

JOHNSON RACIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL EQUITY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
THURSDAY, APRIL 7, 2022

Present:

Committee Members: Sophia Berard, Jeff Bickford, Offie Wortham, Adelle MacDowell, Shayne Spence

Others: Jackie Stanton, Kyle Nuse, Mark Nielsen

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Sophia called the meeting to order at 6:32.

2. Review Agenda and Any Adjustments, Changes, Additions

Shayne suggested taking a moment to talk about Ketanji Brown Jackson's Supreme Court confirmation. Committee members shared their positive feelings about the confirmation and negative feelings about the Supreme Court nomination and confirmation process. Jackie noted that with the election of Lynda Hill there are now two women on the village trustee board.

It was agreed to add planning for the July 4 event and discussion of Sophia's participation after the upcoming birth of her baby to the agenda.

3. Approve Meeting Minutes from 3/322

Shayne moved to approve the minutes of March 3, 2022 and the motion was passed.

4. VHC Rapid Response Grant Update

Sophia said she met with Kristen MacDowell and Jae Basiliere yesterday. They began planning for two one-hour anti-racist story times. One will be on May 10 or 11 during school hours. Sophia emailed the elementary school to see which teachers might want to opt in to bringing their students over. The second one would be for the broader community on Saturday, May 14 at 2:00 pm. Both will be at Legion Field.

Of the grant funds we received from the Vermont Humanities Council, \$600 was allocated for the workshops. Seventy dollars has gone to Jan Gearhart for stitching a canvas with grommets that we will paint to make our banner. About \$100 would probably be a safe estimate for paint. That would leave \$230 we could use to pay Jae, which feels fair for 2 story times.

Sophia said she and Raven decided Raven would do the painting for the banner. Sophia showed the design she came up with.

Sophia passed out information on the upcoming community book discussion at the library.

5. Review and Adopt Committee Agreements

The board reviewed the draft committee agreements. Shayne suggested that it might be helpful to define terms like "white supremacy culture." Otherwise people might paint their own meaning onto it. The committee discussed possible definitions. It was agreed to add an

asterisk and a definition, with the definition to be determined later. Jackie had sent out agreements the diversity committee at NVU uses. It was agreed to incorporate some of that language into this committee's agreements. Jeff will revise the agreements based on this evening's discussion and send out another draft.

6. *On-Call Maternity Leave for Sophia*

Sophia said her due date is June 10. She and Jeff have agreed that Jeff will develop agendas and run meetings in June and July. She will participate in whatever capacity she can. Jeff will take the lead on facilitating the Juneteenth event.

7. *Juneteenth Planning*

Shayne suggested that if we want food we could ask Harmony's Kitchen, owned by a young Black woman who was heavily involved in organizing during the BLM protests and started her own meal catering service with really good food. It has taken off in Chittenden County. Jackie said she imagines Harmony's Kitchen will be in high demand on Juneteenth and won't want to come here. Adelle suggested the Morrisville Food Co-op might donate food.

Jackie noted that Juneteenth is Father's Day this year. Sophia asked where people are envisioning the Juneteenth event happening. She was envisioning it by the community oven. Jackie said Be-Longing for Justice has a tradition of doing something on Juneteenth. We could build on that with a demonstration at the Village Green, then a quasi-parade down to Legion Field for a celebration.

Sophia said she can talk to the oven committee. People may want to volunteer to make food. Maybe our committee could make a donation to the oven committee for purchasing materials for making food. (*Mark Nielsen left.*)

Sophia said she loves the idea of joining forces with Be-Longing for Justice. What if we had a demonstration in late afternoon, then a parade? If we had it at a meal time we might need more food available. Shayne said Harmony's Kitchen might not want to come to Johnson to sell food but if we paid for it we could probably get some food from her. Jeff said he thinks we should wait to plan for food until the next Juneteenth, when we will have more money from the town allocation.

Jackie suggested having the whole event at the Village Green, with a demonstration, then having snacks, literature and information about our July 4 event available. Sophia said that sounds good. Any volunteers who want to make snacks can do that. Jackie asked if there will be food trucks on the Village Green again this year. Shayne said he thinks the new trustee board will be supportive of that. Jeff said we don't want to compete with the food trucks but having snacks there and bringing people in might give the food trucks more business.

The committee agreed to partner with Be-Longing for Justice on the Juneteenth event.

Sophia suggested there could be someone reading children's books. Shayne suggested someone could also read something from the historical record. Sophia said she can ask LN, who helps Kristen MacDowell with library story time.

Offie asked how people will be educated about what Juneteenth is about before the event. Sophia suggested using Front Porch Forum. Offie suggested an article in the paper. Sophia said maybe by the next meeting we can start coming up with ideas for what we could say on a flyer or Front Porch Forum or the town Facebook page. Offie said he would be willing to write a short explanation. Sophie suggested that he do that and send it out to the rest of the committee before the next meeting. Shayne said Sue Lovering can get it in the paper. We can probably get on WLVB. Adelle said she can get it in the Lamoille Union newspaper as well.

Adelle asked if this group has social media. Sophia said no. We have talked about it but there was the question of who would take on the work. Adelle said she would be willing to handle that. Sophia asked if we have to go through the selectboard to establish social media accounts. Jeff said the selectboard recently approved a social media policy. Shayne said we should review that and then discuss things like what we will post, how we will handle comments, etc. Sophia said in the meantime we can send things to Brian Story to go on the town Facebook page.

