

**MINUTES**  
**Belonging Equity & Inclusion Committee Meeting**  
**Tuesday, Mar 8, 2022**  
**6:30 - 8:00 PM**  
**City Hall, Second Floor Conference Room**

**Board Members Present:** Leah Christopher, Chair; Preston Fuller; Mareesa Miles (via Zoom); Clark Sheldon; Reese Kelly; Reier Erickson (via Zoom); Eliana Castro (via Zoom)

**Board Members Absent:** Keith Longmore

**Members of Public Present:** Catherine Marrin; Shaun Robinson; Kathi Fuller; Sue Prent; Lauren Dees-Erickson; Eliana Castro; Angela Sturm; Robyn; Diane; Courtney Seale; Josh Ellerbrock (media - St. Albans Messenger)

1. Call to Order

**Leah Christopher called to order at 6:33 PM**

2. Agenda Introduction and Review

Reier Erickson offered that pronoun sharing should be encouraged/suggested rather than mandatory.

3. Open Brief Public Comment on Agenda Items (limit 2 min. per person)

Dr. Jen Williamson voiced concern over lack of neurodiverse and disability representation.

4. BEI Mission Review

Leah Christopher reviewed the mission of the Belonging, Equity & Inclusion board.

- Mission: The St. Albans City Council has appointed a Belonging, Equity and Inclusion (BEI) Committee to help foster a sense of belonging among our citizens. As one of the City's volunteer boards, the BEI will seek to understand the experience of historically marginalized groups and the manner in which our implicit bias can impact the delivery of City services, programs and events.

## 5. Introductions - Board Members (2-3 minutes per person) and Staff

All board members and staff shared pronouns, reason for interest in committee, and goals.

## 6. Select Vice Chair (D&V)

- Reese Kelly nominated Reier Erickson
  - Mareesa Miles seconded

### **Reier Erickson Unanimously Selected as Vice Chair**

## 7. BEI Action Roadmap

One-page description of the BEI Committee, including objectives reviewed by L. Christopher, including discussion of priorities, initial action steps and related agenda items.

Reier Erickson recommended that the BEI Committee should look at how the City populates Committees like this. In this case, another white person is chairing this committee, when the goal of the committee is to uplift marginalized voices, rather than placing another white person in charge. He suggested an audit process to go through the departments and City's mechanisms and figure out ways that the City can do better promoting belonging, equity and inclusion but also have the tools necessary to promote that kind of worldview.

Reese Kelly expressed concern over the overrepresentation of men on the BEI Committee, including those with 3-year Committee terms. Lack of gender diversity in City Council, as well. He agreed with Erickson that an audit process would be important and that as part of that process, it would be beneficial to set goals for what we would like in terms of diversity composition. Kelly also mentioned that the Committee has eight members instead of the seven the Council had stipulated, and expressed frustration that Dr. Jen Williamson was excluded from consideration, when other committees included non-resident participation. Kelly also took issue with an individual member of this committee who has publicly expressed a lack of support for the creation of the BEI Committee be asked to resign or removed from the Committee.

Leah Christopher agreed to discuss this further at the next meeting.

Eliana Castro reiterated that it is one thing to invite someone to serve on the Committee that has a different approach but still shares the same commitment to the outcomes; this person's stance is that this approach is unnecessary. Having an individual on this committee who fundamentally believes this work is unnecessary is concerning, as it could stall our progress. Would like this Committee member to attend to allow for conversation about this.

Leah Christopher reiterated that the committee does not need to defend itself and its mission. The question of the need for a BEI Committee already has been established.

Preston Fuller brought up the need for a commitment to Committee meeting attendance and suggested that members alert the chair when unable to attend.

Reese Kelly expressed severe concern over the city council's decision to appoint someone so against the committee's message. Kelly also expressed concern over the city

council's commitment to realizing the goals of the BEI committee.

Clark Sheldon asked how the Committee views the term "Advisory" and how the City Council and other city staff view us. How do we make decisions? How do we structure our time? He suggested finding a way to make the agenda more flexible and/or maximize the productivity of the board, taking into consideration digestibility and time constraints. What happens when we come up with something that is not on the list of objectives?

Reese Kelly asked for clarification on the statement "All are welcome here." Is there a written vision?

