

**MINUTES**  
**ST. ALBANS CITY BELONGING, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**REGULAR MEETING**  
**ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET**  
**6:30 PM TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2022**

*Approved February 14, 2023*

**Committee Members Present:** Leah Christopher (Chair, in person), Reier Erickson (Vice Chair), Mareesa Miles, Eliana Castro, Clark Sheldon (All remote via Zoom)

**Committee Members Absent:** Preston Fuller, Reese Kelly

**City Staff present:** Paul Clapps (Minute-taker)

**Members of the public present:** James Galloway, Diane (All remote via Zoom)

- 1 Call to Order.** L. Christopher begins the meeting at 6:31.
- 2 Land Acknowledgement - Reier Erickson**
  - a. R. Erickson leads with the land acknowledgement.
- 3 Agenda Introduction & Review**
  - a. No comment.
- 4 Public Comment on Agenda/Non-Agenda Items (limit two minutes per person)**
  - a. No public comment.
- 5 Consider approval of October 11, 2022 Minutes**
  - a. R. Erickson motions to approve the minutes. M. Miles seconds. No discussion.
  - b. R. Erickson, L. Christopher, C. Sheldon, and M. Miles all vote aye.
- 6 Declaration of Inclusion Follow-up**
  - a. L. Christopher mentions that this was put on the agenda in the event that if anyone had any follow-up comments or things to share, then they could.
  - b. R. Erickson noted a bias in the way the mayor and city council addressed white members being different than the ways that black members were addressed. R. Erickson was disappointed in how the discussion went and hopes that the city council addresses some of the elements of the discussion. He was glad it passed, but disappointed in how it passed.
  - c. E. Castro was frustrated and disappointed with the resistance to the discussion.
  - d. L. Christopher wanted the Declaration of Inclusion to be a bridge and a celebratory matter. But that didn't happen, and that was a loss for everyone.
  - e. E. Castro reiterates that the rawness of the issue is what makes it so compelling.
  - f. R. Erickson mentions that every time he brings up that there are issues in this community that need to be faced, he receives pushback that he's doing it the wrong way. It's infuriating and he even explored real estate options and moving because of the racial bias.
  - g. C. Sheldon mentions that he was also uncomfortable with how the meeting turned out.
  - h. L. Christopher says that they're going to ascertain next steps (Goal setting).

- i. M. Miles thanks the other board members for their energy during the meeting and for addressing the issue of tone policing.
  - j. L. Christopher appreciates everyone's voices and candor. She felt like there was a lot of energy around that and it was important to have a safe space to communicate the committee's individual and collective experiences. She thanks everyone for sharing.
- 7. Banner Content & Process Update - Maresa Miles and Preston Fuller**
- a. L. Christopher mentions that M. Miles and P. Fuller are in charge of this. P. Fuller is absent this week.
  - b. C. Sheldon mentions that he was not at the October meeting when the task was created. C. Sheldon continues that the banner was created during the Street Safe program, which was part of the downtown revitalization project funded by federal money. It was designed to convey a sense of vitality and place. He noted that it was the city's brand. He finished by saying that Dominic distinctly mentioned that they don't allow "political speech."
  - c. M. Miles mentions that after the meeting, before diving into proposing a new policy (something like a monthly banner), she wanted to find out what was currently in place.
    - i. To find out if the city was open to a banner.
    - ii. To find out about the logistics of banners, (if there would be a monetary charge).
    - iii. To find out if there were specific seasonal banners that needed to go up.
  - d. M. Miles mentioned that Dominic wanted to have an "in person" meeting to discuss the potential for this.
  - e. L. Christopher asks for clarification as to whether Dominic wants to discuss with the whole committee or just the banner subcommittee.
  - f. M. Miles specifies that he wants to meet with the subcommittee. She mentions that "political speech" is a difficult category to classify and this might be a contentious issue in the future.
  - g. C. Sheldon agrees. He mentioned that Dominic didn't think it was feasible that there could be a monthly banner, unless the committee could explain it to the city council.
  - h. L. Christopher talks about the two problems at hand. One is the feasibility and the "we" who makes decisions regarding the banner. The second is the "political speech" and what that entails.
  - i. M. Miles agrees with this categorization. She says that the City Council seems to have the ultimate authority on this matter. But it's still unclear.
  - j. L. Christopher asks about what the subcommittee will do from here on.
  - k. C. Sheldon says the subcommittee should meet with Dominic and address more questions as well as arrive with their own proposal for an approach to the banner.
  - l. E. Castro is confused as to why if there's no stated policy, why it has to go through City Council.
  - m. R. Erickson believes that the City Council does not decide on the banner. He brings up the Juneteenth banner as an example, they created it and the City Council just approved it. He also mentions that there have been ads on the banners as well, so someone makes that decision to allow them there or put them there.
  - n. M. Miles agrees, there isn't really much controversy around "Black History Month" banners or "Indigenous People's Month" banners.
  - o. M. Miles asks if the subcommittee can get some help with questions to ask about the