It was agreed to plan the Juneteenth event for around 4:30 or 5:30. Sophia will reach out to LN and see if she is willing to read children's books. Jeff said she should be compensated and Sophia agreed. Snacks will be provided by volunteers. Jackie noted that if we want to use the green we need a permit from the village trustees.

Offie said he will do research and find out what was happening in Vermont on Juneteenth.

8. July 4 Planning

Shayne said he thinks the committee had previously discussed having the reading of Frederick Douglass's Fourth of July speech on the weekend before July 4. Jackie said we would get the speech from the Vermont Humanities Council and people would take turns reading paragraphs. People could sign up to participate.

Jeff asked if there would be space for that at Tuesday Night Live or as a separate event in the same space on the same date as TNL. Jackie said the reading of the speech is a pretty intimate thing. Offie said he doesn't think people coming out to TNL are coming for something that heavy. Jackie agreed. When she participated in the speech reading it was heavy and emotional. Would it be on the TNL stage with a mike? Jeff said he had at one point envisioned a public reading of the speech, not knowing the number of paragraphs. Maybe we could have a table with a banner and people could sign up to participate during intermission – not necessarily over the sound system, but at a designated place and time. That could bring it to a wider audience. The weekend before July 4 will be a busy family weekend for a lot of people. Sophia asked if the speech can be read in half an hour. Offie said it takes at least half an hour. Jackie said she is not sure doing it at TNL is a good idea. Reading the speech is an intimate thing and TNL is such a zoo. Sophia said we could have a table and during intermission the people who sign up go to a spot like the backstop for the reading. Jackie said it will be hard to hear with all the noise.

Shayne said we could do it the weekend after July 4. Jackie said we could do it on July 4. Others said a lot of people will be traveling for the holiday. Shayne said we don't need to get that many people there if we bring cameras and record it.

Sophia suggested advertising the event on Front Porch Forum and inviting interested people to show up, without requiring them to sign up ahead of time. Shayne suggested having promotional materials about the event at TNL and at the Juneteenth event. Jackie said we can put it out on Front Porch Forum too.

Sophia said she was thinking of having it at Legion Field. Jackie said she was thinking of having it at the municipal building. At Legion Field the grass may be wet and there will be no chairs. The previous reading was done at a church. Shayne said he thinks we still need to consider COVID when thinking about the location. There is a new highly contagious variant. It was suggested that people could bring their own folding chairs to Legion Field.

Shayne and Offie agreed to work on planning for the event. Jackie said she is happy to help too.

Jackie said if the event is at Legion Field a permit is needed. We have to go through Lisa Crews.

9. *NVU Production of Hair*

Sophia said Hair will be at NVU April 21-23. Some committee members went to the open rehearsal. Isaac Eddy and the co-director seem to have a great handle on modern theater and the consent-based approach. Sophia reached out to Isaac to ask if there is anything else we should be aware of. He said he will share a poster and we can help publicize it. He will keep us in the loop. He is planning a quick version of the conversation they had at the open rehearsal. Helping to get people there is a role we can play.

10. *Other Business*

Jackie asked Adelle to talk about the student demonstration and walkout at Lamoille Union. Adelle said on March 11 she and her friends organized a walkout about anti-LGBTQ bills being passed in Florida and Texas. The Florida bill referred to as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill limits conversations in classrooms about gender and sexuality. It will contribute to misinformation and lack of education on those topics and it will be harmful for queer students. The Texas bill says that parents supporting their trans children in transitioning can be sued for child abuse. During the walkout students gathered in the courtyard. There was a speech and they played music. They tried to make it more of a hopeful celebration.

Offie asked if there was resistance from any students. Adelle said yes. One student tried to disrupt the event but the principal took him aside right away and dealt with it. About 30-40 students were there. Adelle and her friends planned it at the last minute after Adelle found out that nothing was planned yet. Teachers and the principal were supportive.

Adelle said there are still issues at Lamoille Union. Today a trans student was harassed for using the boys’ bathroom. And there is a teacher who writes what is supposed to be a humorous newsletter for staff members every April 1. Adelle saw the last two issues and felt some of the stories were offensive. She is thinking of writing an article about it for the school paper.

Jackie said the Lamoille Family Center is offering a workshop on nurturing, valuing and protecting LGBTQIA+ youth. She handed out information about it.

Shayne moved to approve the design presented by Sophia for the committee banner and the motion was passed.

Jeff gave information on the Equitable and Inclusive Communities grant program. Grants are awarded on a rolling basis. Things they are interested in funding include:

- Requests for funding to support consultant-led work within a community (introductory trainings on diversity, equity, and inclusion; implicit bias trainings; equity assessments; planning efforts; review of hiring practices)
- Community-wide conversations
- Support for the creation and work of municipal equity committees
- Stipends for community members to be involved in the work (for example, so that people can take time off work, pay for child care or transportation, or otherwise have their time appropriately compensated)

The maximum award is \$10K. He thinks if we could get one of these grants it would fulfill a lot of our plans to raise money.

Jackie noted that VLCT took a position against removing qualified immunity for police officers. Shayne said he thinks they bought into a slippery slope argument.

11. Adjourn

Shayne moved to adjourn at 8:25 and the motion was passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths