

JOHNSON RACIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2021

Present:

Committee Members: Sophia Berard, Jeff Bickford, Raven Pfaff, Offie Wortham

Others: Brian Story, Jasmine Yuris, Jackie Stanton, Diane Lehouiller, Adelle MacDowell

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Sophia called the meeting to order at 6:03.

2. Review Agenda and Any Adjustments, Changes, Additions

No changes to the agenda were needed.

3. Approve Meeting Minutes from 10/7/21

Offie moved to approve the minutes of November 4, 2021 and the motion was passed.

4. Discuss Meeting Procedures

Kyle Nuse, Jackie Stanton, Shayne Spence and Adelle MacDowell have applied to be on the Racial Justice Committee. Two people will be appointed by the selectboard at its second meeting in December.

Sophia said we could wait to appoint a co-chair until we have more members. (*Jeff arrived at 6:06.*) She likes the idea of having a co-chair rather than a vice chair. That would spread the responsibility around a little. If a co-chair is elected maybe the co-chairs could take turns running meetings or maybe the whole committee would like to take turns. (*Jasmine Yuris arrived at 6:07.*) It was agreed to discuss this further at the next meeting and to wait to appoint a co-chair until the committee has full membership.

5. Grant Extension

Sophia said we have received an extension on the Vermont Humanities Council grant. The grant report is now due April 30. She is not sure if Laura Smith will be able to do an anti-racist story time. She is interested in moving more towards working with K-4 students. But there may be someone else we can work with. The \$1000 Humanities Council grant is to pay for an anti-racist story time, the workshops and an RJC banner. Jackie suggested maybe we could partner with the school for a K-4 anti-racism program.

Sophia said we have dates chosen with Amanda Garces for the workshops. The first will be Thursday, February 10 from 5:30 to 7:30, either on Zoom or in person. The second will be Saturday, February 12. That will be bystander training and will hopefully be in person. We will have to find a venue. We have used the JES gym before.

Jeff said he had talked with a staff member that advises the Coalition of Minority Students at the college. The requirement for everyone on campus to be fully vaccinated could be a barrier to having an event at the college. He is not sure if it is worth asking if that requirement could be lifted for a single program. Probably bringing students here would be better.

Sophia said Amanda will set up the Zoom links and we can have people start registering. We can ask them as they register if they prefer to meet via Zoom or in person.

Jeff said the workshops will be in the middle of basketball season. If we are thinking about using the school we should ask soon.

The committee discussed starting to advertise the workshops after the holidays. Jeff suggested starting to advertise January 2.

Sophia said Amanda prefers to have both workshops in person if possible but for the bystander training in particular Amanda feels it makes more sense to have that in person.

Sophia asked if anyone on the committee wants to help with advertising the events. Front Porch Forum and the town Facebook page are probably the best places to advertise. Raven said she can let REAL know the dates. Diane suggested that a radio advertisement on WLVB is a good way to get the word out to a lot of people. She asked if the Studio Center, Laraway, etc. will be directly invited. Sophia said yes.

Jackie said last time the goal was just to have people from Johnson. Is the goal to draw people from throughout Lamoille County or is this just a Johnson thing? Jasmine asked if we were specific in our grant application. Sophia said we referred to "our community." It asked what county this would serve and she chose Lamoille.

Offie asked if anyone here has been to an implicit bias training. Jackie said we had this exact workshop in Johnson previously. The Human Rights Commission, a state government office, puts it on. Offie asked what they do at the training. Jackie said there were lectures, slides, film, and breakout groups.

Jackie suggested reaching out to the high school to let them know about the workshops. Diane suggested a notice could be included with village utility bills.

Jasmine said last time she remembers a solid presence from the selectboard. She would like to see those people return and she would like to see village trustees and also the fire department because they are working directly with people and might not have had training like this. Sophia agreed. She said it could be part of our report to the selectboard that we encourage selectboard attendance and we could also go to the trustees and let them know the plan and that we hope they can come. Brian suggested also inviting legislators.

Raven said she thinks she can commit to handling advertising. She can make phone calls, etc. She is not sure she would want to talk on the radio. Jeff said if there is any opportunity to talk on the radio he can do it. Diane suggested inviting the United Church and the Nazarene Church. Brian suggested contacting Emily Rosenbaum with the Working Communities Challenge. She is doing a lot of equity work around Lamoille County. Diane said she is on the LCPC board of directors and she can let their JEDI committee know.

