Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Council

Regular Meeting
October 5, 2026 - 6:00 P.M.
Weatogue Room, Simsbury Public Library
725 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, Connecticut 06070

AGENDA

Call to Order

1) Public Audience

2) Liaison Reports
   a. Board of Selectmen
   b. Town Manager's Office
   c. Simsbury Public Library
   d. Board of Education Equity Council

3) Chair(s) Update
   a. Discuss Board of Finance FY2026 Annual Report Submission
   b. Council Applications

4) Review and Approve September 9, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes

5) New Business
   a. 2027 Human Library Discussion
   b. 350th Anniversary of King Philip's War Update (Let's Talk for Native American Heritage Month)
   c. Social Justice Leadership Network of CT Discussion

6) Old Business
   a. Simsbury Civic Forum Update
   b. 501(c)(3) Juneteenth Nonprofit Organization Discussion
   c. Hispanic Heritage Month Update
   d. Adopt DEI Council Logo

Adjourn

Next Meeting: November 2, 2026, 6:00 P.M., Weatogue Room, Simsbury Public Library

TOWN OF SIMSBURY BOARD OF FINANCE FY 2025-2026 ANNUAL REPORT

Department or Board/Commission
[enter name]

Mission Statement/Overview
[brief overview]

FY 2025-2026 Adopted Budget
[enter here]

FY 2025-2026 Full-Time Equivalent Positions or Number of Volunteers
[enter here]

FY 2025-2026 Initiatives/Accomplishments
[provide at least 6 projects/achievements/events for the year; for departments with multiple divisions, the 6 initiatives should be inclusive of all divisions]

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Regular Meeting
September 9, 2026 - 6:00 P.M.
Weatogue Room, Simsbury Public Library
725 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, Connecticut 06070

MINUTES

Call to Order:

- The Council was called to order at 6:19 p.m.

Roll Call:

- Committee Members: Co-Chair Cheryl Cook, Co-Chair Rose Vigdal, Vice Chair Mala Matacin, Meg Evans, Juan Carlos Aguilar, Carol Clark-Flanagan, Leah Pitfield, Lydia Tedone (virtual), Abigail Vacca

- Liaisons: Selectwoman Diana Yeisley, Town Manager Marc Nelson, Head of Adult Services Chris Carney, Director of Equity and Access Dr. Tayarisha Batchelor

- Volunteers: Rick Brush, Cassie Taylor

Liaison Reports:

- **Board of Selectmen:** Selectwoman Yeisley reported that there is a great deal going on in town: Burgers on the Bridge this evening and a public hearing next week to discuss providing Veterans who are TDIU to receive tax exemptions/relief. The Town has received feedback from the public regarding the flock cameras in Simsbury. The Nod Road solar array has been approved by the State. The Board of Selectmen goals were approved and are posted on the website. The Town received grant funding to offset costs to cover special education expenses.
- **Town Manager's Office:** Town Manager Nelson reported that grant funding was given for renovations to the Teen Center at the Library, the Apple Barn, and Eno Memorial Hall. While three vacancies remain, two new officers were hired in the Police Department. The Town is updating the Ethics Code.
- **Simsbury Public Library:** Head of Adult Services Carney reported on the Library events:
    - There are 21 registrations for the Simsbury Civic Forum event on September 16th.
    - The 4th Sweet Social Connections will be held on October 4th. This event is a partnership between the Library, Aging & Disability Commission and Grassroots. The program seeks to help end loneliness among our community members.

  - The Age in Place Expo will be held on September 18th at the Library. This program is a partnership between the Library, the Aging & Disability Commission, and the Senior Center.
  - The Simsbury Public Library is going to host a monthly discussion group on a variety of important topics of the day. Group participants can engage in lively and respectful discussions in a neutral space. The first meeting will be held on September 21st: Domestic Policy & Affairs Discussion Group: Is Civics Important?
- **Board of Education Equity Council:** Dr. Batchelor introduced the prospective DEI student representative. The theme for the SPS school year is Better Together. Data celebrations were shared:
  - Simsbury High School is ranked 10th best High School in CT
  - Grades 3-6 ranked 3rd in our DRG for SBA ELA and Math
  - Grade 11 ranked 1st and Grade 8 ranked 5th in our DRG for NGSS

Chair(s) Updates:

- Co-Chair Vigdal shared that we have funding that is being held by First Church. To avoid paying a fee for them to continue to hold the money, the Council discussed potential options.
- Co-Chair Vigdal will submit a summary of DEI priorities that will be included in the Town Annual Report.
- Co-Chair Cook submitted her resignation from the Council. A motion was made by Juan Aguilar to accept her resignation. Carol Clark-Flannagan seconded the motion. The vote to approve the motion passed unanimously.

