

FINAL

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission Meeting Minutes July 14, 2022

1. Call to Order

Nuha Muntasser called the meeting to order at 7:34 pm.

Nuha Muntasser took the roll call:

Present: Nuha Muntasser, Stephanie Oliver, Sue Rushfirth, Joanna Steffey,
Janine Taylor, Peng Zhou

Absent: Nalini Luthra, Tanisha Tate

Others present: Karyn Vostok Jones, COD Liaison

2. New Secretary

Nuha asked for volunteers to take on the Secretary role due to Sue Abrams' resignation from the Commission. Stephanie asked if Commission members could take turns instead of having one person appointed as Secretary. Stephanie volunteered to take the minutes for the 7/14 meeting, and Sue volunteered to take them for the August meeting.

3. Land Acknowledgement and moment of reflection

Joanna read the Land Acknowledgement and shared a reflection, which was based on a communication with the Outreach Committee with Jim Peters, Executive Director of Indian Affairs for Massachusetts, regarding the Town's historical markers. Joanna said that Jim suggested that working on changing school curriculums would be a better focus than changing historical markers. Joanna said that Jim's response was a good reminder of how important it is to elevate the voices of those we seek to service, because if we do not, we may be doing work that feels like our own priority or through our own lens. Janine commented on the importance of having a government that reflects the diversity of the community.

4. National Disability Independence Day acknowledgement

Karyn Jones shared information on National Disability Independence Day and Disability Pride Month (July), which she described as a celebration of disability in public. Karyn highlighted local organizations and businesses that have positively impacted her family, including Play Sudbury, SPS, and Whole Foods. She recommended several resources for adults and children to learn more disabilities, ableism and people-first language. Nuha asked if there were any upcoming Disability Pride Month events. Karyn said she was not aware of any in Sudbury, but that there will be an ADA Day celebration on 7/19 at City Hall in Boston.

5. Public comments

Len Simon commented about the process by which committees choose new members. He explained the process that was recently used by the COD to appoint new members, which he described as open, fair and equally respectful to all applicants. Mr. Simon said that people have opinions, but it is important that they provide comments in a respectful way and not try to impose their own will. He did not think it was fair to criticize the COD for their process, which he said was open and transparent, and that the critical comments do not promote diversity, equity and inclusion.

Since the Mr. Simon's comment appeared to be referencing agenda item #12, Nuha asked if that agenda item should be discussed out of order. Janine suggested that it be discussed later in the agenda as planned.

6. August meeting

Nuha said that both she and Nalini would be out of the country on 8/11/22, the date of the next scheduled DEIC meeting, so she asked whether the Commission would prefer to 1) have someone other than the co-chairs facilitate a meeting on 8/11/22, reschedule the 8/11/22 meeting or skip the 8/11/22 and meet again in September. There was consensus that the meeting should be postponed to 8/18/22.

Joanna Steffey made a motion to postpone the meeting scheduled for 8/11/22 to 8/18/22.

→ **Roll Call Vote:** Peng Zhou: yes; Joanna Steffey: yes; Janine Taylor: yes; Sue Rushfirth: yes; Stephanie Oliver: yes; Nuha Muntasser: yes

7. Subcommittee updates.

Sue provided an update for the Outreach Committee. She mentioned that the Committee now only had two members, and there was a brief discussion about whether any new members would be added to the Commission, given the uncertainty of the Commission's future after November. Sue said that there had been a meeting with representatives of the clergy association in May regarding the historical markers, and the Outreach Committee decided to consult with three members of Indigenous communities. The Committee is planning to regroup with the Clergy Association to discuss the feedback received from Jim Peters (as described during Joanna's Land Acknowledgement and reflection) and to determine next steps. Sue said that she and Joanna also plan to reach out to DEI boards/committees in other communities.

Joanna added that there had been some confusion about the process for responding to incoming communication to the DEIC. There was subsequent discussion and clarification that the Outreach Committee would provide responses to emails received by the DEIC. There was also discussion about having DEIC members attend other boards/committees. It was

determined that the Outreach Committee will communicate with the full Commission about coordinating attendance at board/committee meetings.

