

JOHNSON RACIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
REMOTE PARTICIPATION VIA ZOOM TELECONFERENCING
THURSDAY, MAY 20, 2021

Present:

Committee Members: Eric Hutchins, Raven Pfaff, Diane Lehouiller, Sophia Berard, Portia Foss

Others: Jackie Stanton, Margo Warden, Shayne Spence, Kyle Nuse, Walter Pomroy, Jasmine Yuris, Saudia LaMont

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Portia called the meeting to order at 6:08.

2. Review Agenda and Any Adjustments, Changes, Additions

No changes to the agenda were needed

3. Approval of Minutes

Eric moved to approve the minutes of May 6, 2021 and the motion was passed.

4. Accept Rick Aupperlee's Resignation from the Racial Justice Committee

Eric moved to accept Rick Aupperlee's resignation and the motion was passed.

5. Elect Chair and Vice Chair

Portia called for nominations for chair. Sophia nominated Portia. Portia respectfully declined as she is not sure she can put 100% into it right now. Portia nominated Sophia, seconded by Diane. Sophia was elected chair.

Sophia called for nominations for vice chair. Diane nominated Eric. Eric was elected vice chair.

6. Reassess and Discuss Conducting the RJC Meetings in a More Formal Way

Eric said he thinks we have had some difficulties in a number of our meetings. He suggests stronger adherence to something more like Robert's Rules, discussing one agenda item at a time, with all members of the committee speaking first and only opening comments to the public once committee members have had input. All comments in the meeting should be addressed to the chair. That is a common way to keep meeting civil and conversations on topic. People should wait to be recognized by the chair before speaking, whether they are committee members or members of the public. If we use these guidelines, meetings will be less formal but he thinks they will be more fruitful and less contentious. Sophia agreed. Diane said she thinks that sounds good.

7. Discuss Suggested Action Items

Sophia said Jackie Stanton had sent an email to the committee with a lot of different points laid out. Sophia took those ideas and incorporated other things discussed at past meetings and things added by committee members.

A. Finalize Template for RJC Essay Contest

Jackie sent the template used by Rutland NAACP. Their prompt was: *A 150-500 word speech to other young people expressing your commitment to anti-racism and encouraging peers to be anti-racist.* Shayne Spence shared some prompts he thought of.

Eric said our request for funds was denied by the village trustees. The selectboard approved \$200. The Lamoille Restorative Center agreed to contribute the other \$200. They have also shown

willingness to collaborate with us on publicizing the contest and perhaps judging or creating criteria for judging but for the time being they can only commit to the financial support.

Raven suggested we could use the same framework Rutland NAACP used for their contest and just plug in our details. Eric said he thinks that is a good idea.

Sophia said Nat Kinney had a preference that the prizes go to Johnson residents. Eric said there is an elementary school in Johnson that only Johnson residents go to and a school in Hyde Park with grades 7-12 with students from Johnson, Hyde Park, Cambridge, Waterville, Belvidere and Eden. About 200 of the students are from Johnson. One selectboard member expressed a preference for prize money going to a Johnson resident but was not really dedicated to that idea. Eric would like as much participation as possible. And part of the funding is from the Lamoille Restorative Center, which is a countywide organization. He doesn't have strong feelings about what grade levels the contest should be for. He has access to high school students and knows there is racial justice work being done at the high school. He knows there are a lot of summer programs at campuses in the district. He thinks the NAACP prompt is targeted to slightly more mature kids. He suggests opening the contest to any Lamoille North School District students in grades 7-12.

Sophia asked if we want to go ahead with \$400 for prizes or fundraise more. Eric said he thinks we should go with \$400. He suggested one or two people can later approve some details like where people should send their entries. Maybe the whole committee just needs to approve the deadline and the award amounts.

Sophia asked, do we want to launch the contest on Juneteenth? What is a reasonable deadline? Eric said the last day of school is June 11. Summer programming starts in July. If we want maximum participation it would probably be preferable to have something to hand out during the last week of school. If we plan a Juneteenth event, that would be another opportunity to promote the contest but he thinks we should get publicity out sooner rather than later. Diane asked what the last day of summer school is. Eric said he believes it is 4 weeks entirely falling within the month of July.