Action Item:

- Review and Approve Meeting Minutes
  - A motion was made to accept the June 1, 2026 minutes as presented by Juan Aguilar. Meg Evans offered a friendly amendment, that was accepted, to the motion: to correct the time and date of the Civic Forum, to September 18th from 6:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m. and the spelling correction of Philip's in the bulleted discussion on the 350th Anniversary of King Philip's War. Leah Pitfield seconded the motion. A discussion was held. The vote to approve the motion with the corrections passed unanimously.
  - A motion was made to accept the August 3, 2026 minutes as presented by Vice Chair Matacin. Juan Aguilar seconded the motion. The vote to approve the motion passed unanimously.

New Business:

- A motion was made to recommend Yusra Ali to be appointed by the Board of Selectmen as the DEI Council Student Representative by Vice Chair Matacin. Leah Pitfield seconded the motion. The vote to approve the motion passed unanimously.
- A discussion was held regarding creating a 501(c)(3) Juneteenth Nonprofit Organization. The pros and cons of this were discussed. Meg Evans made a motion to adopt the concept of creating a 501(c)(3) Farmington Valley Juneteenth Nonprofit Organization. Co-Chair

Cook seconded the motion. A discussion was held. The vote to approve the motion passed unanimously.

- Hispanic Heritage Month starts on Tuesday. Hartford Performs will be working with Simsbury Public Schools to make a mural at Simsbury High School and be guest readers at each of the elementary schools. Hispanic Heritage Month will be added to the May, 2027 DEI Council Agenda in order to have enough time to plan for a 2027 DEI sponsored event.
- The Simsbury Civic Forum is being held on September 16th. Please encourage people to register for the event. We are looking forward to a great conversation regarding Civic Duty. Three Simsbury residents will share their thoughts on the topic and Braver Angels will facilitate the discussion among all participants.
- There will be a Let's Talk for Native American Heritage Month. She will use the 350th Anniversary of King Philip's War as a segway to Indigenous history and appreciation in Simsbury. Sunday, November 8th is a possible date.

Adjourn:

- Juan Aguilar moved to adjourn the meeting. Vice Chair Matacin seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 7:56 p.m. by a unanimous vote.

Next Meeting:

- October 5, 2026, 6:00 P.M., Weatogue Room, Simsbury Public Library

SIMSBURY CIVIC FORUM

BRIDGING DIFFERENCES. BUILDING COMMUNITY.

LISTEN | UNDERSTAND | SOLVE TOGETHER

Summary of Forum #1

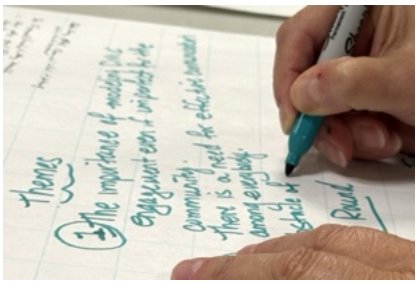
"As Citizens, Do We Have a Civic Duty?"

September 16, 2026 | Simsbury Public Library

Neighbors listening, learning, and beginning to build a better Simsbury—together.







From welcome to conversation: about 40 neighbors filled the room on September 16.

Neighbors coming together to strengthen civic life

On a September evening, 40 neighbors gathered at the library for the first **Simsbury Civic Forum** to explore a simple question: *As citizens, do we have a civic duty?* We listened to one another, shared different perspectives, and explored how we can work together to strengthen civic life in the community we love and share.

What emerged was practical and hopeful: civic participation takes many forms; relationships matter; people need clearer and more flexible ways to get involved; civic habits can begin early and be modeled across generations; and Simsbury needs more places where neighbors can connect across differences and turn conversation into action.

This summary shares what we did, what we heard, and where we go next. The conversation is just beginning, and it belongs to all of us.

Watch the video recap: youtu.be/0pitPR5APdI (produced by Simsbury Community Media)

~40	7	3	93%
people showed up for the first Civic Forum	table hosts guided the conversations	Simsbury residents opened with personal perspectives	of respondents want to stay involved going forward

Why we gathered

The Simsbury Civic Forum grew out of the Simsbury Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Council's conversations about what it takes to build an inclusive town. We recognize that our community is stronger when people with different experiences and perspectives have meaningful opportunities to sit together, listen to one another, and help shape the place we call home. Being inclusive means honoring someone's right to believe what they believe, even when we don't agree.