The group discussed researching other possible presenters of an anti-racist story hour.

6. *Neighborhood Watch*

Sophia handed out copies of the statement Jeff had written up in response to neighborhood watch coming to Johnson. Some suggestions were made about ways to revise the letter. Jeff said he was thinking of putting the letter on Front Porch Forum. Sophia said she doesn't know how active the neighborhood watch is currently. She is wondering if it is still a thing.

Jasmine asked, was the town giving out neighborhood watch signs? Brian said yes. Jasmine asked, they were funded partly by the sheriff's department and partly by the town? Brian said yes. Jasmine asked if the cost was divided 50/50. Brian said he doesn't recall. The price came in at less than what both had committed to spend. Jasmine asked if it was around \$150 to \$200. Brian said yes. Jasmine asked who designed the signs. Brian said the town just ordered them. The design is owned by a company that does neighborhood watch signs. It is a commonly seen, pretty basic design. Jackie asked where the \$200 comes from. Brian said he believes we used our events fund but he would have to check.

Jeff said the last post on the Railroad Street/Johnson, Vermont Neighborhood Watch Facebook page was on October 8. He doesn't know how much it is still on people's minds. Brian said he knows from speaking to a few residents he knows on Railroad Street that the crimes that happened in summer and fall are still very much on their minds. He doesn't think people who live there post much on Facebook but they still talk to each other frequently.

Jasmine said she wonders if we could talk to Amanda Garces about the neighborhood watch so that maybe it could be discussed in the bystander intervention workshop. Others agreed that would be a good idea.

Sophia suggested that perhaps the statement should not come from the Racial Justice Committee but from the town. Maybe it could be given out with the signs. Brian said he thinks the RJC could make that proposal to the selectboard. He suggested it might be better received if the language talked more about offering additional resources and didn't seem to be criticizing decisions that people have been making. Jasmine said the RJC could show it to the selectboard and if they don't take it up then it could come from the RJC. Sophia suggested we could send it to the sheriff's department for them to share and publicize with the community.

Jeff will do another draft of the statement with changes based on the suggestions tonight.

7. *Budget Needs*

Brian said having a timeline of events and how the committee will spend the requested money makes the proposed budget more likely to pass. If the committee is doing any additional fundraising that would be helpful to identify.

Sophia said one thing she put in the draft budget was a projector and two screens. She asked the Bijou if they would rent us what they use for drive-thrus and the owner said no but said that they had two screens and a projector that they would sell us for \$1000. This would be for outdoor viewing.

Jackie said the idea of showing movies outdoors is new to her. She is wondering if people would prefer an outdoor film festival or an indoor one. Sophia said she just assumed when the committee discussed showing movies that we were talking about outdoor movies. Jasmine said she made the same assumption.

Jackie said this would be a big expenditure. We need to be sure it will be a popular idea that will work.

Sophia said the person she talked to at the Bijou said if we bought the screen our only other expense would be purchasing the license to show the movie. The licenses are around \$200 to \$1000. It is based on the size of the crowd. She put \$600 in the budget. Showing a movie could be a fundraising opportunity. People could buy tickets and we could sell food. If we purchased the equipment and other committees wanted to use it they could borrow or rent it.

Jasmine said she hadn't even considered indoor viewing until now. She is wondering if that would be easier. So much happens in the summer. Why not screen a movie once a week during February, which is Black History Month? Jackie said this is a lot of money. Sophia said even if the movies are shown indoors we still have to pay for the license. Jackie said we have to pay if it is a movie. It could be something like a TED Talk. Brian said there are some public domain movies that are free. Jasmine suggested maybe in the first year movies should be inside because that is cheaper. If the idea takes off in the future maybe we could show movies outside. Brian said the RJC could talk to the college, the elementary school and Jenna's Promise. All have facilities for showing movies inside.

It was agreed to remove from the budget the \$1000 purchase of screens and a projector.

Jeff said he thinks if we wanted to show an outdoor movie in the summer maybe we should go through Tim Mikovitz at NVU. If we wanted to do it in conjunction with an NVU student organization there might be student activities money available.