Stephanie provided an update on the Lived Experiences Project. The survey was initially planned to close on 6/30, but the sub-committee decided to extend until 8/31 in order to allow more time for responses. Additional outreach efforts are being planned. The sub-committee intends to hire an intern to assist with data clean up and putting together charts/graphs.

There was discussion about outreach strategies, including the possibility of mailing postcards to homes (if the Town was willing to assist), partnering with Goodnow Library for a more targeted outreach campaign, and sharing examples of stories (on Facebook or elsewhere) in order to give people ideas for submitting their own stories. Nuha said she would reach out to Jennifer Roberts regarding a mailing. Sue asked about the number of stories received by Needham for their Lived Experiences Project. Stephanie replied that it was around 90, and that given that Needham's population was approximately twice the size of Sudbury's, her personal goal was approximately 45 stories. Stephanie invited all Commission members to promote the survey with their own networks and to share any ideas they had for outreach.

8. SB emergency meeting & response to zoombomb incident debrief

Nuha explained that the Select Board had invited the DEIC to participate in their response to the zoombomb incident and said that she had shared a statement with the Select Board at their emergency meeting. The Select Board invited feedback from the DEIC on their draft statement about the incident and some DEIC members provided input, which resulted in changes to the statement before it was released to the public.

9. SB meeting extension of DEI Commission debrief.

Nuha said that she expressed the need for funding, training and the need for a permanent DEI Commission to the Select Board at their meeting. She said that the Select Board was generally supportive of the idea of extending the DEIC, but there were some concerns about availability of funding, and that funding and staff resources were not guaranteed if the Commission were to be extended. Nuha said there were concerns expressed about DEIC members who have resigned acting as if they are still members, and that those no longer serving should submit formal letters of resignation (if they hadn't already). Nuha shared some information requested from the Select Board including: a vote from the DEIC on whether to become a permanent commission, a recommendation on the number of members that should be on the Commission, whether terms should be staggered. The Select Board also suggested that someone from the DEIC work with the Select Board to draft a new mission statement for the DEIC and that the DEIC should identify annual goals.

Several Commission members expressed frustration and disappointment that the Select Board was considering dissolving the DEIC or not providing funding if it were to continue. There were comments that eliminating the DEIC would send the wrong message to the community, and

perpetuate structural racism. Nuha said that her impression is that the Commission was open to extending the Commission, but that they did not want to set unrealistic expectations regarding funding or available resources.

Nuha said that she also mentioned that the Commission had invited (and would continue to invite) DEI professionals like Raul Fernandez to speak to the DEIC in order to provide learning opportunities for the DEIC. She said that when she shared Mr. Fernandez suggestion that the Town hire a DEI staff person, it did not appear to be well-received by the Select Board.

Joanna suggested that in addition to making a formal recommendation to make the DEIC permanent, perhaps the Commission could send a statement expressing our concerns about the potential elimination of the DEIC.

Nuha suggested that the Commission go through each of the items the Select Board requested and suggested that someone make a motion to recommend to continue the Commission.

Sue Rushfirth made a motion that the Sudbury Diversity Equity and Inclusion Commission become a permanent commission. Peng Zhou seconded the motion.

→ Roll Call Vote: Joanna Steffey: yes; Stephanie Oliver: yes; Sue Rushfirth: yes; Janine Taylor: yes; Peng Zhou: yes; Nuha Muntasser: yes

Nuha asked if anyone would be willing to write an initial draft of a statement to express the need for a permanent DEIC. Sue said she would draft a statement.

There was discussion about the number of members the DEIC should have. Proposed numbers ranged from 13 to 17. Nuha suggested that they settle on 13 members for now, partly because it might be difficult to recruit enough new members to fill that number of vacancies, since there are currently only 8 members.