Eric moved to sponsor an essay contest for residents of Lamoille North School District in grades 7 through 12 answering the prompt: A 150-500 word speech to other young people expressing your commitment to anti-racism and encouraging peers to be anti-racist, with \$400 to be distributed to winners and with deadline and judging details to be worked out by the education subcommittee. He said he thinks he is the education subcommittee. He can have a final proposal for the next meeting.

Raven said she is thinking she might want a different prompt but not much different. Eric said he thinks the exact prompt could be finalized later.

The motion was passed.

B. Discuss 5/17/21 Selectboard Meeting

Eric said at the last selectboard meeting he told the selectboard that we want to reset this committee a little and do things everyone on the selectboard can get behind. He was concerned that the committee was dividing the town into teams. He gave selectboard members his contact information

and he has talked to members of the community. He had a lovely conversation with one selectboard member the next day. He thinks we can get a lot of selectboard support for things we want to do.

C. Graphic Document of Inclusivity and Anti-Racism Statements

Sophia said she noticed a Racial Justice Committee image on Facebook. Portia said she made that with an app on her phone. Sophia said she really liked that. Diane said she likes the idea of having a picture of the inclusivity statement Kate Westcott painted. Maybe Great Big Graphics could print it. Sophia suggested if we just want an 8.5x11" document maybe we just need a copy shop. She suggested someone could take a picture of the Kate Westcott sign and all committee members can see it before making a final decision on the graphic. Diane said she will take a picture of it. She said the anti-racism statement doesn't have a graphic that she knows of. She asked about the image on Facebook that Sophia had mentioned. Portia said she made a graphic that she shared to her personal Facebook page. Diane asked if that would be good to use for the anti-racism statement. Sophia said she thinks that would be great. Raven said she thinks it is very nice.

Sophia said if committee members like this graphic we should discuss how we might pay for getting it printed. Diane asked if we should talk about fundraising first. A member of the public suggested in chat asking Great Big Graphics if they would donate.

Diane moved to create a graphic document of the inclusivity statement and anti-racism statement and to ask Great Big Graphics to donate the cost of printing.

Raven asked if Great Big Graphics is a small town business or a franchise. Sophia said it is a local business in Morrisville.

Jasmine said she loves this idea. She is eager to talk about what the conversation is going to look like between business owners and the Racial Justice Committee or Johnson Works, whoever is going to reach out to business owners about displaying the statements. Maybe before spending money to print out hard copies the committee should have conversations with business owners. Maybe the committee should come up with a prompt for talking to them.

Kyle Nuse said she was also going to suggest that before spending money on printing copies the committee should have conversations with business owners and Johnson Works. Her feeling is that those businesses that are interested in putting up the graphic would probably be willing to pay for it. In the past NVU has also donated printing materials. They did all the printing for the Johnson Jubilee flyers and the mass mailing on local businesses.

Jackie suggested making it 8.5x14" and then both statements could be on the same sheet. She doesn't think it will be that expensive.

Diane said she likes Jasmine's suggestion about planning something to say to businesses before we do anything. We could write something up so we are all saying the same thing. Presenting the idea to Johnson Works and businesses probably has to happen first. If we do matting and framing maybe businesses would buy this statement.

Diane withdrew her motion. She said she thinks we need to discuss more of what we will say and maybe write something up for our next meeting about how we will approach Johnson Works and businesses.

Sophia said we could also draft up the image. It was agreed that she and Portia will work on the graphic for the statements for the next meeting.

D. Inclusivity and Anti-Racism Statements on Kiosks, Bookmarks, etc.

Sophie said after we have a graphic design we can discuss other items like bookmarks

E. Option of Hanging REAL Banner on Pearl Street

Diane said she contacted Jen Stefanski and found that the village did not charge NVU for hanging their banner on Pearl Street, but NVU donates \$6K to the village each year to cover that type of thing. It was hard to get information from the Red Cross about whether they were charged for having their banner hung in the village. They have people that sometimes hang their banners but some towns hang them. They didn't have a dollar figure. Diane thinks we should probably ask the trustees if they will hang the banner over Pearl Street without charging us. And if they want to charge us we can ask how much.