*We opened with a drawing that was created in this very room during the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's 2019 "Greater Together" listening tour. It is a mosaic of what neighbors **say they love** about Simsbury and what they **hope to change**.*

TRUST → **DIALOGUE** → **UNDERSTANDING** → **IDEAS** → **ACTION**

The Simsbury Civic Forum offers a pathway from trust to community-led action.

The Forum was created as a nonpartisan, community-led series to build trust and connection, practice respectful dialogue across differences, deepen understanding, generate practical ideas, and move toward local action together. It offers a different kind of civic space: not a debate, and not an effort to force consensus—a chance to state our views, listen with openness and curiosity, treat disagreement with dignity, and look for common ground where it exists.

Why this matters right now

Trust in national institutions is falling, but trust close to home is holding, and neighbors are ready to connect.

- **Trust for Civic Life** surveyed residents in 24 communities: trust in national political institutions fell 46% in a year, while trust in local organizations averaged about 70% (versus 25% for national institutions). Roughly 9 in 10 people said they can make a positive difference where they live.
- **More in Common** found that about two-thirds of Americans believe they can learn a lot from people with different backgrounds and viewpoints, and 70% feel a responsibility to connect. The most common barrier is simply a lack of opportunity, which is the gap spaces like this forum help close.

Sources: The Local Advantage (Trust for Civic Life, June 2026) | The Connection Opportunity (More in Common, March 2025)

How the evening unfolded

Agenda

- **Welcome and guidelines.** Our host and facilitator provided a quick review of the background, goals, and discussion guidelines.
- **Icebreaker.** Pairs shared one experience or belief that shaped their view of civic duty.
- **Community Voices.** Three neighbors shared personal perspectives.
- **Roundtable 1.** What does civic duty mean to you?
- **Roundtable 2.** How can we strengthen civic participation?
- **Report-outs.** Each table shared its key themes.
- **Closing.** Feedback, next steps, and one word from each of us.

Our guidelines for the evening

- We state our views freely and fully, without fear.
- We treat people who disagree with us with honesty, dignity, and respect.
- We welcome opportunities to engage those with whom we disagree.
- We believe all of us have blind spots and seek to disagree accurately.
- We look for common ground where it exists and believe everyone shares and learns.
- We share airtime so that each person can give their views.

(adapted from the Braver Angels Way)



Ken Steller (left), volunteer facilitator from Braver Angels Connecticut Alliance, and Rick Brush (right), Simsbury resident and volunteer host of the Civic Forum.



Participants engaged in two rounds of table conversations. Key themes were shared during report-outs and are summarized on the following pages.

Icebreaker:

"What is one experience, value, or belief that has shaped how you think about civic duty or participation in the community life of Simsbury?"

Turn to the person next to you. Each person shares for 1–2 minutes.

Hearing from our neighbors

Before the table conversations, three Simsbury residents at different stages of life offered their personal perspectives on what civic duty means to them. None claimed to have the right answer, and that was the point. Their stories were an invitation for everyone else to reflect and share.



Maya O'Brien
Senior, Simsbury High School

Maya's message was simple: use your voice. Young people's perspectives are valuable even before they can vote. She urged starting early, by speaking, writing, or joining conversations like this one. Stories help others understand how things affect us.



Alexis Fernandez
Mid-career resident

Civic, *civil*, *civility*, *civilization*: Alexis noted that these words all point to how we agree to live together. Civic duty runs from voting and volunteering to being a role model through everyday acts of caring for the people we share a community with.



Phil DiMartino
Retired resident and veteran

Phil distinguished civic duty (voting, obeying laws, paying taxes, jury service) from civic *responsibility*: voluntary acts like learning local issues and giving your time to strengthen community. He urged everyone to get involved in a local group.

What we heard around the tables

Across two rounds of table conversation, participants talked, listened, and questioned. We wrote, doodled, and captured ideas on flip-chart "tablecloths." And we distilled our conversations into themes to share with the room.

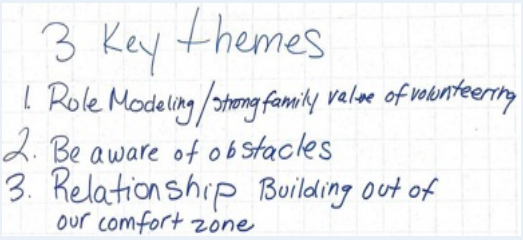
We did not try to agree on a definition of civic duty, and we did not have to. The notes below reflect recurring ideas (and tensions) across the tables—not a vote, formal consensus, or a verbatim transcript.