Reier Erickson explained that it came from a sign above the street as a step toward communicating greater inclusivity. Committee would like greater information on the history and vision for the statement "All are Welcome Here." Eliana Castro found the official statement on the St. Albans City website. General consensus was that the statement was vague and did not successfully address any issues. Leah Christopher noted that her sense was that the statement was a starting point, not an ending point but one action toward moving us forward.

Reese Kelly reviewed events so far in the meeting.

Eliana Castro suggested a Community Agreement/language/guidelines about general behavior in committee, especially in regards to respectful discussion, public comments, and general politeness. Reier Erickson agreed.

Preston Fuller mentioned respectful conferencing, suggesting to use it as a model for conferencing with each other respectfully.

Reese Kelly suggested co-creating a model for respectful conferencing as a committee, so that everyone's input can be heard.

Leah Christopher suggested members bring resources to the committee to draw upon, providing to the Committee prior to the next Committee, in order to properly digest opinions.

Eliana Castro recommended a tentative date for documents to be sent to the Committee Chair by **March 29th**. Leah Christopher and Reier Erickson informed those present that the next Committee meeting is **April 12th**.

Reese Kelly asked Leah Christopher how decisions are made and enacted within the committee. Leah Christopher explained that it's informal, but that there needs to be discussion and voting – and some general framework.

Eliana Castro requested a process for getting items on the agenda in advance of the monthly, including identification of items during the Committee meeting, as well as between meeting dates. Reier Erickson recommended a land acknowledgment at the outset of each Committee meeting, as it is a vital part of inclusivity, especially regarding the town's proximity to the Abeneaki unseated land here.

Preston Fuller agreed with Eliana Castro and the need for the ability to be responsive to issues and/or events that may occur between meetings.

Reese Kelly brought up potential confusion between the BEI committee's idea of what the committee would be accomplishing versus City Council's idea of what the BEI committee should be able to do.

Reier Erickson agreed that advisory boards seemingly tend to not be heard by the city as much. Advocated that the Committee report out regularly – perhaps quarterly? He agreed that structures should be established to encourage that the committee input is taken as advisory versus just discussion. Clark Sheldon voiced concern over chat comments making it into records. He also agreed with the previous conversation of making sure the committee would be taken seriously and that the city council would take action for the committee.

Leah Christopher suggested having a city council member present to make sure of this. Reier Erickson thought this was a great idea and expressed surprise that they weren't present already.

He brought up the importance of city council presence in the BEI committee, and said that it would be important to involve someone else to make sure the committee would be taken seriously.

Reese Kelly reiterated the confusion as to expectations and ideas towards the BEI committee from city council.

Leah Christopher said having a City Council member/member of City Administration/Mayor at the next Committee meeting is desirable in order to clarify these questions and gain guidance on what expectations and outcomes the City Council expects. She also offered a brief summary of the meeting – attendance, number of committee members and its inclusivity/diversity, and issues regarding a specific committee member and how that decision making process was arrived at. There was a conversation about the “advisory” label and objectives (expectations, what latitude the committee has, accountability) of the committee.

## 8. Other Business

Eliana Castro brought up the question of how seats for the Committee will be filled in the future. She also raised the issue of requiring community members to identify themselves before entering the meeting, suggesting that those present via zoom be required to give their names.

Reier Erickson agreed with Eliana Castro. Identifying self is a part of being in an open meeting. We should require attendees to show their name in Zoom.

Leah Christopher opened the floor to any more foundational suggestions for the committee. Reese Kelly suggested a discussion around terms, expressing concern for lack of clarity and transparency in regards to reasons for term length.

Reese Kelly agreed to be in charge of the Zoom meeting when physically present. Leah Christopher brought up concern over attendance and knowledge about who would be physically present.

Reese Kelly asked if it would be helpful for committee members to identify themselves in Zoom as committee members in order to make things more clear for community members. He also suggested opening the floor for public comment at the end of the meeting as well. All committee members present agreed with that.

Community member Robyn voiced her full support of the community and expressed her interest in attending future meetings.

Community member Ken Sturm brought up that, in previous committees, a policy was enacted that removed committee members based on lack of attendance.

Community member Sue Prent voiced their support for the committee and its message of inclusivity.

## 9. Adjourn

**Leah Christopher adjourned the meeting at 7:52 PM**