

**Belonging, Equity & Inclusion Committee Meeting**  
**Tuesday, August 9, 2022 at 6:30 pm**  
**VIA ZOOM**

**Board members present (via zoom): Leah Christopher (chairChair); Mareesa Miles; Preston Fuller; Reier Erickson (vice Vice chairChair); Eliana Castro; Clark Sheldon**  
**Board members absent: Reese Kelly**  
**Guests: Bob Harnish; Al Wakefield;**  
**Members of the public present (via zoom): Kathi Fuller; James Galloway**

1. Call to Order 6:30

Leah Christopher called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

2. Land Acknowledgement

Reier Erickson delivered the land acknowledgement.

3. Agenda Introduction & Review

Leah Christopher opened the floor for agenda discussion.

4. Public Comment on Agenda/Non-Agenda Items (limit 2 minutes per person)

No public comments.

5. Consider approval of July 12, 2022 Minutes (D&V)

Reier Erickson moved to approve July minutes.

Seconded by Eliana Castro.

Motion passed unanimously.

6. Zoom guest Al Wakefield, [Declaration Of Inclusion](#) Representative

Reier Erickson introduced Mr. Wakefield and Mr. Harnish, Declaration of Inclusion Representatives.

Al Wakefield and Bob Harnish discussed their experience with the Declaration of Inclusion being recognized throughout Vermont. Bob Harnish talked about the importance of inclusion in Vermont towns and turned the conversation over to Al.

He said that there are now 63 towns that have passed the Declaration of Inclusion. Al Wakefield read the Declaration:

The Town of \_\_\_\_\_ condemns racism and welcomes all persons, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, age, or disability, and wants everyone to feel safe and welcome in our community.

As a town, we formally condemn all discrimination in all of its forms, commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community, and will strive to ensure all of our actions, policies, and operating procedures reflect this commitment.

The Town of \_\_\_\_\_ has and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions.

By the \_\_\_\_\_ Selectboard on \_\_\_\_\_ 2022.

Wakefield and Harnish talked about how adopting the Declaration has had financial benefits. When a town is a safer place for all, people feel comfortable living there. Providing a safe and inclusive space brings in more young people, strengthening the economy. Al Wakefield provided some examples of effective implementation in Vermont towns and reiterated the moral and economic benefits.

Mareesa Miles asked what kind of accountability strategies are in place to make sure people are following the ideas outlined in the Declaration of Inclusion. Al Wakefield explained that his group doesn't have a method to track implementation, since their goal is adoption. He said that implementation was the ultimate goal.

Leah Christopher asked if there was an ideal formula for sustainable success, be it adoption before implementation or implementation before adoption.

Al Wakefield explained that adoption before implementation was the ideal way to go, since adoption is key to implementation. He said there wasn't a way to gauge sustainable success yet, since the mission is so new.

Reier Erickson brought up Mareesa Miles' question and added that the board Committee could be a resource to make sure the Declaration of Inclusion is implemented. He said that he would love to suggest adopting the Declaration to the City Council.

Al Wakefield introduced a resource outlining actions to take, from short-term easy actions to more long term goals.

Clark Sheldon asked to see the posts made by other towns relating to the Declaration of Inclusion in order to see examples.

Al Wakefield agreed to send examples.

Reier Erickson asked to forward this topic to the agenda for the September meeting.

Mr. Wakefield and Mr. Harnish left the meeting at 7:03.

#### 7. Action Items – Banner and Antisemitism (D&V) 7:05

Reier Erickson said that he believes the Committee can do more with the banner, since the city has taken its suggestions seriously in the past.

Preston Fuller brought specific attention to community antisemitism. He asked who in the local Jewish community the Committee should contact and speak to about banner ideas.

Eliana Castro suggested a slogan that capitalizes on sense of community. She also suggested generally reaching out to targeted people in the community.

Clark Sheldon asked where the committee could turn to for suggestions from Jewish community members, and suggested finding some groups to reach out to.

Preston Fuller and Reier Erickson gave suggestions for people to reach out to. Reier

Erickson also suggested providing resources on dealing with antisemitism.

Reier Erickson brought up the history of St. Albans regarding inclusion and activism. Eliana Castro suggested the committee call attention to it as a way to show that the BEI Committee is here to bring out the best in St. Albans, not change it.

The Committee briefly summarized the discussion up until this point, coming back to the ideas of an explicitly anti-hate banner and a community-centered slogan. The goal is to blend St. Albans' history with a more direct statement.

#### 8. Internal and external communication policies and procedures 7:30

Leah Christopher discussed her concern with the Committee's inability to communicate with the media. She brought up the difficult situation she's often put in when asked questions representing the BEI Committee.

Reier Erickson explained that he feels Leah should have the right to speak about the committee as the Chair, and that he wanted to make sure everyone is comfortable with her doing that.

Mareesa Miles made the distinction between the Chair speaking about past Committee discussions and other topics that the committee has not spoken about before. She explained that there is a big difference between Leah being approached to represent discussions and decisions the Committee has come to vs. new Topics.

Reier Erickson agreed, and mentioned his confusion at the decision of City representatives members to speak to Leah instead of coming to meetings and speaking to the entire Committee. He mentioned his own experiences with people speaking to Leah to avoid speaking to people of color on the Committee.

The Committee voted unanimously to allow the Committee Chair to speak with the media regarding Committee business.

#### 9. Public Comment on Agenda/Non-Agenda Items (limit 2 minutes per person) 7:50

No public comment.

#### 10. September 13, 2022 BEI Committee Agenda Items 7:54

Future potential agenda items:

- Statement to the City (requires advance completion of draft document)
- Goal-setting, benchmarks & measurements of success
- Preselection of individuals available for weekday daytime engagement (participating in the City's hiring process related to a position, etc.)
- How would the BEI committee like to contribute to the City's hiring process?
- How might the land acknowledgement statement be further integrated in the City?
  
- Channel 15 Northwest Access
- SAPD autism and other patches – what would the Committee like its role to be, if any?

#### 11. Other Business 7:58

No other business.

12. Adjourn

Leah Christopher adjourned the meeting at 8:08 pm.

**Next meeting will be held on September 13th at 6:30 pm.**