

Minutes
St Albans City Belonging, Equity, and Inclusion Committee Meeting
Regular Meeting
St Albans City Hall, 100 N. Main Street, St Albans, VT, 05478
6:30pm, June 13, 2023

Approved July 11, 2023

Members Present: In Person: Reese Kelly (Co-Chair), Clark Sheldon Zoom: Eliana Castro PhD (Co-Chair), Preston Fuller, Mareesa Miles, Carl Watkins, Moira Jamieson-Brooks (Alternate), Melyssa Bailey (arrived late via zoom, 6:46pm)

Members Absent: None

City Staff Present: In Person: Chip Sawyer (Director of Planning and Development), Quinnlan Steele (Minute-Taker)

Members of Public: Zoom: Dr Jen Williamson, Jan Appel, Kathi Fuller

Begin recording and Open Meeting - R. Kelly opened meeting at 6:33pm

Discuss agenda order, additions and deletions.

- R Kelly suggested explaining the role of an “alternate” member to the committee before approving the minutes and adding more general check-in with the whole committee before getting into subcommittee’s reports. Both suggestions were accepted.
- E Castro suggested that all new committee members introduce themselves and that the role and goals of the committee be explained to them as part of their welcome. With the addition of new members she suggested that the board consider if there would be meeting times that worked better for the groups as a whole. Both of these suggestions were also accepted.

Alternate Member Role

C Sawyer explained that the role of an alternate is to vote if a member of the committee is absent. They would only vote under those circumstances. However, they are more than welcome to participate in board discussions like any other member.

- R Kelly asked if the board can allow the alternate to vote regardless of other member’s attendance. C Sawyer explained that they cannot.
- E Castro asked that if another member permanently left, would the alternate then become a member of the board? C Sawyer then explained that while the alternate would vote in a member’s absence, city council would have to approve them joining the board after the other member left.

Approval of May (05/09/23) Minutes

R Kelly asked for indications that the Committee Approved the Minutes of May 9, 2023, as presented. Approved with 6 in favor and 1 abstention (C Watkins).

Grounding

M Miles read the land acknowledgement and group values statement.

- She shared quotes from Angela Davis and Mariam Kaba emphasizing hope in activism.

- “You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world and you have to do it all the time” - Angela Davis
- “Hope is a discipline” - Mariam Kaba

Public Comment on Agenda/Non-agenda items (limit 2 minutes per person)

J Williamson expressed concern that her application for the board membership was rejected by city council as the only openly disabled applicant for the second year.

Overview of Committee and Members

E Castro explained the structure of the committee. She and R Kelly act as Co- Chairs, facilitating meetings and communication within the group but otherwise all committee members hold the same role as there are no other officers. There are sub committees that take on individual projects and work together between meetings.

Current members introduced themselves. They each highlighted reasons they were drawn to the committee, their goals, and the perspective they brought. New members then did the same.

General Committee Updates

R Kelly opened this section with his concerns and frustrations regarding the committee’s relationship with the City and its overall effectiveness. He emphasized:

- Frustration with communication between the board and City Council.
- Frustration with the selection committee’s decision to not make J Williamson a board member.
- Frustration with the BEI Committee’s limited ability to act independently.

Discussion of these frustrations followed. Many board members shared the sentiment that the BEI Committee was ignored by City Council and because of that, it was an ineffective mechanism for enacting change in the city. R Kelly expressed concern that others in his position in the past had felt the same way and it had led them to leave the committee.

- C Watkins cited his experience with the planning commission to show that City Council will listen to advisory boards when their constituents' needs are specifically met.
 - R Kelly responded to this with his reassertion that City Hall’s relationship with the BEI Committee was uniquely dysfunctional and they wouldn’t listen based on their history of “negotiation” and “defensiveness” with the committee.

In the midst of this discussion, R Kelly brought up the idea of an external equity audit of the city. He said the BEI Committee could advise the city based on the findings of this audit. Many board members were in favor of the idea.

R Kelly asked C Sawyer what the committee would need to do to enact an equity audit.

C Sawyer explained that the BEI Committee was limited in its ability to take actions independent of the City Council. The BEI Cmte. can advise City Council's decisions but can’t make binding City decisions, themselves. They’re an *advisory* board. The best approach to an equity audit, in his opinion, would be to build the case for the audit and present it tactfully to City Council in a palatable way. A large part of this

statement was focused on the board's relationship with City Council needing to be more diplomatic and cooperative on both sides to create effective change. He asked board members to consider if their goals for the committee aligned with this.

After processing this, R Kelly announced his resignation from the board.

Adjournment

E Castro proposed the idea of ending the meeting without addressing the rest of the agenda. She asked members to consider their goals for the future of the committee.

M Miles made a motion to adjourn. C Watkins seconded the motion. Meeting was adjourned at 8:04pm.