

JOHNSON RACIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
REMOTE PARTICIPATION VIA ZOOM TELECONFERENCING  
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2020

**Present:**

Committee Members: Rick Aupperlee, Portia Foss, Eric Hutchins, Mark Nielsen, Brynn Nuse, Raven Pfaff

Others: Sophia Berard, Margo Warden, Steve Hatfield, Jasmine Yuris

**Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.**

**1. Call to Order**

Rick called the meeting to order at 6:05

Rick read an inspirational quote from Rosa Parks, who was arrested 65 years ago on December 1 for not giving up her seat on the bus: "I did not get on the bus to get arrested. I got on the bus to go home." He said it is helpful for us ordinary people to remember that a small act like not giving up your seat can create great change.

Rick said Brian did cursory minutes from the previous meetings but is going to forward the recordings to Donna Griffiths for her to use for more detailed minutes.

**2. Five Bullet Point Areas of Interest**

Rick suggested that rather than the whole group trying to tackle each of the 5 points the committee is supposed to address, maybe we could each pick something to work on and bring back to the committee. How does the committee feel about that? Mark said he doesn't have any problem with that. No one else objected.

Rick read the 5 points:

- Education opportunities for the community to learn about issues of racial and social justice.
- Public displays to express support of racial and social justice.
- Policies and procedures to promote racial and social justice.
- Engage with community residents to continue the conversation on issues of racial and social justice.
- Coordinate with local partners and stakeholders to further the cause of racial and social justice.

Mark said he doesn't have a problem with working on the education one but his focus would be working with Eric and the school and he is not sure that is exactly what we are looking for.

Portia offered to take the lead on the education one. She was thinking we could offer Zoom classes and have speakers, have articles in the paper and maybe blogs. Mark said he would be happy to give Portia information about what he is working on and copy her on communication with the school.

Mark offered to work on the one about coordinating with local partners and stakeholders as it seems that his interest in refugees would fit with that. Raven offered to work with him as her job has given her the opportunity to work closely with a community partner engagement coordinator and she has already started conversations with some people around mental health.

Mark said he has a phone call tomorrow with Mayor Lott of Winooski. They are going to talk about the value refugees have brought to their city. He is trying to contact the school board chair in that area with questions related to education. There is a group in Colchester he has been working on getting in contact with that coordinates work with refugees. He wants to talk to them to get insight into how Johnson gets in line for the refugee placement program they have. President-elect Biden will be pushing this more. He is also going to contact Senator Leahy to find out how we move forward.

Eric said under President Trump the number of refugees allowed in the country has been lowered to 10,000 per year and Biden has said he would increase it to 125,000 a year. The Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program is already preparing for what is likely to be a large increase. Bigger cities in Vermont like Winooski, Burlington, Rutland and Colchester have experienced the ups and downs of these programs. A major barrier is always affordable housing. He is curious what the vacancy rate is like in Lamoille County. Raven said she can get that information. She works with housing. Eric said he knows our school districts have some capacity.

Brynn said she would be willing to take the lead on the public displays one. Rick said he will work on that one also because he has been involved in a public display to express support recently.

Rick said he doesn't know if we are in a place yet to work on policies and procedures to promote racial and social justice. He thinks that might be a little down the road. Eric said he would like to volunteer to take that on. He doesn't believe it's down the road. We can't make policy but he believes it's our charge to recommend policies to the selectboard and he thinks we can do that right out of the gate.

Sophia Berard asked if it is appropriate for interested community members to volunteer for a subcommittee. Eric said he thinks we should allow the committee to go ahead with the assignments and make decisions. The committee is aware of community members whose talents can be harnessed when it is appropriate to ask for volunteers.

Rick said he will volunteer to take the lead on engaging with community residents.

**Rick moved to approve the following subcommittee appointments:**

Educational opportunities for the community: Portia and Mark

Public displays: Brynn and Rick

Polices and procedures: Eric

Engaging with community residents: Rick

Coordinating with local partners and stakeholders: Raven and Mark

**The motion was passed.**

### 3. *Technology/Zoom Assistance*

Eric said he would be happy run the Zoom meetings while Rick chairs. Rick said he put this on the agenda because someone from the social justice committee where he works volunteered to run Zoom and Rick told him he had to run it by the committee. He asked if Eric feels comfortable running the technology part and also engaging. Eric said he has run hundreds of Zoom meetings and he is quite comfortable with it.

**Mark moved that Eric Hutchins take over the Zoom technology for meetings so Rick can run the meetings and the motion was passed.**

### 4. *Public Comments and Sharing*

Eric commented on Rick's opening quote. Rosa Parks trained to be a social activist, so he would contend that she very much intended to be arrested on the bus that day and her statement that she just wanted to go home was more metaphorical than literal. Small acts do in fact move history, but they are often premeditated by a great deal of education and training and reflection. That is something for us to think about. He is pretty sure she intended on her own arrest which makes it even more meaningful to him.

