

JOHNSON RACIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
THURSDAY, JULY 1, 2021

Present:

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

Others: Jackie Stanton, Rob Rodriguez, Shayne Spence, Kyle Nuse, Jasmine Yuris

Committee Members Absent: Portia Foss

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Sophia called the meeting to order at 6:06.

2. Review Agenda and Any Adjustments, Changes, Additions

Sophie added discussion about the possibility of bringing in someone to do anti-racism story time. Raven added discussion of Minority Mental Health Awareness Month.

3. Review and Approve Minutes

Eric moved to approve the minutes of June 3, 2021 and the motion was passed.

4. Update: Governance of RJC

Sophie said at the last trustee board meeting it was decided that the trustees will no longer have jurisdiction over the RJC. It will just be governed by the selectboard. Eric said that doesn't mean we won't bring issues to the trustees; it just means that town is in charge of any potential budget or appointments.

Sophie said the town has yet to post the openings on this committee. She will reach out to Brian Story about the timeline for that.

Eric said Jackie Stanton shared some documents from Windsor. They have student representatives on their racial justice committee. He suggested getting students from the high school or NVU either to fill openings on the committee or to do public service for the committee.

Jackie said one of the first things the Windsor group did when they formed was reach out to Xusana Davis. She gave them information on some other racial justice groups, including REAL. Eric said he can send an email to Xusana Davis letting her know this group exists and seeing if she has any suggestions to offer us.

Jasmine asked if the RJC is going to ask the selectboard to make a decision on July 19 about who to appoint to the committee. Board members said yes. Jasmine asked if the committee is going to make a recommendation. Eric said it is ultimately the selectboard's decision but the committee did make a recommendation previously. Jackie said she thinks recommendations from the committee have a lot of weight. She noted that this committee won't meet before the next selectboard meeting to look at applications or letters of interest and come up with recommendations.

Kyle said she wonders if it is worth reaching out to those who previously applied to be on the committee and were not appointed. Eric said he thinks people who are already involved in committee meetings are the ideal candidates. He doesn't know why we need to spend energy spreading the net further. But he doesn't think it is our job to recommend appointments to the selectboard.

Shayne said there may be people who have personal feelings about racial justice issues but feel they can't engage with a government group. The committee is overwhelmingly white. Maybe people of color are not comfortable coming to meetings. He questions just relying on people who are already showing up to fill the open positions. There may be others who are engaged and know the issues better than we do. He has pushed for more of a process because he has a friend who is a woman of color who applied to be on the committee and didn't have the chance to be interviewed by the committee. He feels anyone who puts their name forward should have a chance. He also suggests reaching out to people who have applied in the past. He thinks they would need to apply again. Sophie said the problem is that we don't know who all those people are.

Eric suggested that Sophie ask Brian to post the two committee openings and suggest that he email previous candidates and ask him to do those things as soon as possible.

Shayne suggested sharing a graphic about the openings on social media. A lot of people get information from there and nowhere else.

Sophie said she believes once he gets applications Brian Story will share them with the committee. Then if we want to make a recommendation we can.

5. Update: REAL Banner on Pearl St.

Sophie said she is hoping to get the banner tomorrow morning from MoCo.

Raven asked for clarification about what the village's banner policy says about payment for putting up banners. Sophia said there is nothing we have to pay. The trustees will cover the cost. Eric said there is no banner policy in place now. The trustees are having their lawyer look at the proposed new banner policy and then they will pass it.

6. Human Rights Commission – Scheduling Workshop(s)

Sophia said Diane asked how much the Human Rights Commission workshops would cost and hasn't heard back. Diane said a Human Rights Commission member wanted to find out which workshop we want. We want whichever one we can schedule first. She can reach out to him.

7. Selectboard Expectations/Direction of RJC

Sophie said the committee has asked the selectboard what its vision for us is and we haven't gotten an answer yet. They said they would devote about 20 minutes to discussing it at a meeting but that hasn't happened yet. We could ask them to put that discussion on their next agenda. Eric said it suggested it would be good to ask selectboard members what doing each of the items on the original five-point plan looks like to them.

Eric asked about the timeline for getting an RJC budget approved by the voters. Sophie said she thought we had discussed tabling it till the fall. Jackie said a budget for this committee

has to wait until town meeting, but can the board provide some money for the committee? Eric said he thinks the board can vote allocate money for a specific thing but can't give the committee a budget at this point. Sophie agreed. She said she thinks a line item in the budget for the committee needs to be approved at town meeting.

