

JOHNSON RACIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL EQUITY COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
THURSDAY, MAY 5, 2022

**Present:**

Committee Members: Sophia Berard, Jeff Bickford (remote), Offie Wortham, Adelle MacDowell, Shayne Spence, Raven Pfaff

Others: Jackie Stanton, Jasmine Yuris

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

**1. Call to Order**

Sophia called the meeting to order at 6:37.

**2. Review Agenda and Any Adjustments, Changes, Additions**

Raven asked to add discussion of data from the state Department of Health about health disparities faced by LGBT students in Vermont. (*Jasmine Yuris arrived at 6:39.*) Shayne asked to add discussion of a presentation given at UVM last week about the Abenaki tribe. Jackie asked to add discussion about the Supreme Court's possible action on Roe v. Wade and Proposition 5 in Vermont.

**3. Approve Meeting Minutes from 4/7/22**

**Shayne moved to approve the minutes of April 7, 2022, Offie seconded and the motion was passed.**

**4. Review and Adopt Committee Agreements Edits from 4/7/22 Meeting**

Jeff had sent out a revised draft of the committee agreements incorporating a white supremacy culture definition. Shayne said he thinks it is a very good definition. He thinks he can get behind it and show it to people and it might make them more comfortable.

**Shayne moved to adopt the committee agreements for the Racial Justice and Social Equity Committee as written and the motion was passed.**

Sophia said perhaps we can include the agreements when we email out agendas so we can be mindful of them.

Jackie asked, can we agree that this document can be revisited and tweaked as time goes on? Sophia and others agreed that it is a living document that can be changed over time. It was noted that getting the agreements on the RJSE page of the town website would be good.

**5. Juneteenth Planning**

Jeff said he is planning to put in a request form for use of the village green on June 19 starting at 4:30. There will be a demonstration by Be-Longing for Justice and we can have some educational materials such as the article Offie wrote. We had talked about having light snacks. He is happy to provide some, paying for them out of our budget. He wants to make sure these plans are consistent with everyone's understanding.

Offie said he doesn't see the need for any Juneteenth event in Johnson. He showed the group a list of events happening in the area. There are a lot of other events. He would like to see the people who are going to be speaking at some of the other events. People have been planning for

months to set things up in Montpelier and Burlington. Adelle said she thinks it would be good to have something in our community for people who can't access those other events. Jackie said the events on the list Offie shared are all in Chittenden County. Shayne said Offie had emailed him and asked if it would make more sense to refer people to those other events. He loves the idea of doing something here, but we haven't put a lot of thought and energy into it and we don't have a budget for it. He hears the concern about people who can't make it to Montpelier or Burlington or somewhere else. He personally might choose to go to one of the bigger events.

Offie said the article he wrote is going to be in VTDigger. Jackie asked, it is just coming from him, not from the committee? Offie said it is just coming from him.

Sophia said she talked to LN, who helps with story time at the library. She would love to be here to read children's books at the Juneteenth event. But she has to see if she is available that day. Sophia asked who will be available that day. Her due date is around then, so she may not be. Adelle said she is available. Raven said she believes she will be here. Jackie said Be-Longing for Justice will have a theme of "freedom revisited" – bringing Juneteenth into a present day context. There was discussion about what food to offer. There was agreement that fresh fruit would be a good idea. Jeff said we can have books there and have story time even if LN can't be there. Sophia and Adelle agreed they will be in touch about what books might be available from the library. Jeff said he is in a musical and may have a show that afternoon. It was agreed that he can check his schedule and put in the request for 5:30 rather than 4:30 if that works better for him.

The committee discussed advertising the event on Front Porch Forum and on the town Facebook page and sending it to Sue Lovering and/or directly to the News & Citizen. Adelle said she can put something in the Lamoille Union school paper. Sophia suggested that Adelle, Raven and Jeff work together on publicity. They agreed.

