



Programs & Services Committee Report

City of Newton In City Council

Thursday, October 8, 2020

Present: Councilors Krintzman (Chair), Noel, Albright, Greenberg, Humphrey, Ryan, Wright, and Baker

Also Present: Councilors Malakie, Grossman, Norton, Leary, Gentile, Crossley, Ciccone, Lipof, and Bowman

City Staff: Dana Hanson, Director of Community Engagement; Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer; Nathan Giacalone, Committee Clerk

#351-20 **Resolution to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day**
COUNCILORS AUCHINCLOSS, BOWMAN, GROSSMAN, HUMPHREY, KRINTZMAN, NOEL, NORTON, AND RYAN requesting a Resolution to the Mayor and School Committee to require City and School Departments to change all references on City and School documents and calendars from "Columbus Day" to "Indigenous Peoples' Day."
Action: **Programs & Services Approved 6-0-1 (Councilor Greenberg Abstained, Councilor Wright not voting); Public Hearing Closed 7-0 (Councilor Wright not voting)**

Notes: The Chair introduced item #351-20 as a public hearing on the proposed resolution to rename Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day. He said that individuals would have three minutes each to speak on the topic. He also said that Councilors Greenberg and Humphrey had attempted to find another date that could serve as Italian American Heritage Day but were unsuccessful. They are hopeful to be able to successfully resume this search. Their memo regarding this effort is attached to this report.

Before the public comment opened, a committee member said that while they agree that the name of Columbus Day should be changed, the rushed process of it has insulted the Italian American community in the process. Another committee member said that they were against the idea of a public hearing on this item, saying that it is not a "both sides" issue where each position is equivalent, but rather of addressing the historic injustices done to Native Americans. They said that this public hearing will be more damaging than cathartic.

The Committee opened public comment:

Bryan Barash, 161 Lowell Avenue, said he was in favor of the resolution as a step Newton can take to address the harm done to Indigenous Americans and be actively anti-racist. He also said

that he supported creating a separate Italian Heritage Day to address the historic wrongs done to this community as well.

Lisa DiFelice, 280 Nevada Street, said that changing the name of the holiday should take extensive research from all sides and the proponents of this change have not done enough. She said she was astonished that six councilors voted against the public hearing. There are multiple interpretations of Columbus and the materials from Howard Zinn do not give enough attention to contrarian views and indoctrinate children. These errors include taking Columbus' journal entries out of context.

Emily Restivo, 177 Maple Street, said that she has taught for 11 years at the Countryside School and supports changing the name of the holiday both as a teacher and an Italian American. She said that Columbus should not be used as the vehicle for Italian heritage and a better example should be picked. Children cannot be taught to be upstanding citizens while celebrating Columbus at the same time because the holiday disrespects indigenous people.

Nora Murad, 32 Holman Road, said that the difficulties of this change are part of the healing process. There are not two equal sides and Italian Americans should not be pitted against Native Americans. Columbus' birthplace is irrelevant as he should be defined by his actions, which were bad for Native Americans. The call to rename Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day began decades ago and this day should be more than a symbolic nod but a way to reckon with past inequities.

Tamika Olszewski, 341 Lexington Street, said that the School Committee, of which she is a member, voted on September 2 to recognize Indigenous Peoples' Day in Newton, but recognized that it needs to follow the lead of the City Council. She said that Newton's youth look to the City Council for an example of standing up for marginalized people who lack a voice. Nobody should have to experience the trauma of hate. This may not be the perspective of a majority of residents, but those who need this advocacy the most are those whose cultural pride has never been considered, especially because their numbers are small.

Terry Alther, 32 Auburn Street, said he supported the resolution. He said that he is a Japanese American with deep pride in his cultural background and is aware of the horrible actions committed by the Japanese government in the early 20th century. Though many of these actors were brought to justice, he is worried about a growing attitude of revisionism. These reasons are why he is in favor of the resolution, because he was surprised to learn the truth of Columbus in high school. Many indigenous people suffered, and Italians did as well. He feels there are better Italian figures such as Cincinnatus to honor. Native Americans are still in danger of losing their lands which is why we must continue to stand with them.

