

JOHNSON RACIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL EQUITY COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
THURSDAY, AUGUST 4, 2022

**Present:**

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

Others: Jackie Stanton, Margo Warden, Kyle Nuse

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

**1. Call to Order**

Jeff called the meeting to order at 6:34.

**2. Review Minutes from July 7 Meeting**

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

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

It was agreed to add discussion of a Prop 5 position statement and discussion of a public display policy.

**4. Report on Frederick Douglass Reading**

Shayne said there was a good group for the Frederick Douglass reading on July 9. Offie said there were about 6 or 7 people. Shayne said they had good conversation afterwards about the continued relevance of Douglass's words. In the future it would be good to try to have this event on a day when there is not another big event in town and to do more advertising and outreach.

Jackie asked if we are reaching out specifically to board members and asking if they would come to events like this. Shayne said he did not ask any selectboard members. Jackie suggested maybe we should think about doing that. Margo asked if Jackie means giving board members a formal invitation to the event. Jackie said yes. Margo noted that Diane Lehouiller and Steve Hatfield came. Jackie asked if Shayne and Offie were the only members of this committee that went. Shayne and Offie said yes. Kyle suggested inviting not only selectboard members but other community leaders, principals, the fire department, etc.

Jeff said next July 4 will be a Tuesday. There was discussion about whether Tuesday Night Live would happen that night. Jackie said there have been times in the past when Tuesday Night Live started on July 4. Sophia said once the Tuesday Night Live committee decides whether Tuesday Night Live will take place on the 4<sup>th</sup> we can decide on the Frederick Douglass reading date for next year.

**5. Proposed Event/Activity for Vermont Pride Week in September**

Jackie suggested that since the Juneteenth celebration on the village green went so well we could do something similar for Pride Month – an event with Be-Longing for Justice and this committee. We could ask Jae Basiliere if they want to do a story time. Maybe there could be face painting for kids. Jackie said September 9-18 is the period when there are a lot of festivities and events in Burlington for Pride Month. We may want to look at the Burlington

calendar and make sure our event is not in conflict with a big event there. Margo said the pride parade in Burlington is September 18.

After some discussion the committee agreed to tentatively plan on having a pride event on September 8 from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. Jackie said we don't need food because no one ate the food at the Juneteenth event. Margo said she loves the idea of the college being involved. Kyle said she thinks more than ever the college wants to get involved with the town.

Sophia said she can talk to Jae. Jeff said he has the committee banner. Sophia said she has a Progress Pride flag. Jackie said she thinks she can borrow one. Jeff said he can fill out the form requesting use of the village green and submit it to the trustees. Margo asked, if Jae cannot attend on September 8, do we still want to plan to have the event that day? The committee agreed that we should. Sophia said she can ask Brian to post a notice about the event on the town website and the town Facebook page and she can post it on Front Porch Forum. Kyle said she can make posters. Shayne suggested perhaps Jackie could put something up on Front Porch Forum as well, since Be-Longing for Justice will be involved. Jackie said she can do that. Kyle suggested getting it in the free News & Citizen Community Notes section for events.

**6. *Discussion of Ideas for Equitable and Inclusive Communities Grant / ARPA Projects***

Jeff said there is a grant of up to \$10,000 available with applications accepted on a rolling basis to help groups doing diversity, equity and inclusion work built capacity. That could mean stipends for people of color to do work, or building something, or paying someone to do a diversity, equity and inclusion audit. The committee can also discuss ideas for spending ARPA funds. Margo said the town has about \$600,000 in ARPA funds. Jackie said she thinks the village has \$300,000.

Shayne said an equity assessment could include things like assessing hiring practices and giving us an idea of policy directions we need to take. He thinks it would be great to have an expert give us a list of things to address. Jackie asked if anyone has a ballpark idea of the cost. Margo said the Lamoille Restorative Center just did one this past spring. They loved who they worked with. When People's Academy sought quotes for a similar assessment the first one they got was \$65,000, but that was the "Cadillac" package. Shayne said we could possibly just look at one specific area. For instance, he is interested in law enforcement. We could do an equity assessment of the Lamoille County Sheriff's Department and law enforcement. Focusing on one area could be a way to cut down cost. Jeff said the Lamoille County Sheriff's Department might be willing to chip in for a law enforcement audit. Sophia asked what the audit would be looking at. Jackie said it could include town employees, the fire department, contracted services, etc. Shayne said he thinks they would look at the makeup of different town organizations and see why the makeup is what it is. It can also look into things like whether when we are hiring we are advertising in the right places. Sophia suggested we might want to recommend using ARPA funds for a DEI audit and plan to do something else with the \$10,000 grant.

Jeff said one possibility for the \$10K grant could be getting a professional facilitator to do more in person educational events. The \$10K Community Foundation grant would not be enough for a thorough audit. We could apply for the \$10K grant for capacity building for

larger trainings and to support what we already have scheduled, but if we do that and request using ARPA funds for a DEI assessment, then we risk missing out completely on any chance of being able to do an assessment because the selectboard makes the decision on how to spend the ARPA funds and they may make a different choice. To do a really good audit of our practices we would need more than \$10K.

Offie said the cost for an equity audit is a large amount of money. When he worked for the city of Philadelphia, they figured out with their own staff what to do rather than having an outside expert come in. Jeff said what we are asking for is to have someone evaluate the town's policies and practices and see what we could change. Some practices could change to be more equitable. Shayne said he thinks we will get some suggestions that are more achievable and others that are less achievable. Margo said she thinks the audit can give us clarity that we may not normally have because we are in the middle of it. Sophia said we can't make changes if we are not aware of what needs to be changed.