Jackie said the Windsor group had a budget and also was able to apply for grants. She doesn't know if that is a possibility for this group. Eric said the selectboard had talked about ARPA funds but he understands the money has to be distributed by counties. Shayne said because Vermont doesn't have county government it is being disbursed to towns but there are quite a few strings attached.

Diane suggested Xusana Davis might know about available grants.

Sophie suggested that she reach out to Xusana Davis and Eric reach out to Brian Story and Eric agreed.

Jasmine suggested that perhaps the RJC should present what they would like to do during the discussion with the selectboard about expectations and direction. Eric said we can suggest ideas and ask if the selectboard thinks those things are the right direction for the committee or if they have other ideas. Sophie said she likes that approach.

Eric said before sending an email to Brian about posting RJC openings and items for the selectboard agenda he will circulate it to RJC members.

8. ***Progress Pride Flag Flown at Municipal Building for VT Pride Week***

Sophie said Jackie suggested that the RJC suggest that a progress pride flag be flown at the municipal building for Vermont Pride Week. Eric said the village is responsible for flags at the municipal building. Jackie said the RJC can still get support from the selectboard for the idea. She thinks it is worth bringing it to them. Diane noted that the building belongs to both town and village. Jackie said she thinks the request would just be to display the flag in some fashion for that week, not specifying whether it is on the flagpole or the building. She said the flag costs \$60 if it is purchased from the designer. She suggested asking the municipality for the money.

Eric moved to ask the village trustees to fly a progress pride flag during the week of August 28 to September 5 and the motion was passed.

Eric moved to ask the selectboard for \$60 to purchase a progress pride flag from the designer and the motion was passed.

Eric said it would be helpful to get information about other government entities that fly this flag. Jackie said Winooski just put one up and the State Department and US embassies around the world fly it. Shayne said the Vermont State Police put it up as their profile picture on Facebook.

9. ***Johnson Inclusivity and Anti-Racism Statements***

It was agreed that Sophie will reach out to the Conservation Commission and Raven will go to a Johnson Works meeting to talk about displaying graphics with the inclusivity and anti-

racism statements. The RJC will ask the Conservation Commission to place them on kiosks and ask Johnson Works to see if any businesses are interested in displaying them and to put the anti-racism statement on their website in addition to the inclusivity statement.

10. RJC Banner

Raven and Sophia didn't get the banner done before Juneteenth but have plans to reach out on Front Porch Forum to invite people to join them to discuss creation of a banner. Then they can work on painting it. Sophie has canvas that can be used. Jackie suggested asking the selectboard for money for supplies. Kyle said the Beautification Committee can donate some leftover paint and the Studio Store offers supplies at cost for non-profits.

Eric moved to request up to \$100 from the selectboard for materials to create a Johnson RJC banner. The committee will also solicit donations and try to find materials. **The motion was passed.**

Jasmine asked about the timeline for completing the banner. Will it be used at Tuesday Night Live? Sophie said the RJC can't ask the selectboard for money until July 10. The Tuesday Night Live Committee said it would be fine for the RJC to set up a table at Tuesday Night Live. She envisions having the banner there as well as a donation jar. Eric said he thinks collecting donations sends the wrong message. This is a subcommittee of a government group, not a charity. We should be getting the town to provide funding. Kyle said the Beautification Committee asked for donations of flowers knowing that would free up money to be spent on something else. She thinks there can be a balance. Sophie said she agrees that there should be line item in the town budget for the RJC but she remembers the selectboard saying that there are a lot of committees that fundraise and the selectboard doesn't give them all the money they need. It was agreed not to solicit donations at Tuesday Night Live, just give out information.

Shayne said fundraising brings people in and gets them engaged but the town should also be engaged. He suggested having items like flags, buttons, etc. at the RJC table to sell for fundraising. Jackie suggested the RJC could get money from the town to buy the items and then give them away.

Jackie recommended printing both the inclusivity and anti-racism statements on a single 8.5x15 inch sheet. Jasmine agreed that would be a good idea.

Sophia said she will reach out to Portia about finalizing the graphics.

11. Social Media Presence

Sophia said she thinks the RJC should have a Facebook page. It could reach a lot of people. We could share articles and post pertinent information.