**6. *Reading of Frederick Douglass Speech – Updates, Discussion***

Shayne said he and Offie discussed having the Frederick Douglass reading on July 9, which would not compete with other things happening on July 4. They were thinking of doing it in the afternoon. He suggests 3:00 pm. We could have multiple Front Porch Forum posts starting a month in advance of the event. He suggests creating a Facebook event either on a page we create or on the town page and getting a notice out to all our media connections. He suggests sending it to Seven Days and/or VT Digger, trying to get it on the radio and seeing if TV stations would want to come out. He and Offie thought we should aim to have 10-15 people sign up to read. He thinks it would be wise to get video cameras and mikes. It will be at Legion Field.

Jackie mentioned that July 9 is the day of Carl Powden's memorial service so she can't attend. Probably a number of community members will be at the memorial service.

Offie showed the committee a piece he wrote about why Frederick Douglass was so angry. He asked if the committee would like him to publish it somewhere before the event. It was suggested that it could be posted on Front Porch Forum as a follow-up to one of the posts advertising the event. Sophia said the committee doesn't have a Front Porch Forum presence, so the event advertisements and Offie's article can be personal posts made by committee members. An item can be signed by all committee members even if it is a personal post made by one

member. It was agreed that Offie's piece should come from the whole committee. Jackie said the Vermont Humanities Council started this program of reading Douglass's speech. They have materials and press releases prepared where you can just insert your town name.

**7. *Flying of Progress Pride Flag***

Sophia said at the next village trustee board meeting on May 9, if the committee wants her to, she will ask for permission to fly the Progress Pride flag on the village green for the month of June, which is Pride Month. Jackie said in the past the committee made a request to fly the Progress Pride flag at the municipal building and the board said no, but there is a new board now.

**Shayne moved ask the village trustees for permission to fly the Progress Pride flag on the village green for the entire month of June.**

When the Progress Pride flag was flown last year it replaced the Black Lives Matter flag. Adelle asked if the Progress Pride flag could be flown year-round along with the Black Lives Matter flag, on the same pole. Raven said she thinks that was proposed before and the trustees wanted just one flag at a time. Jackie said she thinks there was some logistical reason like the pole not being strong enough. Jeff said there is a grant we will be brainstorming ideas for. Maybe we could consider getting a more robust pole.

Jeff said at the NVU Lyndon campus a Progress Pride flag and pole were vandalized just last week. Jasmine said there was also a recent incident at the Pride Center of Vermont. Jeff said he doesn't have any issue with asking to fly the flag at the green and he would love to keep pushing to have it fly at the municipal building, the seat of governance. But the risk of vandalism and pushback is real. Shayne said he thinks we can't let that keep us from doing what we believe is right. If there is pushback it will be too bad but it will be a point for a broader conversation if it happens. Jeff agreed.

**The motion was passed.**

**Sophia moved to ask the village trustees for permission to fly the Progress Pride flag at the municipal building for the month of June. The motion was passed.**

**Shayne moved to authorize expenditure of up to \$50 to buy an additional Progress Pride flag if the committee is given approval to fly the flag in both locations, Sophia seconded and the motion was passed.**

**8. *Anti-Racist Story Time Update***

Sophia said she has been in touch with the principal and counselor at Johnson Elementary School, as well as with Jae Basiliere and Kristen MacDowell. We had talked about trying to offer one anti-racist story time during school hours so public school kids could attend and one on Saturday, May 14. Sophia will work with Jae and Kristen to advertise the May 14 story time. It will be at Legion Field. She talked to principal Dave Manning about potentially doing a story time during school hours at Legion Field that school kids could attend but he thought it would be better to have the story time at the school. He put Sophia in touch with Woody Bell, who is in charge of programming outside of classes. He is in favor of a story time but thought it might be too close to the end of the year, with teachers trying to fit things in before the end of the year. His proposal was to plan on having it in the fall. Jae is willing to do it whenever we want.

Jackie asked if we should have a rain site for the May 14 story time. Jasmine suggested Old Mill Park. It has a larger gazebo that more people could fit under. Sophia said she will connect with Kristen and see if she has already put in a request to use Legion Field. Depending on whether she has, we can make Old Mill Park either the main site or the alternate rain site. The story time will be May 14 at 2:00 pm.

Sophia said it would be nice to have our banner at these events. She asked if the banner canvas is primed yet. Raven said she hasn't been able to do it yet, but she will soon. Sophia said once it is primed and dry she can put the design on it and then Raven can paint it.