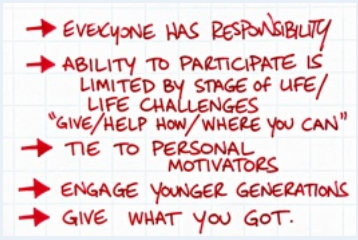
Table host Tayarisha Batchelor leads the conversation.

Roundtable 1: What does civic duty mean to you?

- **Civic life is bigger than politics.** Voting and local government matter, but so does volunteering, helping neighbors, learning what's happening in town, using our voice, and giving back in ways large and small. Civic responsibility often simply means showing up for the community where we live.
- **Start close to home and give back.** Voting and taxes matter, and so do neighbors who are hungry or need a ride to the doctor. Giving back can begin on a smaller scale.
- **Give what we can, where we can.** Everyone has a responsibility, and the ability to participate changes with stage of life. Both big and little actions count.
- **A candid moment: can money buy your way out of duty?** One table went below the surface. In a comfortable town, it can be tempting to "pay your way out" of civic duty. Their takeaway: "If not me, who? If not now, when?", with schools and young people as a place to begin.







Roundtable 2: How can we strengthen civic participation?

- **Everyday demands are the biggest obstacle, and small swaps help.** Work, family, and meeting times keep neighbors away, and so do income, health, and transportation. One table suggested gently nudging people to trade a couple of hours of screen time each week for community time.
- **Make it easy to find where we are needed.** Information overload and not knowing where to start were common complaints. Ideas included a "Simsbury 101" on what each board and commission does (perhaps through Simsbury Community Media), a town volunteer fair with commissioners and elected officials, and a website or database of opportunities matched to life stage and availability.
- **Make room for different kinds of contribution.** Jobs, caregiving, burnout, and other demands affect how much time people can give. Consider flexible pathways and smaller commitments that let more people take part.
- **Reach the unengaged, starting with a warm welcome.** Fear, loneliness, and not feeling like we belong keep some neighbors away as much as a full calendar does. A question worth sitting with: how do we reach the neighbors who were not here tonight?
- **Model it, and start young.** Role modeling and strong family traditions of volunteering came up again and again, even when the modeling is imperfect. Tables floated school programs with volunteer hours, noting that when kids get excited, whole families follow.
- **Build relationships across our circles.** Neighbors wanted safe, non-political places to meet, socialize, and discover what they share, without the weight of social politics—plus stories and connection that stretch us beyond our comfort zones.

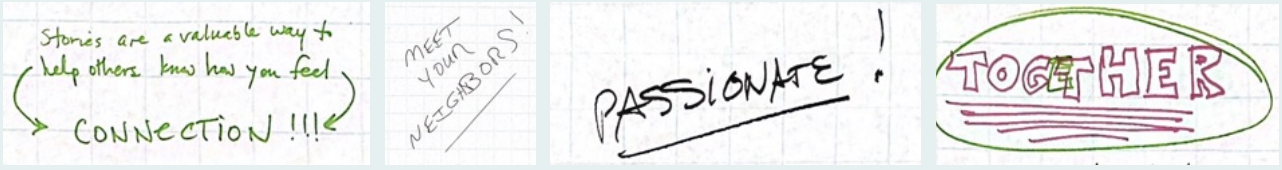


Report-out by Mala Matacin, table host.

From ideas to possibilities

The Forum wasn't designed to produce a finished action plan in two hours. It was designed to surface ideas worth carrying forward. Several possibilities seem especially ripe for continued exploration:

- **Make civic participation easier to find and understand.** Explore a civic/volunteer fair, welcome information for new residents, and clearer ways to see where help is needed and what boards, commissions, nonprofits, and community groups do.
- **Create more flexible pathways to participate.** Help residents find opportunities that fit their available time, interests, skills, and stage of life.
- **Grow civic habits across generations.** Explore ways families, schools, community groups, and residents can model participation and give young people meaningful opportunities to contribute.
- **Create more opportunities for connection across difference.** Continue building welcoming, nonpartisan spaces where neighbors can meet outside their usual circles, develop relationships, and work on something together.
- **Keep moving from dialogue toward shared action.** Use what surfaced at the Forum as a starting point—not an endpoint—for residents who want to develop ideas into recommendations or community-led projects.



