

JOHNSON RACIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL EQUITY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2022

Present:

Committee Members: Sophia Berard, Jeff Bickford, Shayne Spence

Others: Jackie Stanton, Jasmine Yuris (remote)

Absent: Offie Wortham

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Sophia called the meeting to order at 6:50.

2. Review Agenda and Any Adjustments, Changes, Additions

No changes to the agenda were needed.

3. Approve Meeting Minutes from 9/1/22

Jeff moved to approve the minutes of September 1, 2022 and the motion was passed with Shayne abstaining as he was not at that meeting.

4. Outreach for Two Open Positions

Brian Story posted the openings on the town website and Front Porch Forum. Sophia said she knows Jackie is interested in being on the committee. **Shayne moved to recommend Jackie Stanton for appointment to the RJSE Committee, Sophia seconded and the motion was passed.**

Sophia said she will reach out to other people who often attend RJSE meetings but are not voting members to see if anyone else is interested. She suggested that everyone can reach out to people they know. Maybe the RJSE committee can post on Front Porch Forum. Shayne mentioned someone who might be interested. Sophia suggested that if a revised mission statement is approved maybe we can put that out and say at the same time that we are looking for people.

5. Report on Small Town, Big Pride Event

Sophia said she thought it was a great event. The only misfortune was that soccer started that night so fewer kids were able to come. Jae was there doing story time. Jackie said she counted 45 people at one point. She was impressed that two village trustees (Diane Lehouiller and Steve Hatfield) and one state representative (Dan Noyes) showed up. Sophia thanked Jackie for sending pictures to the News & Citizen.

Jackie said this committee used to have a report at every other selectboard meeting. Jeff said now we just ask to be on the agenda if we have something specific. He and Sophia could not remember exactly how the change happened. Jackie said if the committee had reported at a selectboard meeting about this upcoming event people would have heard about it.

6. Publicize Article 22/Prop 5 Resolution

Sophia read the language the committee agreed on at the last meeting. Shayne said if Sophia sends him the final language he can send press releases about the resolution to VTDigger, Seven Days and the News & Citizen. Sophia said she can make sure there are posts on Front Porch Forum and the town Facebook page.

7. Mission Statement Revision

Sophia read aloud the draft she created by combining the old mission statement and one Kyle suggested. Jackie read a statement she likes from the Vermont Student Anti-Racism Network. Shayne asked what the impetus for this is. Sophia said Lydia Putvain reached out to us to get the most current information from our committee for the website. She asked if we had a mission statement. We did but we realized it was a couple of years old and we wondered if we should work on it before sending it to the town. A lot has changed since it was created. It just said “Racial Justice Committee” and we needed to change that and then we thought we should make sure it was still congruent with the mission of the committee. A mission statement can be a living document that is revisited. Jasmine asked to hear the original mission statement and Sophia read it.

Shayne said “inspire ourselves and others” sounds a little self-righteous. He likes the language about educating ourselves in the statement Jackie read. Jasmine said she likes the language about power and privilege. That is a tangible thing we can work on right now in our community.

The committee discussed wording and came up with this draft statement:

The mission of the Johnson Racial Justice and Social Equity Committee is to encourage and support community diversity, and to disrupt and actively change the oppressive systems and policies that wrongly marginalize populations in our community.

We pledge to uphold our town and village’s Inclusivity and Antiracism statements, and promote awareness by providing free educational opportunities, events, affirming public displays, and partnering with local and state diversity experts and organizations.

Our work is to educate ourselves and others about the impacts of racial inequality, power, privilege, and oppression in our community to continually seek justice, with the goal of cultivating equitable change in Johnson for generations to come.

Jeff said he thinks a short mission statement has more impact. He thinks the third sentence by itself could be the mission statement and we could have internal documents expanding on it. Jackie said she likes having everything in one mission statement rather than having multiple documents.

It was agreed that Sophia will send out the draft for people to review and at the next meeting the committee can decide whether to make any changes or adopt it.

8. Land Acknowledgements

Sophia said Jackie originally brought up the topic of land acknowledgements because of the Historical Society one she had seen. Jackie had sent out some land acknowledgements from other places. Sophia said she really likes the resolution Winooski did on their centennial. We could think about land acknowledgements in a broader scope than just the Historical Society. We could ask them if they want to be part of the process of developing a land acknowledgement for the Historical Society or for the town. A land acknowledgement could be on the town website. Jeff mentioned one he has seen that he can send out.

Jasmine said she likes the idea of including the rec department and the Conservation Commission. Any time there is a gathering on land outdoors – at soccer or baseball games or if there is a Conservation Commission snowshoe hike – a land acknowledgement could be used. She likes the idea of it being used with young children.

It was agreed that Sophia will reach out to the Historical Society to let them know that the RJSE Committee is proposing to draft a land acknowledgement for the town and see if they are interested in working with us on that.

9. *Indigenous People's Day Flag Flying on Village Green*

Sophia said the flag of the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation will be flying on the village green starting tomorrow for the week of Indigenous People's Day. She can find and post on Front Porch Form what she wrote last year with Chief Don Stevens' approval.

10. *Other Business*

Jackie asked if Sophia had sent the selectboard the request to use ARPA funds for an equity audit. Sophia said yes.

Jackie said there is a Lamoille Health Equity Grant. Our region got 150K. It is to encourage health equity – the opportunity for all people to have a fair and just opportunity to be healthy, especially those who have experienced socioeconomic disadvantage, historical injustice and other avoidable systemic inequalities. She wonders if we want to think about possible uses for these grant funds. She will email information about the grant to committee members.

Jackie asked if the selectboard had the meeting where they discussed uses of ARPA funds. Jeff said it was on Monday. They only spent time on suggestions from the survey that went out over the summer. They chose items to keep on the list of possible uses and others not to keep. Things that were suggested a lot of times mostly stayed on and things that were only suggested once or twice mostly did not stay on. There were some things they felt were good ideas, but not good uses of ARPA money. They will have additional discussion on this. Beth said people can send in ideas if they didn't have a chance to fill out the survey. Shayne said he thinks they did a poor job of publicizing the survey. Jackie said the survey asked what people wanted to do with the money without providing any options to choose from. Jeff said he thinks those initial ideas will be the basis for another survey later. Sophia said it is odd that they did not bring up that they had a recommendation from our committee. Jeff said he wonders if it got lost in the shuffle. It was agreed that he will resend it to Beth.

Shayne said he thinks it is worthy of recognition that today the president signed pardons for a number of people convicted of federal cannabis offenses. There is broader recognition that the war on drugs failed and disproportionately impacted people who were black or brown or lower social status. Jackie said the president is going to recommend that states also pardon people with possession charges. Shayne said he thinks expungement of cannabis offenses should be pushed nationwide. For the most part we agree that cannabis should be legal but many people have barriers to housing, employment, etc. because they did something that used to be illegal.

11. *Public Comment*

Jackie said she went to see Cornel West at the Flynn. He was amazing. The tickets were \$10. It was put on by a group called the Greater Burlington Multicultural Resource Center. They

will have another event in April with an author. They had a great panel of people at the Cornel West event.

Sophia recommended the movie *Bros*, which has an all LGBTQ cast. Jackie recommended the documentaries *The U.S. and the Holocaust* and *Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America*. Jackie asked if we would ever show a movie for the community. Sophia said we have talked about it. Shayne said he is fairly certain Jenna's House would allow us to do it for free. Jackie said the cost of the movie is the biggest issue. The cost can be different depending on the size of your organization. She can look into it.

12. Adjourn

Shayne moved to adjourn at 8:04 and the motion was passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths

UNAPPROVED