banners, or an additional meeting to dig more into the details. C. Sheldon also wants to know what additional information that the subcommittee needs to get to be able to bring this project forward.

- p. L. Christopher says that this committee wants banners with some form of regularity so that the BEI can add more inclusivity. This can be used to address the rise in antisemitism or recognition of certain months. The banners currently lack specificity and clarity.
- q. R. Erickson mentions that the last bullet point of the BEI committee charter states that this is the job of the committee and it allows for promoting the message of the City. If the BEI doesn't have that authority, then who does?
- r. L. Christopher clarifies that one option is to decide what the BEI wants to do and take it forward. Come up with an initial proposal and determine how it's fulfilled.
- s. C. Sheldon thanks the group for clarifying the matter. He mentions that there needs to be clarity as to "who owns the banner."
- t. L. Christopher clarifies that she is **not** looking for a motion on where the subcommittee goes from here. She is just looking for a clear vision.
- u. M. Miles thanks R. Erickson for bringing up the charter since it was overlooked initially. If anyone has a question that should be added to an email or follow-up, it should be emailed to the subcommittee.

#### **8 Goal-setting, Benchmarks & Measurements of Success Brainstorm**

- a. L. Christopher asks about what people want to do with the remaining time. Should we reschedule this topic for January?
- b. R. Erickson agrees that this should be rescheduled for January. It was important to R. Kelly, and he is absent, so it should be tabled.
- c. L. Christopher starts a motion that this topic be deferred to next month. The vote is unanimous, all present committee members vote "aye."

#### **9 Public Comment on Agenda/Non-Agenda Items (limit two minutes per person)**

- a. No public comment.

#### **10 Future Potential Agenda Items**

- a. L. Christopher mentions that the banner conversation and goals will be two major discussions to have at the next meeting.
- b. R. Erickson mentioned that someone was concerned about the lack of "non-Christmasy" decorations in the park. Perhaps the city can reach out to the BEI for next year to help facilitate the decorating of the park.
- c. L. Christopher mentions that she did some digging on this. Monday, 12/19 is the menorah lighting (6:00PM). The Christian manger is done by a church in town.
  - i. The issue is that a "menorah" does not create inclusion on its own. L. Christopher mentions that the minutes of previous meetings also fail to capture the dialogue behind this. Perhaps the committee should look at what the Anti-Defamation League is doing in Vermont to fight antisemitism and for collaboration opportunities.
- d. M. Miles is happy that a citizen felt comfortable reaching out to R. Erickson and the committee with a comment like that. The question remains, can constituents feel represented by the committee?
- e. L. Christopher mentions that any time a person from the public reaches out, that signals a

great deal of importance because they really went out of their way to voice their concerns.

- f. R. Erickson believes that sometimes people in positions of power aren't interested in hearing from their constituents, and to recognize that there's a power structure here. M. Miles agrees and believes that they can find some ways to empower people to make their voices heard.
- g. L. Christopher says that at the end of the day, we want to meet people where they are and serve them in the best way possible. They will pick what resonates with them, and the Committee will try to represent the public as they evolve.

**11. Other Business**

- a. No other business

**12. Adjourn.** Meeting is adjourned at 7:33 by L. Christopher.