Eric said the committee was created by them. We are them. He suggested any requests to the trustees wait until after the June 8th election.

Diane said the village would charge us for the labor involved in hanging the banner over Route 15. There would be a lot they would have to put up. She believes they could waive the charge. She thinks it was mostly labor for putting the infrastructure on the poles. The Racial Justice Committee would have to raise that money to pay for it. Sophia said they had a spreadsheet showing the costs to install the wire for the banner on poles by Sterling Market. They found the best spot on Main Street to hang a banner and came up with a cost sheet showing a cost of \$1100. We can give them a new proposal that they hang it on Pearl Street with no extra cost for installing the wires because wires are already there. We probably don't want to pay \$1100. We don't have a budget. She thinks they would not charge us labor for hanging it on Pearl Street because the infrastructure exists. Hopefully they would just do it as part of public displays because we are a village committee. Eric said it is absurd for them to charge us, because we are doing their business. We are not an outside organization asking for services. This is a town and village committee. They appointed us.

Diane said she agrees but it is the electric department that is charging. It is its own department with its own revenue and expenses. There are also water and sewer departments and a general department. When the general department wants the electric department to do something the electric department has to get paid. She noted that Donna pointed out in the chat that the \$6K from NVU is just for fire department services. It sounds like the college doesn't pay for the service of hanging their banner.

Sophia said she doesn't believe we are entertaining the thought of paying \$1100. We are deciding if we want to propose that they hang the banner on Pearl Street where the NVU banner goes. The idea of hanging it on Main Street without a fee was not supported by the trustees.

Raven said if we have a proposed date for hanging it on Pearl Street that will make it easier to communicate with REAL about it. Sophie asked if Raven can find out when it is available.

Jackie said when she asked at the trustee board meeting, Meredith said the college doesn't pay anything for having their banners put up. She is hoping that same grace would be extended to the Racial Justice Committee.

Kyle said it is true that the \$6K just goes to the fire department. This is a free service the village is offering to the college. It makes sense that they would extend it to their committee. If there is still cost involved they have a budgeted line item called "flags, festivals and celebrations." She thinks this could fall under that if it absolutely has to.

Diane moved to ask the village trustees to hang the REAL banner on Pearl Street instead of Main Street, free of charge. Eric suggested striking "free of charge." He said it is an obvious assumption that it would be free if they do it free for other groups. **Diane agreed a friendly amendment.** (*Saudia LaMont joined the meeting at 7:27.*) **Diane restated her amended motion: to ask the village trustees to hang the REAL banner across Pearl Street on a date to be determined by June 3rd. The motion was passed.**

F. Create Unique Johnson RJC Banner

Portia said she thinks it is a great idea for the committee to create its own banner. Raven asked if what we had to come up with has to be used just for a banner or if we could put it on other things like stickers. Diane said she really likes the idea of a banner that includes Black Lives Matter, pride and other symbols. She likes the idea of stickers.

Jasmine said she likes the idea of something that is canvas, rough and tumble, unique to our town. She is enthusiastic about this idea.

Jackie said she loves the idea and loves the idea of stickers. Stickers are cheap. Once the banner is made someone can photograph it and that can be used to make stickers.

Sophia said she can start working on designing the banner with Raven and anyone else who is interested. People can start drafting ideas and sending them to each other. If it is big, maybe we can create an outline and have elementary students paint it in.

G. Request to Town/Village That a Budget Be Established for the Joint RJC

Eric said at the last selectboard meeting he said that Hardwick's Racial Justice Committee had been given \$5K because that was what someone told the committee. Jackie said \$5K was the amount they requested. Eric said Mike Dunham said that in fact the Town of Hardwick Equity Committee only received \$2,500. But that is a minor distinction since we have zero. He thinks it is very reasonable to ask the trustees and the selectboard for a budget. Hardwick has approximately the same population as Johnson and their committee got \$2,500.

Eric moved to request an annual budget of \$1,500 each from the selectboard and the village trustees to further the work the Racial Justice Committee was charged to do.

