

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: 29th October, 2024

Location: Flynn Building

Meeting Begins:

7:30 pm: Meeting Commenced followed by Roll Call and introduction by Dr. Raul Fernandez

In-person attendees: Janine Taylor, Safa Khan and Consultant Dr. Raul Fernandez

On-line attendees: Joanna Steffey, Thomas Plihcik and Nnenna Uneke

Absent: Isaac Tesfay and Serena Hu

Agenda Items:

Land Acknowledgement:

At 7:35 pm Janine Taylor read the Land Acknowledgement Report followed by Joanna's reflection by sharing an example of a friend who observed that removal of dams from a river brought back the salmon fish that used to inhabit before the dams were built. Joanna shared how this is inspiring and such an uplifting story.

Public Comment:

No comments were made

Review of Current Mission Statement:

Joanna shared initial thoughts on the Mission Statement, which is verbose and we can consider to make it more concise

Thomas shared how we rarely focus on equity in town and we don't have measurables for that purpose.

Safa shared the mission statement is ambitious yet the goals are not achievable yet since this requires careful planning and frequent meetings.

Janine discussed what Raul's suggestions are, and asked what we should focus on.

Raul also thought that the Mission statement along with the outlined goals are very ambitious. However, it would be better if we could identify what we want to focus on for at least the next year. In order to understand this we need to identify the needs of the community, what are the opportunities that are open now that can make a difference.

Plan to set up yourself for success in the first year, and the goals should be more meaningful and measurable.

Safa shared how advertising is a challenge in Sudbury and we could draw inspiration from towns like Acton and Wayland who have visibility of programs through banners on intersections, lawn signs, QR codes, and LED message boards

Nnenna agreed that since we are not visible, we could perhaps learn what the community expects from a DEI commission via Survey or Flash Vote/Public Opinion.

An example of an achievable goal is partnering with the local library to host programs such as Movie nights, a book club such that we are able to inform about our existence

Attendee Kay Bell shared information about an upcoming Trick or Treat Event organized by the COD. Kay mentioned how there is tremendous community support where sponsors stepped in and helped with the advertising including social media support and creating and sharing flyers.

More discussion:

- Janine and Joanna talked about the Lived Experiences survey and what lessons we could learn from that.
- Safa based on Kay Bell's event suggested having an event organized by the DEI catered to children, for example a Fashion show. Raul suggested we should think about what the event we plan in the future is in service of, and how we should focus on not de-prioritizing any particular group.
- Nnenna suggested that any event that can help bring people together, will suggest that the town is a safe space for everybody
- Janine talked about an "Around the World idea", which would be on the lines of a multi-cultural event like a food festival. Joanna followed up with a suggestion of having an exclusive event for under represented communities and people of color.
- Raul suggested finding out what Sudbury believes about immigrants, and how they could be a driving force in the community. Raul suggested to learn on issues about new people moving into the town, becoming your neighbors along with new homes being built, how does Sudbury as a town feel about this?
- Janine shared an example of the town of sharing having a street decorated with flags from around the world, which looked very welcoming and inclusive. Perhaps implementing this in Sudbury would help people feel that they belong as well, especially under represented communities.
- At 9 pm, Janine made a Motion: Are we willing to work on a position statement which will focus on inclusivity and a welcoming community such that everyone feels that they belong. Janine also proposed that the commission plan an event that demonstrates the position statement.

The commission members replied in the affirmative where it was decided that Janine and Safa will be working on the position statement together.

Logistics Moving Forward:

At 9:05 pm the commission agreed to continue with the current meeting format which is hybrid and virtual. The committee also agreed to decide certain days of the months so as to make the DEI commission meetings recurring. However, the commission will be mindful of any overlaps including COD meetings, Select Board Meetings or important holidays/vacation.

For now the committee has agreed on choosing the third Tuesday for the upcoming few months. Possible schedule looks like:

Tuesday, 19th Nov, 2024 at 7:30 pm

Tuesday, 17th Dec, 2024 at 7:30 pm

Tuesday, 21st Jan, 2025 at 7:30 pm

Commission Composition:

The commission reflected on how we could work on the gaps so we don't accidentally choose a date that overlaps with an important holiday.

One of the suggestions made was how to invite more people to participate, so that the commission is composed of representatives from different groups in Sudbury.

The commission agreed that a size of seven members would be ideal so as to meet quorum.

Reflections and Future Planning:

In summary the commission will be working on the position statement on planning an event demonstrating the statement.

Building on past efforts:

Janine recalled how an important town meeting coincided with the day of Eid-ul-Fitr and how we should actively work on identifying important dates in the future so that any town event doesn't clash with those.

At 9:30 pm, Safa shared information on an initiative she is working on as a representative of the Muslim Community. As a collective group they have requested Sudbury Public Schools and Lincoln Sudbury High School to consider adding Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha, as district holidays in the school calendar. This is not only to honor the growing Muslim community in Sudbury but also to honor the students who feel ignored and under-represented when they have to choose between their religious obligation and academics. Safa also shared how a typical day of Eid begins early in the morning and the rituals and celebrations take the entirety of the day.

The parents have already made public comments at both SPS and LS committee meetings and had a discussion with Principal Stephens and LS School Committee chair Ravi Simon.

Safa requested an endorsement letter from the DEI commission in support of this initiative which will help in fostering a harmonious and equitable environment for all in Sudbury.

At 9:39 pm Janine made a Motion asking if the DEI commission will draft a letter to endorse the initiative of adding Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha as district holidays to Sudbury Schools Calendar.

The motion passed as all Commission members voted in the affirmative; Janine and Joanna will help to draft the letter.

Meeting Close:

At 9:42 pm, Janine made a motion to end the meeting and everyone present replied in the affirmative. Following this the meeting was adjourned

