSION IN THE BUSINESS SECTOR, AND

SECTION 3: THE HARTFORD CITY COUNCIL ENCOURAGES THE CITY TO STRIVE FOR INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE SPACES AND EVENTS INCLUDING:

- ACCOMMODATIONS LANGUAGE ON PUBLIC SIGNAGE
- ACCOMMODATIONS LANGUAGE ON INVITATIONS AND REGISTRATIONS FOR ALL EVENTS HOSTED AND SPONSORED BY THE CITY,
- REQUESTS FOR ACCOMMODATIONS LANGUAGE TO BE USED ON INVITATIONS AND REGISTRATIONS FOR EVENTS THE CITY SPEAKS AT AND/OR CO-SPONSORS, AND
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SECTION 4: THE HARTFORD CITY COUNCIL COMMITS THE CITY TO CONDUCTING INTERNAL CHECKS AND CREATING IMPROVEMENT PLANS THAT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED OVER TIME TO ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY AND DISABILITY INCLUSION IN:

- EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES, ENCOMPASSING BUT NOT LIMITED TO ACCOMMODATIONS,
- TALENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION POLICIES,
- FACILITIES, PROMOTING UNIVERSAL DESIGN WHENEVER POSSIBLE, AND
- WEBSITES, PROMOTING ACCESSIBILITY WHENEVER POSSIBLE.

DATED THIS ____ DAY OF _____, 2025
AT HARTFORD, VERMONT. _____