Sophia said at the last village trustee meeting a major sticking point for the chair was double taxation. He doesn't believe the trustees should be asked for the same amount of money the selectboard is asked for. He believes that is not fair to village taxpayers because they pay both

village and town taxes. There was a huge discussion at that meeting around \$200. She wants to make that clear before we ask for \$1500.

Raven said in addition there was a comment made that she understood to mean that Johnson residents were struggling and requesting money was a disservice to people of the town. That is how she took that comment. That made sense but she feels the Racial Justice Committee should be a line item in the budget, if not now then in the future.

Eric asked if Kyle had information to share on the issue of double taxation as a former selectboard member. Kyle said it is a matter of perspective. Her perspective is that village residents are not double taxed. The town gives 10 cents on the grand list to the village to fund the general department, which is used for things like this. Her perspective is that village residents get taxed but reimbursed. She is fairly sure that adding a line item to the budget will have to be brought to the village and town voters. That had to happen for the Beautification Committee to get funding in the budget. She thinks it is appropriate for the committee to ask for a budget but it will probably mean a townwide vote.

Eric asked, so we will have to wait until next March? Kyle said yes. She said there are places within the selectboard budget and the trustee budget where they could fund some things before that. The selectboard has a consulting line item. That is how the educational programs with Bor Yang got paid for.

Eric amended his motion: that the committee request that the trustees and the selectboard each add a line item to their budget for the Racial Justice Committee in the amount of \$1500, for a total of \$3,000, to be approved by voters.

Sophie said she wonders if this motion needs to be made now or closer to March. Raven said if we make it now it could be in their thoughts.

Jasmine asked, to avoid the double taxation concerns, what if the committee just asked the selectboard for \$3K? Eric said he thinks we should ask both boards. Diane asked, what about asking the selectboard for more than the trustees? Eric said he thinks the extra scrutiny for this committee is only based on objections to what the committee is trying to do. Maybe we should research the double taxation issue. He withdrew his motion. He suggested that committee members do financial research and think about what would be a reasonable amount to ask for.

H. Option of Hanging REAL Banner on Pearl Street (continued)

Saudia said she thinks the banner will be available starting around June 21 and through the month of July.

Diane moved to request hanging the REAL banner on Pearl Street from June 21 through July 31. Sophie suggested giving some time for transit of the banner. Diane agreed to a friendly amendment to change the start date to June 28. The motion was passed.

Margo suggested it would be nice for the banner to be up when the college is welcoming new and returning students in August. Sophie asked if the college would have a banner up at that time. Margo said she is wondering if both could be up. Sophie said maybe by then we will have a banner of our own and the college would let us put it up on campus or we can put it somewhere in town. Tuesday

Night Live is happening in July, so if the banner is up then, people coming for Tuesday Night Live will see it.

I. Explore Juneteenth Celebration/Demonstration Options

Sophie said Portia had at one time recommended a Juneteenth unity walk. Jackie had suggested partnering with Be-Longing for Justice on that. The idea of kicking off the essay contest on Juneteenth had been mentioned but it sounds like we will be doing that earlier.

Portia said she invited Saudia today because they thought maybe we could collaborate or share ideas with REAL. She feels a unity walk is a good idea. Saudia said there are a lot of things happening in Burlington for Juneteenth, but that sets the tone that BIPOC people only exist in Chittenden County, so she and some others are planning an event on the State House lawn in Montpelier on Juneteenth. They are engaging racial equity groups across Lamoille County. They will do a drive for liberation from Morrisville to Montpelier. The Johnson Racial Justice Committee could coordinate and do a drive from Johnson to Morrisville and then people could join the drive from Morrisville. REAL has 100 Black Lives Matter signs that can be rented for a suggested donation during the week of Juneteenth for a fundraiser and for visibility. Some local restaurants are offering to donate a red drink if you purchase a meal because the colors of liberation are red, black and green. She and the people she is working with re trying to pull together all rural racial equity organizations. There is a volunteer sign-up sheet for the Montpelier event.

Eric asked about the time and place the drive is starting in Morrisville. Saudia said she is thinking people will start lining up between 2:00 and 2:30 at CCV and pull out about 2:45 to 3:00. The goal is to arrive in Montpelier around 4:00. In Montpelier there will be food vendor trucks and an open mike. If any black people want to speak or perform, that list is still open. She would love to see a youth tent.