Stephanie Oliver made a motion to recommend to the Select Board that the DEIC consist of up to 13 members. Janine Taylor seconded the motion.

→ Roll Call Vote: Sue Rushfirth: yes; Stephanie Oliver: yes; Joanna Steffey: yes; Janine Taylor: yes; Peng Zhou: yes; Nuha Muntasser: yes

There was discussion about how often the DEIC should provide updates to the Select Board (annual, quarterly, etc.). Concerns were expressed about the administrative burden of written reports, especially if they are expected often. At the same time, more frequent communication would be helpful in building relationships in the community and supporting the DEIC's work. Peng suggested that perhaps quarterly reports could be given verbally. Nuha said she would ask the Select Board about whether updates could be verbal updates at Select Board meetings. Sue suggested that sub-committees could help to reduce the administrative burden.

Stephanie made a motion to recommend that the DEIC continue with quarterly reports in some format, but that the co-chairs would work with the Select Board to determine the best format. Peng seconded the motion.

→ Roll Call Vote: Sue Rushfirth: yes; Stephanie Oliver: yes; Janine Taylor: yes; Peng Zhou: yes; Joanna Steffey: yes; Nuha Muntasser: yes

10. Membership, vacancies, and volunteer opportunities.

There was discussion about whether DEIC terms should be staggered. Nuha said her understanding was that the Select Board was interested in knowing the DEIC's thoughts on this issue before voting on whether to make the DEIC permanent. Nuha explained that she had already communicated with the Select Board regarding how many members planned to continue with DEIC. She shared that Sue, Joanna, Janine, Nuha and Nalini had committed to another year on the Commission and that Peng, Stephanie and Tanisha would be rolling off in November. Karyn Jones shared the language from the COD's bylaws regarding staggered terms. After a brief discussion, Nuha said she would suggest to the Select Board that the 5 members commit to a one-year term and new members commit to a longer term.

Regarding redrafting the DEIC mission statement, Nuha said she would be happy to coordinate that with the Select Board, but would really like to have participation from the DEIC. Janine said she could help with the mission statement. Nuha said her understanding is that the designated person would work with the Select Board directly, and that she could work with Janine (and Nalini) on the mission statement.

11. Town events and national holidays planning

Due to the late hour, this agenda item was not discussed, but Nuha asked if some members could look at any upcoming events that DEIC members should attend and holidays/observances to acknowledge.

12. Scott Smigler's COD concern.

Sue explained that she had reached out to Mr. Smigler regarding why he had contacted the DEIC regarding this issue (rather than the COD). She shared the response from Scott Smigler and provided some background information on what occurred. Janine shared that she was the person who had been in touch with the COD, and Karyn Jones (Commission on Disability member) said she had reached out to Janine, a Human Resources professional, about the idea of using a rubric in order to fairly evaluate applicants for the vacancy on the COD. Karyn added that the idea of a rubric had come up at a previous COD meeting and that she personally found the rubric helpful in order to view applicants in terms of their skills and experience. Janine and Sue agreed to coordinate on a response to Mr. Smigler that would explain Janine's involvement and the intent. Len Simon asked to be copied the response, and there was some discussion about the proper way to handle that request. Nuha asked that Janine and Sue would follow up.

13. Review and approve minutes of June 9, 2022 meeting

The Commission reviewed the draft minutes from the meeting on 6/9/22.

Sue Rushfirth made a motion to accept the minutes with one correction. Stephanie Oliver seconded the motion.

→ **Roll Call Vote:** Janine Taylor: yes; Stephanie Oliver: yes; Sue Rushfirth, yes; Peng Zhou: yes; Nuha Muntasser: yes

14. Adjourn Meeting by roll call vote.

Nuha Muntasser made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Janine Taylor seconded the motion.

→ **Roll call vote:** Janine Taylor: yes; Sephanie Oliver: yes; Sue Rushfirth: yes; Peng Zhou: yes; Nuha Muntasser: yes;

The meeting was adjourned at 10:29 pm.