Amanda Caruso, 67 Tolman Street, said Columbus Day was recognized to honor the contributions of Italian Americans. She said her family has a proud of immigrating to America from Italy despite hardships faced along the way, such as an ancestor who was tricked by his coworkers at the factory and fired. November is already recognized as Indigenous Peoples' Month, why isn't this enough? The Council cannot just swap days around as taking away this holiday is a threat to Italian American culture. There should be more conversation about the cities and states which

have refused this change. Please follow federal law and proclamations and keep the holiday as is.

Kyra Norsigian, 43 Waban Hill Road, said that, as an educator, it is important to accurately represent history and to not have a holiday obliterating Native American heritage and celebrating the atrocities done against them.

Marcus Breen, 56 Gardner Street, said he is an Australian American and in Australia there is more attention being brought to indigenous Australians and Newton should follow suit. History changes and shows the sufferings of indigenous in colonial countries. People who can do better should do better and care for indigenous in public policy. Now that people are better informed the holiday name should be changed.

Terry Sauro, 50 Cook Street, said the day will always be Columbus Day no matter whether the City Council changes the name or not. If the interest was to explore all sides of the issue a task force should have been formed including representatives from all parties. Italian Americans are not being heard nor considered on this issue. She said that all Newtonians have the right to speak on these issues and the Council should not try to take the tradition of this holiday away, asking which holiday will be next after Columbus Day. November is already recognized as Indigenous Peoples' Month.

Corrie Popp, 16 Honey Road, Waltham, said that while a former Newton resident, she is still a Newton public school teacher and as a member of Italian Americans for Indigenous Peoples' Day, she wants Italian Americans to know that they have been heard and people are trying to bridge this gap. She acknowledged that Italian Americans are in a tough position on this issue but should not center the discussion on their hardships as Italian Americans have come a long way since immigration. Those in the past picked the wrong figure as Columbus was not the one who made Italian American great. The facts about Columbus come directly from him and Italian identity should be separated from him. Italian Americans need to make this decision together and while it is not the fault of those today that the wrong figure was picked for the holiday, it can be fixed today. There are far fewer Indigenous Americans and Italian Americans should do the right thing and support changing the name of the holiday.

Karen Ghiron, 80 Hillside Ave, said she was born into an Italian American family that fled fascist Italy to escape persecution because they were Jewish. There needs to be a more diverse education of history and Italian American history does not need to be confined to one day. Indigenous people have been advocating for this name change since the 1970s and Italian Americans should recognize that the discussion should focus on Native Americans.

Kate Carpenter Bernier, 67 Prescott Street, said that she was in favor of the resolution. Her son, Becket also spoke, saying that schools should tell the truth about Columbus instead of lies. He also said that the holiday should be dedicated to those who deserve it. Ms. Bernier said that many more scholars than Zinn speak about atrocities attributed to Columbus.

Riya Raghavan, Brown Middle School student, said that this change is overdue and is another step closer to addressing past injustices and making the world a better place. She said that

Indigenous Peoples' Day does not harm Italian Americans, rather it recognizes the sacrifices of Indigenous Americans. Change can be difficult, but people should not perpetuate a false hero as Columbus Day does.

Ginny Gardner, Chair of the Metrowest Italian American Alliance, said that she recognizes indigenous people have a different perspective on Columbus and has suggested some books to explain their reasons for opposing changing the name of the holiday. She said that their civility has been met with name calling and insults and this whole proposal makes Italian Americans feel unworthy. She said other accusations of poor conduct from her side were unfounded. There is already a month and a day dedicated to Native Americans and it is mean spirited to change the name of Columbus Day. She said that her group has not heard from any Councilor and that their seat at the table has been denied. Ms. Gardner also said that a list of their board members has gotten out and is being used to harass them.