Eric suggested maybe there could be a unity walk in Johnson with people meeting at the green at 1:00 and coming back at 2:00 and then anyone who wanted to could move on to Morrisville. Portia said she thinks that is a good idea.

Sophie asked if Jackie has any ideas how the committee could partner with Be-Longing for Justice on the unity walk. Jackie said right now Be-Longing for Justice is planning on doing what they have always done at 5:00 on Juneteenth.

Saudia put a link in the chat for people to get information and see the sign-up list for the Montpelier event.

Jackie asked who is sponsoring it. Saudia said she and someone else are organizing it and trying to collaborate with all the rural racial justice organizations. It is a community-led event. Jackie said she can see if the core members of Be-Longing for Justice are interested.

Sophie suggested the Racial Justice Committee could start promoting this and get involved. Eric said we could get more information before the next meeting and put something out after that meeting.

Sophie asked, if someone has an idea for child engagement should they email Saudia? Saudia said yes. She is going to reach out to the Family Center and Headstart.

Portia asked if the event is being advertised. Saudia said they just had their first meeting today for the drive. They felt that part of what made their last drive so successful was that it was impromptu. They discussed that if they put out information far ahead of time it could make it easier for people to negatively impact the event through counter demonstrations, etc. It will be marketed but they are waiting until closer to the date. For now any publicity is word of mouth.

Saudia said Margo Warden noted in the chat that there will be a George Floyd remembrance/gathering/student walkout in the center of Morrisville from 2:30 to 4:00. It is organized by student racial justice groups at PA and Stowe. Students will walk from People's Academy and some Stowe High School students will drive over from Stowe. She suggested letting Lamoille Union students know that REAL has a youth coalition. Youth ambassadors at PA and Stowe would love to connect with students from other schools.

J. Explore Options Around RJC Presence at TNL

Sophie said she asked the Tuesday Night Live Committee if the RJC could have a table there and they said yes. Maybe we can have our banner at Tuesday Night Live. Diane suggested we could have a table with a banner and sell things for fundraising. Can we be at the bread oven selling things we bake in the oven?

Eric asked what the purpose of a presence at Tuesday Night Live would be – education or outreach or an appeal to people to join the meetings? It would be easy to make a misstep there but it also could have a good impact. He thinks we would need to think hard about the purpose and who and what would be at the table. Everyone from the community goes to Tuesday Night Live. We would interact with everyone, not just willing RJC participants.

Jasmine said she feels like the setting of Tuesday Night Live might not be the best place to dive into potential conversations the committee would want to have with community members. She suggested having a visible banner that is not manned might have the best impact. The event is loud and the environment doesn't lend itself to engaging in an effective way. Eric said he is thinking about putting out information like when the committee meets, not having discussions on issues.

Jackie said tables at Tuesday Night Live traditionally are just for visibility. Maybe there could be a schedule of when the committee meetings are and very general information. It is really about presence and visibility. Sophie suggested we could have an email list. Raven said it would be good to get information about meetings out there. She has had a couple of conversations with people her age who didn't have social media and were curious about the meetings. There is an audience we haven't reached. The committee agreed to think about this and discuss it again on June 3.

8. Other Business

Raven suggested the idea of an artist's market, focused toward BIPOC artists. They could sell their own art. Sophie said the Tuesday Night Live Committee made a decision two years ago not to allow any non-food vendors at TNL, but this could happen independently.

Jackie asked how the idea connects to the Racial Justice Committee. Raven said she originally got the idea because of a BIPOC art exhibit being created in Stowe. It would allow BIPOC people to showcase their art and also make money for themselves. Jackie suggested that might tie in well with some things the Studio Center is doing. Sophie said she can help connect Raven with Harlan Mack at the Studio Center.

9. Public Comment

Eric asked Shayne Spence to comment. Would he say this meeting was welcoming and inclusive and that he was allowed to express himself? Shayne said being put on the spot like that did not make him feel more comfortable.

Raven read a quote from *The Four Agreements* about being impeccable with your word.

10. Adjourn

Diane moved to adjourn, the motion was passed, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:46.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths

UNAPPROVED