These are possibilities generated through the conversation—not adopted recommendations or decisions. The next step is for interested residents to decide together which are worth developing.

What we learned

Survey responses so far reinforce what we heard in the room. An overwhelming majority (**93%**) rated Simsbury's first Civic Forum as excellent or good, and the same number **(93%**) asked to stay on the mailing list. More than half (**60%**) of respondents asked to join a small working group to continue the conversation and take action on civic duty. And many (**40%**) also volunteered to help plan future forums. In their written comments, people especially valued the small-group format, facilitation and ground rules, Community Voices, collaborative atmosphere, and the opportunity to speak and be heard. The clearest request for improvement: go deeper—with fewer questions, more time, and more opportunity to explore genuine differences.

What worked well

- Small groups with a volunteer host
- Clear structure and ground rules
- Community Voices to open the conversation
- A warm, well-organized evening
- Meeting neighbors and feeling heard
- Real interaction between attendees at the tables
- Table monitors were a great resource to help lead discussions
- The format allowed everyone to hear and be heard
- Keep the conversations going

What we can improve

- More time and deeper questions
- Fewer, less repetitive questions
- Explain why the format is tight
- Share questions in advance
- Other days or times to include more people
- A follow-up to work through real disagreement
- More discussion of specific, near-term areas to act on
- Too little time for some to organize their thoughts

Proposed topics to explore

- How town government and its commissions work
- Housing and transportation
- Open space, smart growth, and the Farmington River
- K-12 education, public health, and town budget priorities
- Tapping the skills of retired residents
- Difficult conversations the town avoids
- Immigration, climate change, voting rights
- Supporting seniors and veterans who need assistance

Ideas for the forum planning team to consider

- Sharing the discussion questions ahead of time so everyone can think them over.
- Fewer, deeper questions, with a bit more time to explore.
- Ways to keep tables together over time, so trust can build.
- Going further into real disagreement, through working groups and by choosing topics where views differ.
- Different days and times, to reach more neighbors.
- Meeting more often than quarterly, so momentum and focus carry between forums.

What happens next

This is the beginning of an ongoing series. Future forums will continue to be designed *by* and *for* community members. We are especially looking for topics that matter to Simsbury residents, that benefit from different perspectives, and that give residents a chance to shape solutions alongside town officials and local organizations. Here's what we'll do together:

- **Forum #2.** We plan to gather quarterly, with the next forum around January or February.
- **A working group on civic duty.** Two hours is not enough to make change happen. Join neighbors to keep talking and, over time, move toward recommendations and community-led action, potentially in partnership with town officials and local organizations.
- **The planning team.** Help shape and run the next forum—no need to belong to any other committee or board.
- **The mailing list.** Stay in the loop on upcoming forums and progress. To join any of these, or to share feedback that hasn't reached us yet, just reach out using the contact below.

One word or phrase

At the end of the evening, participants were asked for one word or phrase they were taking with them.

connections · hope · dialogue · **relationships** · responsibility · giving back · **role models** · encouraged · invigorated · **opportunity** · leadership · engagement · **generational shift** · persistence · starting them young · **gratitude** · build a humane community · opportunities for socialization · **connect with those who are different than us**

With gratitude



Some of the volunteers who helped make the evening possible.

To everyone who came together. We're grateful for the time, honesty, and willingness to sit and really engage with people we may not have known. We also warmly welcomed guests from other Connecticut communities and several town officials who joined as neighbors.

Our table hosts. Members of the Simsbury Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Council: Carol Clark-Flanagan, Lydia Tedone, Tayarisha Batchelor, Mala Matacin, Leah Pitfield, and Rose Vigdal, Chair; as well as Craig Diamond, Co-Chair of Braver Angels Connecticut Alliance.

Our facilitator. Ken Steller, volunteer with Braver Angels Connecticut Alliance.

Our Community Voices. Maya O'Brien, Alexis Fernandez, and Phil DiMartino.

Our partners. The Simsbury Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Council; the Simsbury Public Library; the Town Manager's office; the Board of Selectmen; Braver Angels Connecticut Alliance; Simsbury Community Media, for recording and producing a video record of the evening; and the small group of Simsbury residents who planned it together.

Want to learn more or get involved?

Contact: Rick Brush, Simsbury resident and volunteer Civic Forum host: rrbrush@gmail.com.

Simsbury

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Council