Eric asked who will administer it. Sophia said she thinks it would be someone on the committee. Rob Rodriguez said there is a town social media policy. Jackie said she thinks it includes a requirement to get back to people within a certain amount of time.

Sophie suggested tabling this until we have more committee members. She believes it is important to have a social media presence so people can reach out and the committee can be

more engaging. Raven said we might get more feedback from a Facebook page. Eric recommended turning off the ability for people to comment. Jackie said no other town page has comments turned off. Shayne said there have been lawsuits due to public officials not allowing constituents to comment. Jasmine said the page could have very strong rules about what types of things can be posted.

12. Report on Written Expression Contest

Eric said he has gotten no requests for information and no entries so far. He has emailed the middle school and high school principals to ask permission to distribute information about the contest. He plans on giving out information during the first week of the summer program. He also sent information to the state homeschool office. Sophie said Kristen MacDowell sent out information about the contest from the library. Sophie asked if Eric could post information on Front Porch Forum and Eric agreed. It was mentioned that the committee could be open to extending the deadline if necessary.

Jasmine asked what the process will be when entries are received. Eric said the Restorative Center said they could help judge entries. Essays are to be sent as attachments without names. Probably people from the Restorative Center and the RJC will discuss the entries on an email chain. Jackie said she would like to be involved. Eric said the committee can include community volunteers in the judging process. Jasmine said she would love to see the entries.

Sophie said she will ask Kristen to put information about the contest on the library's Facebook page.

13. Anti-Racism Story Time

Sophie said there is a resident of Wolcott who does anti-racism story times. Her pay scale is based on the result of a self-assessment related to privilege. It is a reparative mode of payment. Sophie reviewed the self-assessment questions and the committee concluded that the Town of Johnson's cost would be \$150.

Jackie asked, is it just reading a book? Sophie and Jasmine said there is usually a craft, two books and an activity.

Jasmine said Kristen MacDowell does not feel comfortable doing an anti-racism story time herself but she is supportive of the idea of someone else credible hosting it.

Eric said he thinks this sounds like it should go to the library committee. He thinks this would be an opportunity for the RJC to coordinate with the library, which probably has a budget for this. Jasmine asked if he is suggesting that the library or the town pay for it. Eric said the library. It has a budget for story time. The committee agreed to suggest this to the library. Sophie will reach out to Jessica Bickford about getting on the agenda for a library board meeting.

14. Minority Mental Health Awareness Month

Raven said July is Minority Mental Health Awareness Month. Jackie asked if Lamoille County Mental Health or other partner organizations know about this or are doing anything with it. Is there anything we could promote? Raven said not to her understanding, but she

could call organizations and ask if they are aware and doing anything about it. Shayne suggested some places to contact.

15. Public Comment

Shayne said since the town approved allowing retail cannabis he thinks it would be good for the RJC and the Planning Commission to start having conversations about where retail cannabis businesses might be located. The RJC and the Planning Commission might want to have a joint meeting.

Eric said he thinks the PDFs on the town of Johnson website about tourism and business opportunities ought to include the inclusivity and anti-racism statements. We should have messaging on the internet about our town, letting people know that we welcome people from diverse backgrounds. He suggested there could be one place where we provide information about the opportunity zone, the light industrial park and retail cannabis as well as our messaging about inclusivity and anti-racism. It would be an opportunity to converge economic growth and diversity.

Jackie said Johnson has a revolving loan fund. It provides low interest loans and is not advertised well. It seems like the loans are available on a first-come first-served basis. She suggested that the RJC could be involved in policy change regarding that fund. Kyle said the town and village each have a revolving loan fund. There is almost \$200K available in each one. Jackie said information about the loan funds is not on the website. Kyle said it is there but it is hard to find. The Johnson Works website is more user friendly. It has a whole section on business incentives. Johnson Works did put the inclusivity statement front and center on its website.

Kyle said the Beautification Committee may be calling on the RJC to join them for part of the process of putting up a mural. They got permission from the Tatro family to use some of their property to do a public mural piece called World Cow. Artist DJ Barry will create a 16 ft. mural of a cow whose spots are a world map on the facade of the largest former Parker & Stearns building facing the rail trail. That will happen in September.

Eric said he got an email inviting him to attend a meeting of Lamoille County Planning Commission's justice, equity and diversity committee.

16. Adjourn

Eric moved to adjourn, the motion was passed and the meeting was adjourned at 7:57.