Rachel Pytel, 1300 Walnut Street, and her daughter Eva said that in an elementary school lesson, an untrue poem about Columbus was used and schools should not be teaching this.

Sarah Dellea, 64 Falmouth Road, said she was in favor of changing the name and no matter the association it centers around a specific individual. Columbus was not just an enabler, but an active participant in oppressing indigenous people. She said keeping Columbus Day implicitly honors these abuses and the name needs to be changed to move towards a less racist future. She said she is also Italian American and familiar with stories of Italian abuse such as how her great-grandfather felt he needed to change the family name to make it sound "more American." Columbus does not celebrate Italian Americans, but rather is a blight on the heritage and a better example of an Italian American should be used.

Uma Millner, 2256 Austin Street, said she was in favor of the resolution and as an Indian American, she is also familiar with the negative impact colonization has on indigenous populations, though nothing like the genocide experienced by Native Americans. Columbus Day is a racist holiday due to his actions and his legacy. Effects of the historical trauma suffered by Native Americans are visible today and people are complicit in these abuses if they continue to resist changing the name of the holiday. Racism is a problem that hurts all groups, white Americans included.

Ashia Ray, 185 Christina Street, said she was one of the few in attendance this meeting who was at the original meeting for the Columbus Day item in the previous term. Before that meeting, she said she was unaware of the Italian American perspective. She spoke about the impact on students, such as trivializing a slave ship like the Santa Maria with a construction paper craft assignment. At the original meeting, she was upset to see Newton residents brush off the stories of Columbus' worst acts. She said that the truth should be taught in the schools in order to help indigenous children feel safe.

Faries Gray, Sagamore of the Massachusetts Tribe, said that Newton sits on the ancestral home of the Massachusetts people. He said that his tribe views Columbus as a terrorist, but not as a representative of Italians. Columbus' nationality does not matter, his actions do and honoring him considering those actions is deeply hurtful. He said that greatness comes not from how much

power one has but doing the right thing when not obligated.

Linda Goldman, 25 Haynes Road, said that when a group with power like the City Council has the power to help an oppressed group of people, they have an obligation to do so. This resolution is needed to heal suffering and make more members of the community feel welcomed.

Christine O'Donnell, 71 Sharpe Road, said she supported the resolution and as an Italian American, Columbus Day has never been a source of cultural pride for her. This instead has come from a different rich history with more to be proud of than Columbus. Native Americans discovered this land first and even considering Europeans, the Vikings were here before Columbus. If renaming the holiday is one small thing that can help Native Americans, then it should be done. Italian Americans have plenty to be proud of besides Columbus and should focus on people who bettered the world rather than those who brought more suffering.

Coral Lin, Newton North High senior, said she was joined by other students from NextGen Voices Civic Engagement Club. While they had some lessons in school that dispelled myths about Native Americans, there were others that had the students dress up as conquistadors and recite their achievements while ignoring the sufferings of Native Americans. Simply splitting the day is not good enough. The conquistadors should not be celebrated as it is negative to indigenous students.

Julia Priest, Nonantum Street, Brighton, said that she is a former Newton resident but owns a business within the city. She wanted to acknowledge the Native Americans who lived here first and thanked Mr. Gray for speaking. She said that technically, Columbus was not even Italian as the country was not yet unified and rather, he was Genovese. She disagreed with giving Native Americans another day which they did not ask for as they have been asking for Indigenous Peoples' Day since Columbus Day was established in its modern form in the 1970s. Ms. Priest said that people should support each other and work towards a world where nobody needs to be persecuted.

Dr. Frank Mazzaglia, Chairman of the Italian American Alliance of Massachusetts, said he was inducted into Algonquin Indian Association after collaborating with them on an anti-poverty campaign, and along with being half-Jewish said he had a unique perspective on changing the name of Columbus Day. He said he was troubled to hear children being indoctrinated by the heavily biased work of Zinn. He said that Columbus did not commit genocide as the spread of disease was not intentional and he did not introduce slavery as indigenous Americans were already practicing it before his arrival.

