

**MINUTES**  
**ST. ALBANS CITY BELONGING, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**REGULAR MEETING**  
**ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET**  
**6:30 PM TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2023**

*Approved November 7, 2023*

**Commission Members Present:** IN PERSON: Mareesa Miles, Co-Chair, Clark Sheldon; Carl Watkins VIA ZOOM: Moira Jamieson-Brooks, Alternate

**Commission Members Absent:** Eliana Castro, Co-Chair; Preston Fuller; Melyssa Bailey

**City Staff present:** IN PERSON: Katie Haseltine (Minute-Taker); Chip Sawyer (Director of Planning and Development)

**Members of the public present:** Kurt Hersey, Treasurer of Pride Corps; Scott Bushey, President of Pride Corps; Emily Kline, UVM Intern at Vermont Counseling Center.

- 1. Begin recording and Open Meeting. M. Miles** began the meeting at 6:34 pm.
  - Introductions.
  - Discuss agenda order, additions and deletions.
- 2. Approval of Minutes.**
  - **M. Miles and the rest of the committee members in attendance approve the minutes of September 12, 2023, as presented.**
- 3. Reading of Land acknowledgement and BEI Committee Values**
  - C. Watkins reads Land acknowledgement
  - M. Miles reads BEI Committee Values
- 4. Public Comment on Agenda/Non-agenda items (limit 2 minutes per person).**
  - E. Kline reintroduces herself saying she is a UVM student interning at the Vermont Training & Counseling Center, where she is the only person of color. She had connected with P. Fuller and became interested in coming to this meeting. In hopes to spark a discussion, E. Kline asks: What does it mean to encourage diversity in an appropriate and genuine way in an organization?
    - i. C. Watkins, from personal employment experiences, has seen that organizations hire anyone and does not really make any purposeful intentions. Things he has seen are; giving opportunity for those who may have different interest to voice their views of really being heard, which helps people feel more comfortable.
    - ii. M. Miles believes focusing and listening to what others have to say, that helps to encourage diversity.
    - iii. K. Hersey finds that often people use the saying “we encourage diversity” as a scapegoat and what actually works is to make people more comfortable. Many diversity groups in organizations are a group of white people and they have lots of ideas, but they drop the ball when they don’t ask those groups of people what

would help them.

- iv. M. Jamieson agrees, we need to make those identities more comfortable, and encourage allies.
- v. C. Watkins reflects that often the way in which people speak can often lead people to not listen to the context of what is being said since individuals can have different dialects.
- vi. C. Sheldon reflects that the emotional labor of having to speak for a large group of people can be a lot. C. Sheldon mention implicit bias and that at one of his former employers he initiated an Implicit Bias Assessment from Harvard website, potential internal work to be done in organizations to help bring awareness to one's bias's.
- vii. C. Watkins mentions bringing in external individuals to an employer to aid in diversity efforts. C. Watkins believes encouraging organizations to work toward acknowledging that others may have different insight and ask how they feel about it. C. Sawyer reflects that you can encourage diversity all you want, but being open to diversity is a different level. C. Sawyer recalls the committee was originally proposed as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, but it was decided to replace Diversity with Belonging, since they are striving to create a space where everyone feels they belong.
- viii. C. Watkins shares some personal examples and reflects on how very small simple acts that others may not think twice about can be a much bigger experience for certain groups of people and that should be recognized (ex. Having to show your receipt after checkout at Walmart).
- o C. Sawyer reflects that employers can encourage and focus on diversity all they want, but when it comes to communities, that is a huge population that will "take a village" to address. It can't be just the City and BEI Committee.
- o C. Watkins shares he is big on communication and talking it out. It allows for a space of discussion to reflect and learn, as well as practice implicit bias and notice how one internally reacts to things they hear and work on expanding their internal self to be more understanding and reflective.
- o C. Sawyer discusses the potential efforts and initiatives that could interest community partners, which would help with allowing this work to spread.
- o M. Jamieson shares that one of the goals of the focus groups/needs assessment subcommittee is to support the community in being more welcoming of each other.
- o K. Hersey discusses the Let's Talk About Race Champlain Valley Facebook group and wonders if that is a platform for potential opportunity. In the past she has seen some good conversation and learning happening in there.