Margo Warden said she has some questions around looking at Johnson and the area and talking about refugee and sanctuary cities. Larger cities have public transportation, employment opportunities and pretty vibrant social services. She imagines that schools there already have English language learning established. Are the 5 subcommittees all simultaneous or is one building to the next, with perhaps the last being identification as a sanctuary town? She has concerns about whether we are ready in all those areas she mentioned and about community readiness to welcome and support refugees.

Eric said he thinks we decided at our last meeting that we would work on all five areas. This is a small town. Margo's questions are good. We are saying we will look into it. He thinks the most anti-racist thing that can happen is proximity. Having schoolmates, workmates and colleagues who are people who look different from you is what really moves the needle on racism. But do we have the support and resources for that? Can we provide people the assistance they need? He really doesn't know but he thinks it is worth looking into.

Margo said she heard mention of refugees being an economic driver. She wants it to be grounded in inclusivity and equity.

Eric said he doesn't think everyone is going to agree on the moral reasons for anti-racism. Why we are doing what we are doing isn't something everyone will agree on but we might be able to get everyone to agree on the multiple benefits of proximity. Anti-racism is for everyone and not just certain sectors or demographics. It benefits the entire community, including in economic ways. That allows everyone to get behind this effort because there is something in it for everyone.

Sophia said it seems like Margo's concern is that we should bring refugees to Johnson not just because it is a good thing for all the white people here but because it will support the people asking to move here, right? Margo agreed. Sophia said if we are asking people to live here we want their quality of life to be good and stable. We should not just want people to move here so we can have a black neighbor.

Eric said there is something in it for everyone. He would hope we would do it because someone coming here would experience real benefits by living in our community.

Portia asked if Mark was able to speak with refugees. Mark said he hasn't gotten that far. He doubts he will be able to do that immediately. Kristine Lott was very eager to talk with us. If we want guest speakers she is quite willing to meet with our group. There are different outreach programs where we are able to talk to families. Through his job he knows more than many people about sex trafficking. The local group deals with those people as refugees. He feels that if he could be part of helping one sex trafficking victim that would be pretty awesome. As Margo mentioned, there are a lot of economic and transportation pieces we can't offer right now but down the road we probably could. Down the road we might be able to have a family join us in a Zoom meeting where we can all talk to them. Mark has been talking to superintendent Cat Gallagher about what our committee is doing. She is very happy about it and eager to get involved also. His primary reason for being on this committee was to be the bridge from Johnson to the high school. He thinks there is a huge upside to this. He would like to continue putting it together and present it. It might not happen but he would at least like to have an opportunity to look at it.

Rick said Lamoille County and Winooski were two areas that were awarded the Working Community Challenge Grant. The focus in Lamoille County is on workforce development. He doesn't remember what Winooski's was. He thinks they were going to appoint an equity coordinator or something like that. Mark may want to check with the mayor on that.

Steve Hatfield said he thinks there a lot of different ways we could get involved with helping refugee families before any of them move to Johnson. He had thought about carpooling to one of those communities to provide help with tutoring in English or other skills. Maybe we can make connections that way. For himself, he thinks he would have to have a COVID vaccine first but hopefully that is soon. It's something he has always thought of doing but he was always a little intimidated. But if we were doing it as a group it might make it easier in a lot of ways.

Jasmine Yuris said she would like to advocate for this group to try to follow up on the training from Bor Yang. The response to it was really positive. She thinks our community could benefit from another training by her. It could easily be done by Zoom. Jasmine also wanted to ask a logistical question. The committee voted at the first meeting not to require a second for motions, just to have a motion and then open it up for public comment. She noticed that wasn't done tonight. A motion was made and seconded and the committee didn't open it up for public comment. She wanted clarification on how meetings are going to operate.

Eric said motions are made by the committee and voted on by the committee and there is room for public comment at the end. He doesn't know if there is room for public comment on each individual motion. He is not clear on that. Rick said he can look into that. He knows when the trustees or selectboard meet they make a motion and before they vote on it they open it up to public comment. Jasmine suggested that getting public input before making a final vote might be a good way to operate. Eric said he is most familiar with the school

board. They have public comment at the beginning and rest of the meeting is just the board. Mark said he thinks what Jasmine described is what we agreed on.

Rick said both boards approved using Donna Griffiths to do minutes and both were willing to share the cost.

Sophia said she really appreciates the initiative and energy this group has. She wants to thank all the committee members.

**5. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:58.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*

UNAPPROVED