Kingston Mills, Brown Middle School student, said it was important and right to change the name of the holiday because Columbus' actions were not right and should not be justified. There is more to be done, but this resolution is a good start.

Cedar Pruitt, 2 Wyoming Road, said she was happy to hear many children speaking and was grateful that the Council is talking about this issue and following the trend of renaming Columbus Day. She said she never saw Columbus as Italian growing up. Newton should be a community that supports marginalized people and as monuments to slavery and bullying are coming down,

the same should happen for Columbus Day.

Larry Spotted Crow Mann, from Webster and the Nipmuc Nation, supported the resolution, saying that after Columbus' arrival there was a 96 percent genocide rate. Referring to earlier comments of indoctrination, he said that is already happening as children are taught a myth of America that omits the genocide of Native Americans and their experience. Regardless of what the holiday is called, he said Columbus did not discover the land as indigenous people were here first and that Columbus introduced slavery and white supremacy to the hemisphere. Denial of Native American humanity and cultural erasure has had terrible effects and it is good to see the youth speaking up for the right thing. Change is hard, but tradition is not a good enough excuse to avoid it.

Tarik Lucas, 36 Central Avenue, said that everyone deserves respect and to be treated fairly. Columbus was a bad man who did many awful things to Native Americans and the holiday should be renamed and a different holiday to honor Italian Americans should be enacted.

Elianna Kruskal, Newton South High senior, said she was a full supporter of renaming the holiday. She said this is not just about choosing a random day in November but allowing indigenous people to reclaim a day that is part of a painful history from Columbus. This is not to make white people feel better, but to do the right thing.

Nathan Phillips, 73 Charles Street, said he supports the resolution and there are plenty of other Italian American heroes rather than Columbus, such as Mayor Menino.

Amy Behrens, 19 Bowdoin Street, thanked the indigenous speakers present and said that the name of the holiday should be changed in light of Columbus' actions. After working at a children's summer camp on the Sioux reservation, she saw the effects of hundreds of years of bad policy and that the least that can be done is to rename the holiday and commemorate those who lived here first.

Janet Sterman, 120 Church Street, said she was actually a student of Zinn when he taught at Boston University, and thought that while he was brilliant, he was too one-sided. History is not black and white, and America did not invent slavery. She said that another day should be made Indigenous Peoples' Day.

Nathan Ray, 185 Christina Street, said that changing the holiday name is important to people who have been hurt and are asking for help. He said that he also felt that the conversation often loses sight of the indigenous people.

Sana Fadel, 69 Fair Oaks Ave, said she was in favor of the change and Columbus Day should not be the only holiday to honor Italian Americans. Massachusetts has also already been observing Italian Heritage Month for many years.

The Committee voted 7-0 to close the public hearing (Councilor Wright not voting).

The Committee and other Council members in attendance thanked everybody who spoke.

Councilor Norton read a statement from representatives of United American Indians of New England in favor of the resolution. This statement is attached to this report which also includes a link to video testimony.

Committee Discussion:

C: Thank you to the indigenous speakers who joined the meeting but based on the testimony read by Councilor Norton they should not have had to speak and defend their basic humanity. It is shameful that this discussion has seemed to pit two sides against each other, and it is disappointing that some of those who voted for this public hearing were not in attendance. While Columbus Day cannot be renamed in time this year, it is still worth doing both for next year and considering the upcoming anniversary of the Mayflower landing at Plymouth Rock.

C: I have seen firsthand marginalized people needing to fight for recognition of their basic rights, as well as the hate speech and misinformation which emerged against it. Anybody can find questionable publications to support whatever their viewpoint is. This is something important to do besides the routine work of the City Council.

C: As indicated before, this is a difficult conversation as the Italian American community sees it as an attack. The history of Columbus has been told by more people than just Howard Zinn. Other recently uncovered primary source material supports the case against Columbus. It should not remain Columbus Day and it is correct to say Italian Americans “picked the wrong guy” when there are other Italians who can better serve the spirit of the holiday. This is no attack against Italian Americans as a whole.