## **5. Updates on initiatives and subcommittees**

- a. Community Focus Groups
  - a. The focus groups will be briefly morphing with the Benchmarking Committee.
- b. "Movies that Matter"
  - a. C. Sheldon gives a summary of the idea around "Movies That Matter". C. Sawyer suggests that C. Sheldon connect with Kelly Veins at the Recreation

Department to inquire what her thoughts are in terms of a partnership. C. Sheldon shares that the hope is to start this in January 2024 and collaborate with St. Albans Community Arts and BFA teacher, Dee Christie (recipient of the 2023 Arts Educator of the Year Award). Politically, C. Sawyer believes it would be best if the BEI committee put their name out there and advertise this series as as being put on by them so they are highlighted. C. Sheldon and C. Watkins wonder how it will be funded. C. Sawyer not worried about that and shares that the City has some money, SACA has money, and there is also opportunity in finding sponsors/partnerships.

- c. Banner Subcommittees
  - a. C. Sawyer shares a quick mock-up of what is being proposed for November (Indigenous Heritage). He had corresponded with the Missisquoi Abenaki Chief for input.
  - b. C. Sawyer presents the current Banner schedule and notes that many months are pretty bare and that there is opportunity to fill those spaces.
  - c. C. Watkins suggests October (Breast Cancer Awareness), November (Family Caretaker Awareness Month), June (Cancer Survivor Month).
  - d. M. Miles suggests May (AAPI).
  - e. M. Miles reflects that this committee should consider brainstorming ideas for those vacant months. C. Sheldon shares October (National Coming Out Day) and November (Transgender Remembrance Day).
- d. BEI Committee Benchmarking Subcommittee
  - a. C. Sheldon gives a quick update, saying the goal is to compile information in a spreadsheet after evaluating what other BEI Committees around the state are doing, either formally or grassroots community efforts.
- e. Needs Assessment Subcommittee
  - a. M. Jamieson gives a summary of what the Needs Assessment Subcommittee has come up with as a vision. Ideas on addressing and compiling data were: using Front Porch Forum and Facebook groups. C. Sheldon asks about the groups that don't have easy access to technology and how we reach them. M. Jamieson envisioned flyers going up, open to hearing other ideas.
  - b. C. Watkins reflects that not everyone knows how to share their viewpoint. One way to do that was to do Facebook Live open forums to encourage involvement and open communication that is a safe space. In addition, those forums can generate opportunity to have one-on-one listening sessions for individuals open to discussing further with the BEI Committee.
  - c. M. Jamieson shares that they believe starting with the City Council is paramount and curious how others feel about that. M. Jamieson shares that in her school district they do restorative circles. C. Sawyer is in agreement that it is time for the BEI to meet with City Council and would love to prioritize scheduling and making time for that. C. Watkins shares there is a history of intermittent friction between those groups and it would be nice to re-introduce themselves and start fresh in finding commonalities to work together. M. Miles also likes the idea but wants to be intentional in ensuring a safe space to

- encouraging open conversation (which could be one-on-one meetings).
- d. M. Miles suggests that this committee goes back and dives a bit further into the plan and discuss final plans for going to City Council during the November BEI meeting. C. Sheldon suggests that the BEI approach the City Council in a way that suggests a partnership. C. Watkins appreciates the idea, but feels a general sense (temperature check) with council members allows for setting a groundwork before partnering and asking for their support in certain initiatives.
  - e. M. Jamieson quickly runs through proposed questions for a survey. C. Watkins would recommend partnering with the Police Advisory Board since they recently did a survey where a question was asked about safety. C. Sawyer plans to send some suggestions to C. Watkins. M. Miles reminds that folks may have survey fatigue and be intentional of not repeating questions. C. Sawyer believes this is a good opportunity for the BEI Committee and the Planning Committee collaborate together. C. Sheldon reflects that safety means something different to everyone.
  - f. C. Sheldon requests that a copy of the proposal be sent out ahead of time for the rest of the committee members review prior to meeting.
  - f. Pride 2024
    - a. K. Hersey mentions there isn't a ton of movement right now, but, lots of volunteer interest.
  - g. Other.

**6. Public Comment on Agenda Items (limit 2 minutes per person).**

- o K. Hersey asked about the Movies that Matter and mentioned that the community she grew up in did "I" films where local students at schools created films that highlights what students are thinking or concerned about. These films were then shared with the community. K. Hersey wonders if this is a space to allow for that collaboration.

**7. Other business**

- o None.

**8. Discuss next BEI Cmte. meeting and agenda items.**

- o M. Miles shares that the next meeting will be on November 7th, 2023 at 6:00 pm, and confirms agenda items that:
  - i. Allow a larger chunk of time for the Needs Assessment Committee
  - ii. Allow for some time to further discuss Movies that Matter
- o C. Sawyer shares that he won't be there, but will make sure tech is covered.

**9. Plus/Delta (Optional)**

- o **A plus from C. Sheldon was that he appreciated that time was allowed to have a robust conversation from E. Kline's question.**

**10. Adjourn.**

- o **M. Miles adjourns the meeting at 8:21 PM.**