**9. *Data on Health Disparities***

Raven said she had sent some information to Sophia to distribute to the group – data from the Vermont chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention about the health disparities faced by LGBTQIA high school students of color.

Offie asked why students of color face more discrimination. Shayne said there is an idea called intersectionality – the idea that various identities intersect in some people. If one person has multiple minority statuses, they will bear the brunt of all of them. An LGBTQ person of color deals with the negative aspects of being a person of color and also the negative aspects of being LGBTQIA.

Raven said LGBTQIA students of color are more likely to experience violence, mental health issues, hunger and housing insecurity and are less likely to experience protective factors compared to other students, including LGBTQIA students who are white. Things we are doing like the events we have planned or flying the Progress Pride flag are good protective factors that make people feel seen.

Shayne said protective factors are important. He had a gay friend who he thinks was of Cuban descent. One time he was being harassed and he spoke back to his harassers. A few of them started to push him and he ended up punching one. The police were called and he was charged with assault. Police assumed he had just as much of a role in starting the fight as the people harassing him. Those protective factors were not there for him.

Raven said her point in bringing up this data is that it could motivate us to beef up protective factors, not just for reducing suicide but for addressing issues with housing, hunger, etc.

Jackie said there are five protective factors commonly referred to by organizations that deal with families: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting, and social-emotional competence of children.

**10. *UVM Abenaki Tribe Presentation***

Shayne said last week there was a presentation at UVM featuring representatives from the Odanak First Nation, an Abenaki tribe based in Quebec. They spoke about how their tribe has interacted with different governments and about being cut off from a lot of their historical lands by the international border. They talked about “pretendians” – people whose Native American heritage is not up to the level they deem necessary to be a true Native American or First Nations member. They specifically called out Don Stevens and Rich Holschuh from Vermont-based Abenaki tribes. They brought up the fact that none of the Abenaki tribes in Vermont are

federally recognized. They are recognized by the state, but the Odenak tribe is not recognized by the state. VPR talked to Odenak representatives and got quotes from Don Stevens and Rich Holschuh. Shayne said he thinks it is not his place to comment on this type of thing. But we as a state have gotten involved by recognizing some nations and not others.

Jasmine asked if they got into why the Odenak tribe was not recognized. Shayne said a representative from the Odenak tribe said the Odenak were shut out in the debate over state recognition of Abenaki tribes because they were not from Vermont. That representative argues that the Vermont legislature doesn't have the power to recognize whether a community is indigenous or not. Shayne thinks an overwhelmingly white body of legislators came up with their own standards for recognition and some were left out.

#### **11. *Roe v. Wade and Proposition 5***

Jackie said this is a large topic she hoped this committee would want to talk about. Raven asked if someone could bring her up to speed on Proposition 5 in Vermont. Jackie said we will all get a chance to vote on it in November. Shayne said it is a proposed constitutional amendment that would enshrine the right to reproductive autonomy in the Vermont Constitution – a fail-safe so we will have that right if it is not granted in the federal Constitution.

Jackie asked if this group wants to make a statement on this. Jasmine asked where the statement would land. Would it just go out to Johnson residents, for instance on Front Porch Forum? Shayne said his idea is that it would be on Front Porch Forum, in a press release and on our social media page if we create one. He is open to the idea of a statement. Sophia suggested putting this on the agenda for June.

#### **12. *Other Business***

Offie said the greatest discrimination in this country is age discrimination. He is 84 years old. For the past 11 years he has not been offered one position to do anything in Vermont. He attributes that mostly to his age. Jackie agreed that you get treated differently as you get older. She is seeing it.

Adelle said at the last meeting Shayne mentioned in passing that he was recording the meeting. She thinks that ties into the committee agreements. She felt a little violated by that. She would have appreciated him asking permission to record at the start of the meeting. Shayne said the recording was for his own use so he could get notes. Adelle said she doesn't necessarily have a problem with him recording but in line with the values of openness and honesty in the agreements she would appreciate him asking first. Sophia said if anyone feels the need to record they should ask permission and see if people feel comfortable with it.

#### **13. *Adjourn***

**Shayne moved to adjourn at 8:34 and the motion was passed.**