C: The public hearing and video testimony has taught a lot. Columbus Day should be renamed, but there should have been a better process that brought both sides together to a compromise rather than pitting two groups against each other. This holiday is hardly about Columbus the man and Italian Americans feel strongly as this holiday was enacted to recognize the trauma they faced.

C: It is unfortunate that a task force was not formed to address this matter. There seems to be consensus that the holiday should no longer honor Columbus, but since Italian Americans have also suffered much, perhaps there should be a way to honor both Italian and Indigenous Americans at the same time.

C: The tie in with the October date is specifically to mark Columbus’ landing. This marks Native American survival despite everything that came against them. This item should not be held up any longer.

Other Councilor Comments:

C: It was surprising to hear Professor Zinn’s name come up again. Even 50 years ago, as a Newton resident his views generated controversy.

Q: What will be the net effect if this resolution passes? It is a federal holiday so what will be different? Is it merely symbolic?

A: It asks the administration and School Committee to change the names within their control. This will be like when Board of Aldermen was changed to City Council. It is about how language frames the world and reflects values and sends a message that Columbus is not revered and Newton recognizes the value of those who lived here first.

C: This resolution would not literally change much of substance and it is unfortunate how divisive this item has been as there should have been a better process to not have been as hurtful. There should also be an opportunity to celebrate Italian heritage. The public hearing was helpful and very informative. Why is it necessary to recognize this additional day when the federal government already recognizes an Indigenous Peoples' Day?

C: The public hearing has proven to be a very powerful experience, though the divisiveness is regrettable. It is a process to bring people along to a better outcome. and it can sometimes be a painful one. It has been made loud and clear why the holiday needs to be renamed.

C: It is good that the Committee had the public hearing as it was more opportunity to listen to the public. Even though Newton is not the first community to rename the holiday, there is power in following the trend.

C: Appreciative of the comments, but the holiday does not need to remain as Columbus Day as its clear change on this is coming, but it should have been handled better. If the wrong person was chosen, then maybe a solution is to find the right figure to honor. A task force would be a good way to accomplish this goal. This will be discussed at least once more by the Council and Councilors should remember not to tell people how they should feel. It would be great to discuss this issue more with Faries Gray.

C: One point that stuck out from the video testimony was the question "should pride supersede pain?" Keeping this in mind may change how the Council addresses this.

Councilor Baker made a motion to amend the resolution to add Italian American Heritage Day to Indigenous Peoples Day in addition to removing Columbus Day.

Committee Comments:

C: No, this is not what the Council is being asked to do. It should only be about changing the name of the holiday and an Italian Heritage Day should be a separate day.

C: This seems like a good idea but the Committee should wait to hear more on this from the Italian American and Native American communities.

Other Councilor Comments:

C: No, the Council should do what indigenous people are asking, and this is not what they are asking.

C: There is no need to wait on this as the Council has already received plenty of correspondence saying that the name should just be changed to Indigenous Peoples' Day.

Councilor Baker said that his proposal was to generate conversation and withdrew his amendment.

Councilor Humphrey moved to approve the item which carried 6-0-1 (Councilor Greenberg abstained, Councilor Wright not voting)

The meeting adjourned at 9:36pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Josh Krintzman, Chair

Nathan Giacalone

From: David A. Olson
Sent: Thursday, October 8, 2020 12:21 PM
To: Nathan Giacalone
Subject: FW: Memo regarding Columbus Day change.

From: Maria Scibelli Greenberg <msgreenberg@newtonma.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 8, 2020 12:19 PM
To: City Council <citycouncil@newtonma.gov>; David A. Olson <dolson@newtonma.gov>
Subject: Memo regarding Columbus Day change.

We wanted to let the full City Council know that in the intervening time since the full Council voted to recommit the Indigenous Peoples' Day Item to the Programs & Services Committee for a public hearing, we had undertaken an effort to identify a date in some other part of the year that could serve as an Italian-American Heritage Day on the Newton calendar.

