

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission
June 9, 2026
Meeting Minutes
(Virtual Meeting)

Attendees

Isaac Tesfay, Kimberly Lezak, Safa Khan, Thomas Plihcik, Janine Taylor, and James Goudie-Murray (Town of Sudbury Staff Liaison) . Joanna and Nnenna were absent.

Welcome and Opening

Janine Taylor called the meeting to order at 7:03PM and conducted a roll call. The session was recorded for public broadcast on Sudbury TV.

Land Acknowledgement

Janine read the land acknowledgement, recognizing the traditional territories of the Nipmuc, Pawtucket, Pennacook, and Massachusett peoples.

Public Comment

No public comments were received.

Approval of Prior Minutes

The April and May meeting minutes were approved. Safa will work with Kim to clean up and organize past meeting minutes, including correcting the year on the November minutes, before new members are added. James noted the minutes from the afternoon meeting would be posted to the website.

Reflections

Safa shared reflections on her recent pilgrimage to Mecca for Hajj, describing it as a humbling and privileged experience shared with her husband. She spoke about the diversity she witnessed among the millions of pilgrims gathered from all over the world, noting that her roommates were from the US and Canada and represented a wide range of ethnicities, all there for the same purpose. She shared that it has been hard to reorient back into daily life after the trip.

Janine reflected on a difficult month, noting that recent online discourse had been hurtful and lacking in grace. She shared that hearing Safa's reflections helped put things into perspective, highlighting how shared experiences and common goals can bring people together even during a challenging time.

Discussion Topics

Reading Frederick Douglass Together – Guest: Dr. Katina Fontes

Janine introduced Dr. Katina Fontes, one of the founding members of the DEI Commission, who joined to discuss a potential Reading Frederick Douglass Together event. Janine recapped that the idea grew out of a visit from Lincoln's IDEA Committee earlier this year regarding a public reading of

the U.S. Constitution, and that the Commission wanted to explore whether Dr. Fontes would be interested in helping organize a similar event tied to Sudbury's 250th anniversary.

Dr. Fontes explained that the tradition typically centers on Douglass's 1853 address "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July," which reflects both his admiration for the nation's founding principles and his condemnation of the injustice of slavery. She noted that readings can be formal or informal and generally follow a three-part structure: an introduction, the reading itself, and a facilitated discussion or art-sharing component. She shared that an abridged version is often used, and that building community is the central goal rather than driving immediate activism.

On timing, Dr. Fontes advised against a summer date, noting that July 4th conflicts with vacations and that any near-term event would need to be very informal. The group discussed September as a preferred alternative, potentially paired with Lincoln's IDEA Committee and a separate discussion piece Dr. Fontes is planning around the Constitution's preamble. She also referenced Douglass's historical description of Sudbury as "the darkest place in Massachusetts," framing it as an opportunity for the town to reflect on where it can do better.

Isaac shared a mentor's perspective on engaging allies who are currently on the margins of DEI work rather than relying on the same regular participants. Dr. Fontes agreed that while attendance often includes familiar faces, past events have also reached new participants, and that the value lies in building community and facilitating meaningful conversation. The group discussed the possibility of a joint event with the schools, potentially involving eighth-grade students, and considered how MassHumanities and Essential Partners' dialogue guide on the speech could support facilitation.

The group agreed to move forward with a September timeframe and to invite Rob and the IDEA Committee chair to the next meeting to discuss a potential joint event with Lincoln, including possible involvement of Lincoln-Sudbury students.

Lincoln's IDEA Committee Invitation to Collaborate re Public Reading of the U.S. Constitution

This item was folded into the discussion above; next steps include inviting Lincoln's IDEA Committee chair to a future meeting to discuss a potential joint September event.

DEI Commission Logistics

Membership and Appointments

- Janine shared that Nnenna indicated this will be her last year on the Commission due to other professional and career commitments.
- Thomas is rotating off the Commission.
- The group will follow up on whether Joanna is receiving emails through the Listserv; Janine will encourage her to consider stepping down given limited attendance at meetings.
- The Commission will ask the Select Board to help publicize that three seats are turning over and will look to recruit new members, including posting in different community and affinity Facebook groups to encourage representation across identities.
- Radha encouraged current members to stay on until new appointees are seated to maintain quorum; Isaac noted a few people have expressed interest in joining. Radha will continue serving as the Select Board liaison to the Commission.

Responding to Emails and Public Inquiries

- It was shared that The Commission previously voted to authorize Joanna to respond to town emails on the Commission's behalf.

- The group discussed how such responses should be handled at public meetings and noted the importance of being clear about the Commission's jurisdiction, citing as an example an HR matter involving a Sudbury Public Schools employee that falls outside the Commission's purview.
- The Commission discussed a current matter involving a resident who has raised concerns about the Sudbury Public Schools Committee's adoption of a definition of antisemitism. The group clarified that while the Commission has no jurisdiction over the schools, residents have the right to learn more about antisemitism in Sudbury, and after some discussion the group agreed it would be appropriate to invite the resident to a future meeting to help inform any eventual recommendation to the Select Board.

Sudbury PRIDE Day

The group confirmed attendance for Sudbury PRIDE Day, taking place Sunday, June 14th from 2–5PM at Curtis Middle School. Janine confirmed she can attend until 4PM, and Kim confirmed she will attend and bring activities for children, including pride bracelets and scratch paper. Isaac was tentative due to a possible post-season soccer commitment. Isaac shared that bringing small giveaway items for kids has worked well in the past to draw families to the table.

The group reviewed the brochure Isaac prepared, which was based on the prior 250th-anniversary brochure content. Small grammar edits were made, and the group caught and corrected an incorrect DEI Commission email address that had been used in prior materials. James agreed to print 100 copies using funds from the 250th Day budget, and Isaac will send James a W9 form for payment processing.

Town Equity Audit

James and Kim will pull together more information on the equity community needs assessment. With approximately \$8,000 in remaining ARPA funding and the project under the \$10,000 threshold, the group agreed to prepare a scope of work rather than pursue a formal RFP. James and Kim are researching examples from prior equity audits in Sudbury and surrounding communities and will bring a draft scope of work to the next meeting. The group noted the importance of maintaining momentum on this work over the summer given ARPA funding timelines.

Report to the Select Board

The group discussed providing a verbal update to the Select Board, with available dates of June 16th, June 30th, or the following meeting on July 14th. Janine will aim for June 30th and will confirm the date with Safa.

Updates

Sudbury Resiliency Coaching Program

Currently at the stage of training the trainers, Kim had represented the DEI Commission for the Advisory Council associated with Sudbury's new resiliency coaching program. Kim has no upcoming meetings associated with the program.

Sudbury 250 Celebration

Isaac reported that the Commission's table at the Sudbury 250 Day celebration was well attended, with many brochures taken by visitors.

Racial & Social Justice Essay Competition

Students are working on designing the flier for the competition. The teacher coordinating the project has not yet reconnected with Janine to move it forward, possibly pending discussion with the school principal, and Janine intends to follow up before the school year ends. The group discussed having students work on their essays over the summer, with submissions potentially due in September.

Meeting Close

The group confirmed the next meeting date of July 9, 2026, and noted it will likely be rescheduled to July 23rd as an abbreviated meeting due to several members' summer unavailability, including Safa's birthday and Thomas being out of town. Future agenda items include continued Frederick Douglass event planning with Lincoln's IDEA Committee, Commission membership and recruitment, the Town Equity Audit scope of work, and the Select Board update.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55PM.