

**Watertown Citizens for Peace, Justice & Environment**  
**Minutes: Monthly Meeting Oct 19, 2022 via zoom**

Attending: *Anne Benaquist, Tod Gross, Jacqui Gross, Sue Ellen Hershman-Tcherepnin, Steve Owens, Tony Palomba, Deborah Peterson, Pam Phillips, Mary Skinner, Jeanne Trubek, Diane Crowley, Joan Horgan, Marian Grogan, Holly Cachimuel, Youla Hana, Susan Nye, Jennifer Wolfrum, Carole Davidson, Irene Bocella*

Land Acknowledgement

Moment of Silence in Memory of Ron Webber, former WCPJE Treasurer. A memorial will be held in the Spring.

Working Group Reports

*Peace and Common Security* has several upcoming events – Cosponsoring a presentation by Medea Benjamin; a Vigil in Watertown Square Sunday Nov 6 against the deployment of nuclear weapons in Ukraine; and a presentation at our next Monthly Meeting Nov 16 – Why it is not anti-Semitic to criticize Israel on Palestinian Rights. They recently held a dialogue on peace and Ukraine, stimulated by differences among our group, out of which there was interest in a book group which will start with Medea Benjamin's book, War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict.

*Watertown Faces Climate Change* continues to focus on legislation, the school buildings, and the Climate Plan.

*Friends of Bees*, along with *Watertown Community Gardens* has been working on the city's 5 pollinator gardens – DPW, Sen Center, Filippello, Knowles Delta and bump-outs on Boylston. They are thinking about a seed exchanges and brainstorming next steps we should be taking as a Bee City.

*Pigsgusset Initiative* had a successful Indigenous Peoples Day Celebration at First Parish with about 250 people attending. The city participated with a City Council Proclamation and with lights on the Delta reflecting the colors red, yellow, white and black of the traditional medicine wheel. The play *Listen to Sipu* was well received and sparked a very good dialogue. Branch Line featured menu items for 10 days that were created by a Mashpee Wampanoag Chef. They hope to expand on that next year.

*Watertown Community for Black Lives* will be hosting another Race Reels, featuring *We Still Live Here*, a film about a woman who has been working since 2011 to bring back the Wampanoag language. It will include a circle feedback section. They are also trying to get the schools to incorporate Pigsgusset material into the curriculum. They continue to meet the first Monday of the month.

Feature Presentation: Refugee Support Working Group

History of the RSG was given, starting in 2014 from concerns regarding the Syrian conflict. As they learned more, they connected with larger efforts to highlight the Syrian situation, participated in clothing and food drives for Syrian refugees, and eventually formed the RSG with a wider focus on local refugees from additional countries. A team of RSG members described some of the families they have gotten to know and work with for many years on a person to person basis, providing material support such as food, housing, furnishings, school and medical supplies, as well as accompanying families on visits to doctors, schools, and official organizations, tutoring, banking, job searches. Besides support from WCPJE, they receive donations from fundraisers, including the most recent online fundraiser with cellist Yo-Yo Ma.

The RSG also works with an informal network of churches and other agencies. This network also refers families to each other for help. The group also brings families and supporters together for picnics and other socializing. Despite the psychological stress many experience having come from dangerous situations and now facing uncertainty fear, sadness, anxiety, anger and distrust, members recounted numerous successes among families and rewarding relationships.

Refugee status is temporary, but there is no clear path to citizenship and ordinary benefits. On the national and state level there are many initiatives: State Driver Licenses for all is on the Ballot in Massachusetts; there is turmoil on the national level, especially as Southern states react to the recent influx of immigrants; DACA is in limbo; an Afghan Resistance Act is being promoted. With a growing number of refugees and a tightening market, housing has become even more difficult, with few options in Watertown. Members are working on local affordable housing efforts and hope to organize a network of families open to emergency placement.

*Respectfully submitted, Deborah Peterson*