Margo suggested that if an equity audit is too large for the grant maybe we could use the money to have a series for the community with performers, lecturers, etc. Shayne suggested perhaps we could use Zoom to reduce the cost of hiring certain speakers. If we could ask for grants to pay for speakers maybe we could even get some national figures. That is something he is really interested in. Margo suggested we could collaborate with the college on a series. She thinks that could be a good idea even if it was only four or five events.

Jackie said we have had some events so far and not many people have come. Shayne said he would love it if we could get certain town employees required to come to certain events. Jackie said an equity audit might recommend something like that.

Jackie suggested another idea for the grant could be a loan fund dedicated for BIPOC people, women etc. Kyle said there very few applicants for the existing Johnson revolving loan funds.

The committee agreed to think about possible uses for grant funds and bring more focused ideas back in September.

**Shayne moved to ask the selectboard and the village trustees to consider using ARPA funds for an equity assessment for the town and village and the motion was passed.**

**7. *Prop 5 Position Statement***

Shayne read a statement he had drafted expressing support for the Prop 5 ballot measure. Sophia asked where a statement like this would go – the town Facebook page and Front Porch Forum? Others agreed those would be good places. Jackie said Shayne had previously suggested that it could be on Front Porch Forum, in a press release and on our social media page if we create one. Jackie read a statement she had drafted. The committee agreed that members will review both statements and be prepared to finalize the wording at the next meeting. The final statement may be based on Shayne's with some additions from Jackie's.

**8. *Public Display Policy***

Jeff said we made a request to fly the Progress Pride flag for the month of September at the village green. We won't know whether that request is approved until the next village trustee

meeting. We also made a request to the village trustees and the selectboard to display a Progress Pride flag on or adjacent to the municipal building, which the town and village jointly own. The selectboard cited recent state and federal Supreme Court decisions that if you allow one flag you need to allow others.

Jackie said she does not believe there was actually a Vermont Supreme Court case. Jeff said selectboard members said a lot of towns are thinking they should not allow any flags. The sentiment of the board was not in favor of flying any flags. He brought up the fact that this request did not come from a random special interest group but from a town-appointed committee that is asking to fly the flag in support of a statement adopted by the town at town meeting. He was lectured for bringing forward something that had been brought forward before. Beth Foy asked Brian Story to look at a possible flag policy. VLCT, which he thinks is an inherently conservative organization, has put out guidance indicating that if a town has a policy in place different groups can be allowed to fly flags. Brian has been looking at other municipal policies and he printed out an early draft he put together to show the direction he is thinking of going. Jeff passed out copies of the draft. He said it is similar to the one Jackie and Diane Lehouiller sent out from San Jose.

Jeff said he thinks we should still try to fly the flag on the village green. He submitted a request for that to be on the trustee agenda for August 8.

Shayne asked if the Progress Pride flag is still up at the village green. He knows it was still flying past June. He doesn't know if anyone ever asked the village employees to take it down.

Jackie said it was falsely stated at the selectboard meeting that Black Lives Matter is incorporated into the Progress Pride flag. Jeff said that was addressed at the meeting as false. Jackie said at that meeting the word "divisiveness" came up. That word comes up a lot when people are advocating for social justice ideas. There is an idea that in advocating for those issues you are being divisive. She thinks we need to call that out and say that it is not helpful and that it hurts and is wrong. There is nothing divisive about requesting to fly the Progress Pride flag or the other things we have requested. Margo said we are basically asking to display a flag that creates community. The Progress Pride flag supports community. It is the opposite of divisive. Jackie said she heard a selectboard member saying it puts the selectboard in an awkward position. Whose comfort are we centering and whose comfort are we not centering and calling divisive? She feels we ought to articulate a response to that type of talk. She said in Grand Isle nine or ten Progress Pride flags have been stolen or vandalized and the last two have been set on fire. That is yet another example that this is very real. The Progress Pride flag is not divisive. What is divisive is hatred and bigotry.

Shayne said he agrees that the Progress Pride flag or the Black Lives Matter flag are unifying, not divisive, if you look at the message behind them. But he has learned that there is a difference between the intention and the impact of actions. We do have to examine the impact of our actions in the decisions we make. For whatever reason, there are people in our community who see the Black Lives Matter flag, the Progress Pride flag or other flags they feel are political and that they disagree with as divisive. He doesn't think human rights are a political issue but they do become a political issue when we ask people to vote on them. He

thinks the community has largely accepted that there will be flags on the village green. When people say they are disappointed that the request is coming to the board again and that it is divisive, it is because they feel the question has already been asked and answered and the request is reopening old wounds in a community that has not healed yet. Some people previously felt they were being personally called racist. He feels as if his intentions in wanting to raise the Black Lives Matter flag were misrepresented. The conversation has become so toxic that there are people who are fully supportive of Black Lives Matter or pride who feel like this is a divisive issue. We need to figure out how we can keep the political capital we need and not turn too many people against us. He thinks Brian's draft flag policy is mostly good. Certain language is a little vague and up to interpretation and he doesn't love that under this policy the selectboard gets to veto anything they don't like but he understands that that is probably not negotiable.

Margo said The Creative Discourse Group is a group who do equity surveys. She read some language from their website. Sophia asked Margo to send the link to their website to everyone and she said she would.

**9. Public Comment**

Kyle said it looks like Johnson Elementary School is going to work with Juniper Creative Arts to get a mural at the elementary school. Juniper Creative Arts is a BIPOC organization that has been working with rural Vermont elementary schools to put up public murals with a lot of student input.

Kyle said the Beautification Committee did a fundraising campaign and got all the money they needed to pay for the mural they want to put up. It will go up in early September.

Shayne said the village trustees had issues with the mural and that got news coverage, which led to the Beautification Committee getting more donations afterwards for the mural.

**10. Adjourn**

**Shayne moved to adjourn at 8:21 and the motion was passed.**

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*