The objective of this effort was to honor the contributions of Italian-Americans to our community, recognizing that there was some frustration that the resolution removing Columbus Day was being viewed in some circles as a criticism of Italian-American heritage instead of its intended criticism of Columbus and his treatment of indigenous peoples. While we do not believe the intent of the resolution was anti-Italian-American, we sought to address that concern in some way, if possible, during this process.

It also appeared to us from discussions in the full Council on the motion to recommit that the overwhelming, though not unanimous, consensus of Council members is that Christopher Columbus specifically should no longer be honored and that he should not be conflated with Italian-American Heritage on the whole, although the modern holiday marking his landing in the Caribbean in October 1492 has roots in promoting the latter.

We had hoped to docket a separate item on Italian-American Heritage in parallel to the Indigenous Peoples' Day item before we arrived at the scheduled hearing this week, so that we could defuse some tension ahead of that hearing. We explored various dates and suggested various options that could be meaningful to the Italian-American community in Newton and especially Nonantum.

Unfortunately, the two of us were unable to find a date that was satisfactory to community members leading the opposition and no agreement was reached in time, so it will not affect the discussion of the Indigenous Peoples' Day item either way and we hope that the public discussion will instead focus on the indigenous peoples of the Americas. But we wanted to make sure that other Councilors were aware that a good faith effort had been attempted to address this point.

We certainly remain open to introducing a separate docket item on Italian-American Heritage at another time if an agreement were to be reached with community members later.

Sincerely,
Maria Scibelli Greenberg
Ward 1 Councilor
and
Bill Humphrey
Ward 5 Councilor

Nathan Giacalone

From: Emily Norton
Sent: Thursday, October 8, 2020 8:49 PM
To: Nathan Giacalone
Subject: Fwd: Indigenous testimony for October 8 Indigenous Peoples Day resolution hearing

[DO NOT OPEN links/attachments unless you are sure the content is safe.]

For our packet, thanks Nathan!

Emily Norton
Newton Ward 2 Councilor
www.emilynorton.org
Office (617) 795-0362
Cell (508) 397-6839
She/her

----- Forwarded message -----

From: info uaine.org <info@uaine.org>
Date: Thu, Oct 8, 2020 at 5:14 PM
Subject: Indigenous testimony for October 8 Indigenous Peoples Day resolution hearing
To: citycouncil@newtonma.gov <citycouncil@newtonma.gov>, rfuller@newtonma.gov <rfuller@newtonma.gov>
Cc: info@indigenouspeoplesdayma.org <info@indigenouspeoplesdayma.org>

[DO NOT OPEN links/attachments unless you are sure the content is safe.]

Dear Members of the Newton City Council and Mayor Fuller:

We have created videotaped testimony of several Indigenous people and a non-Native historian in support of the Indigenous Peoples Day resolution that has been presented in Newton. The link to the videos is here: <http://www.indigenouspeoplesdayma.org/newton/#testimony>

We have taken this step because Newton's October 8 public hearing parameters would not allow us to properly present educational information about the need to abolish Columbus Day and replace it with Indigenous Peoples Day. We requested a discrete and fixed amount of time in which we could make a proper presentation, without being interrupted, but were denied that. In particular, we are choosing not to speak in a forum that platforms people who present false history and deny Indigenous genocide, and where we would be limited to two minutes each to be able to speak about our history and current conditions. Additionally, we do not believe that the council would force this sort of format on other people such as Armenians and Jews who might come before the body to give a presentation about their own people's genocide. We cannot help but remark that the privileging of bigoted white voices is part of how anti-Indigenous racism and white supremacy play out in the US.

A critical part of considering an Indigenous Peoples Day resolution is to center and listen to Indigenous voices. We hope that you will take the time to listen to this powerful testimony. You will learn a lot by doing so.

Thank you.

Mahtowin Munro for IndigenousPeoplesDayMA.org

When responding, please be aware that the Massachusetts Secretary of State has determined that most email is public record and therefore cannot be kept confidential.