The committee discussed listing grants the committee has obtained as part of the budget information given to the selectboard. Jeff suggested saying we will do fundraising at each gathering. He has been trying to think of some niche (like pies for the Historical Society) that is something everyone wants and is not competing with anyone else.

Jackie suggested a couple of events we could say we are going to add. In the first quarter of the year we could do a reading of Frederick Douglass's 4th of July speech as an annual event. She had also previously suggested we could have birthday party for Martin Luther King's birthday with a huge cake and maybe some literature. Jeff suggested not adding too many events in year one and gradually adding more over time.

Sophia asked if we should list things that don't cost money in what we send the selectboard. Brian suggested it would be good to do that. There could be a calendar of events in addition to the budget proposal.

It was agreed to add \$50 to the proposed budget for a community reading of Frederick Douglass's July 4th speech. Jackie suggested at the Martin Luther King Day event there could be a speaker or we could show a speech or hand out literature. (*Diane left at 7:30.*) Jeff brought up possible copyright issues. He pointed out that someone has to run any events the committee does. That is why he is thinking we should have fewer events in year one. Sophia agreed.

Jeff will rework the budget based on this evening's discussion, put it in Excel and also work on the calendar of events and then recirculate it to the committee.

Sophia asked if the RJC should plan on presenting its proposed budget as part of its report at the selectboard meeting. Brian said not every committee makes a budget presentation but because this is a new committee and going from zero funding to a proposed budget of \$2000 is a big change he thinks that would be a good idea.

Offie suggested Martin Luther King's Riverside Church speech would be a good choice if we wanted to use a speech. Brian suggested that rather than paying for rights to use a speech it might be a good opportunity for a few people to share excerpts of their favorite Martin Luther King speeches.

8. ***Budget Needs***

Sophia asked if the RJC could suggest a name change for the committee at the same time as it presents its budget. Would that be a good time? Or can the committee just decide to change its name? Brian said the committee can just decide. It is probably a good idea to talk to the selectboard about it. He doesn't think they would have any particular input or comment.

Sophia said if the name is the Racial Justice Committee that locks us into one aspect of social justice. But there are other aspects – for instance, when Jackie and Sophia noticed the Take Back Vermont picture in the lobby and asked that it be taken down. That was a social equity issue. She thinks the committee should address all social equity aspects and not just racial justice. That is not all there is to talk about in Lamoille County. It could be called the Johnson JEDI committee. Raven suggested discussing this more when we have the new members. Sophia said members can be thinking about what they want the name to be and it can be discussed more at the next meeting.

9. ***Written Expression Contest***

Sophia said no one has submitted anything for the written expression contest. It feels as though it is not going anywhere. There is not much interest. She wonders if we should just drop it.

Jackie asked if Offie had reached out to anyone. He said he was waiting for someone to reach out to him. Sophia said there was a bit of confusion with Eric resigning from the committee. He had asked the Lamoille Restorative Center to redo the visual with updated data and that never got done. Sophia reached out to ask them if we could get an updated graphic and they didn't know what she was talking about.

Jackie suggested there was so many other things to do it might not be worth trying to breathe life into the contest. **Sophia moved to drop the written expression contest and revisit the**

idea at a later time. Raven said when we revisit it we should bring Shayne Spence into the discussion because it was his idea. Brian suggested it could be a good idea to time the contest so the committee gave an award at the time students are preparing college applications. Adelle said if it were introduced by teachers as an assignment she thinks there would be quite a bit of interest. There are classes at Lamoille Union where it would be relevant. **The motion was passed.**

Sophia asked if the community needs to let the selectboard know about dropping the contest. Brian said it would be appropriate.

10. Other Business

Raven showed one of the free harm reduction bags from the Recovery Center that she had talked about previously. They include information pamphlets on different resources. Some of the bags have cards with information on housing and mental health resources. One resource not listed in the bag she brought that not a lot of people know about is a mobile 24-hour van that Lamoille County Mental Health has.

Jackie said the Lamoille Family Center will soon start promoting the workshop it has planned. Sophia asked how the RJC can help with that – by posting something on Front Porch Forum? Jackie said that would be great

11. Adjourn

Offie moved to adjourn at 7:59 and the motion was passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths