

JOHNSON RACIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL EQUITY COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2022

**Present:**

Committee Members: Sophia Berard, Jeff Bickford, Shayne Spence

Others: Jackie Stanton, Kyle Nuse (via phone)

**Absent:** Offie Wortham

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

**1. Call to Order**

Sophia called the meeting to order at 6:34.

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

Sophia added discussion of the vacancies on the committee. Jackie added updates on the Who We Are Project and the Lamoille health equity project and discussion on the flag display policy. It was agreed to start with the vacancy item and put the other items at the end of the agenda. Jeff added discussion of the calendar for spring and summer.

**3. Approve Meeting Minutes from 10/6/22**

**Jeff moved to approve the minutes of October 6, 2022 and the motion was passed.**

**4. Committee Vacancies**

Shayne said he reached out to Johna Keefe about serving on the committee. He believes she has expressed her intent to Brian. Sophia said the recommendation for Jackie still stands. Those are the only two people who have expressed interest.

Jackie said at the last selectboard meeting the board accepted Adelle's resignation and Duncan Hastings asked if the committee had made any recommendations. Brian Story said he had just learned a couple of people were interested. Eben Patch suggested reposting the vacancies and revisiting appointments next month. Brian said he had posted the vacancies. Jeff said he didn't forward our recommendation to Brian soon enough for an appointment to the committee to be warned but he was at the meeting.

Jackie said Brian notified her by email that this will be on the agenda at Monday's selectboard meeting. Jeff said he can go to the meeting. Jackie asked, since Sophia can't go to Monday meetings, could she write something to be read into the record? Sophia said she can. She also thinks it would be powerful if Jackie could be there to advocate for herself. She has been participating for two years. It is clear that she deserves a spot on the committee. Jeff said he made the point last time that Jackie is already doing the work. Shayne said in spite of many differences with Jackie he made the motion to recommend her appointment because she shows up and does the work and often has good ideas. He hopes the selectboard looks at the minutes and that it means something to them that he made the motion.

Shayne said Johna is definitely interested. He is pretty sure she is the other person Brian said had expressed interest. He reminded her partner today that the RJSE meeting was tonight.

## 5. *Article 22 / Prop 5*

Sophia said we hit a snag with the statement we wanted to put out because it had political content – asking people to vote with us. She asked Brian about posting the statement with the line about expressing our support for the ballot measure and recommending that others do the same taken out. He said he thinks that is better because it is less direct but he believes it still violates the social media policy because the statement is a town committee taking a position on an issue that is up for a vote. It sounds like we can't take a position as a committee.

Sophia said next time we write a statement of this sort we probably need to run it by Brian first. Jeff said we do if we want to put on town social media. Shayne said he was wondering if the social media policy applies if we don't ask to do that. Jeff said he thinks we can post as individuals without violating the policy. He thinks what we can do is put out a statement saying what impact the current wording can have and what impact we think the ballot measure could have and asking that people consider those impacts as they decide how to vote. Our statement probably could have focused more on research about how the populations the committee is supposed to represent are disproportionately negatively impacted and made an educational point without taking a position. Jackie said she thinks we can make a statement if we don't talk specifically about Article 22 or Prop 5. Sophia said she can ask Brian if the committee can post the first two sentences of the original statement.

Shayne said it slipped his mind to send the statement to the papers, which is a good thing because he wasn't going to ask permission from the town. But he doesn't know that sending it out to the papers would have run afoul of the social media policy because it doesn't talk about print media. If one of us posted on Front Porch Forum as a town official then we would run into trouble.

Jackie said when the social media policy was written the town did not have this committee. It is strange not to have the RJSE Committee able to talk about politics. She thinks we should revisit the policy and ask how we fit into it. The way she reads it, it is more about individuals' behavior. She doesn't think they were thinking about a committee like ours and a statement like this. Shayne said he thinks if any of us posts as a member of the committee the person would be a municipal official so the policy would apply. He agrees that it ties the hands of the committee. It is almost necessary to take positions on certain things to be a racial and social equity committee.

The committee decided to put a link in the statement citing a source for the part of the statement about the disproportionately adverse impact on BIPOC and populations living in poverty. Jeff shared an article from the National Institutes of Health and it was agreed to link to that. Sophia said she will send the shortened statement and the link to Brian.

Kyle said she fully supports sending those sentences but she thinks the social media policy should be looked into more for this committee. The proposed mission statement talks about disrupting and actively changing oppressive systems and policies. The social media policy prevents the committee from doing that work. Shayne said maybe we should ask for clarification on the existing language. Pretty much anything this committee talks about is political. Anything having to do with town government is political.

**Sophia moved to ask the town for permission to post the first two sentences of the original statement on Article 22 / Prop 5 with a link to a relevant National Institutes of Health study and the motion was passed.**

Sophia suggested that between now and the next meeting committee members should look at the social media policy and think about how it could be clearer or more open to this committee doing its work. Jackie said “political content” is too vague and broad. Shayne said the existence of a committee like the Conservation Commission is almost a political statement in itself. Sophia said she can email Beth about the policy. Jackie asked if she could cc the rest of the committee.

**6. *Mission Statement***

Sophia said no one sent her any suggested changes to the draft mission statement. Jackie said she thinks it looks good. Jeff said he thinks it is too long. He suggested removing the middle paragraph, which describes things we do but not necessarily the mission behind it. Sophia said she thinks it is important to have the evolution of the 5-point plan in our mission statement because it is something concrete to explain why we are here. Jackie agreed. She would like the mission statement to refer to the inclusivity and antiracism statements.

**Jeff moved to adopt the following mission 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.*

**The motion was passed.**

Sophia said she will send it to Lydia and have her put it on the website and she will also send it to Brian. Maybe he can post it along with the notice of the committee vacancies. Or do we want to just accept the two people we know are interested in serving on the committee? Jeff said it would be good to talk to Johna first. He doesn’t want to make a recommendation without having talked to her. Sophia said she will wait to see what happens at Monday’s meeting before trying to put the mission statement out there while we ask for people to volunteer. Jeff said if the selectboard wants to vote to appoint Johna, he will say that the RJSE Committee has no recommendation because we have not been able to talk to her.

Jackie asked what the process is for appointing new committee members. In the past the process has been that the person comes to the committee and has a conversation and then the committee recommends or does not recommend. Shayne said he doesn’t know if when Johna

sent her letter of interest there was any response from Brian telling her to show up to the next RJSE meeting. Sophia said she wanted to email Johna to invite her to a meeting but she didn't have her email address. Kyle said she has it and can send it to Sophia.

Kyle said the Beautification Committee also just developed a mission statement. They have sent it to the selectboard for approval at their next meeting. That was what they were told the process was, that the committee should submit it for final approval by the selectboard after coming up with it. Sophia said she will not send ours to Lydia. She will send it to Beth and Brian for approval.

#### 7. ***Land Acknowledgement***

Sophia said she has not heard from the Historical Society. She emailed Lois Frey because she was the only Historical Society member whose email address she had, and she hasn't heard back.

Jeff suggested crafting our own land acknowledgement and folding it into our practices. He said he would love to see it adopted by the town. Jackie said she had sent out a labor acknowledgement. The Peace and Justice Center has a land and labor acknowledgement. She read the part of it that refers to labor:

*We honor the legacy of the African diaspora and the Black lives, knowledge, skills, and labor stolen due to violence and the evolution of white supremacy culture. We acknowledge that much of this country's essential structures would not exist if it wasn't for the free, enslaved labor of Black people, and that many people of African descent are still being met with violence and killed today for simply existing. We honor the legacy of the many other BIPOC ancestors who were victims of the same violent systems that stole their lives, traditions and families. As the current stewards of this space, it is our collective responsibility to hold these truths of these contributions and losses.*

She said she recently heard a VPR show where it was discussed that even though we pride ourselves on not having slavery in Vermont and we all love the Shelburne Museum, the Shelburne Museum would not exist without slave labor because Electra Havemeyer Webb's father made all his money in sugar. While the family did not own slaves themselves, the wealth they accumulated was based on stolen labor. Jeff said in the Civil War the reason the north had an economic advantage was because of all the textile mills that had made huge profits because they had access to cheap cotton. Jackie said she thinks it would be good for us to develop an acknowledgement that includes both land and labor. Jeff said Dartmouth College has started to acknowledge that many of their original structures were built with slave labor. It would be interesting to look into whether there are any structures in this area that would apply to.

The committee agreed to wait until the vacancies are filled to work on developing a land acknowledgement. Shayne suggested that committee members look for other examples of land acknowledgements. Sophia suggested it would be interesting to find land acknowledgements from other towns, since we are hoping to get the town to adopt one. Winooski has one.

Sophie said she is not sure if the neighbors' network Mindy Blank was involved with is still in existence. She went to a few of their meetings. She asked about how to bring their work into our town committee and they said they would reach out but she never heard from them. She could reach back out to Mindy Blank. The group had a mission of contacting local Abenaki leaders about public land that could be made available for members of the tribe to use. It would be great if we could do something like that in Johnson.

**8. *Who We Are Project***

Jackie said she had sent out a link with information about the Who We Are Project. They do film screenings. You can contact them to find out the cost. Do we want to see what the cost would be for our group? It could be tied in with MLK month. Jeff said he can see if the college has a screening planned. Maybe it could be a joint effort. He will submit a request to find out the cost.

**9. *Lamoille Health Equity Grant***

Jackie said we talked last time about the \$150K health equity grant for our region. She is going to go to a meeting next week to learn more about it. She wants to find out how the money can be spent. Shayne said it would be great if we could get funding from this source for something like a Who We Are screening. Jackie said the grant is supported by the Vermont Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control. It is federal money that came to the state and the Department of Health is administering it.

**10. *Display Policy***

Jackie said she noticed that the Abenaki flag is still up at the village green. Shayne said he thinks the village will keep it up until someone asks them to put something else up. We can ask them to put up the Black Lives Matter flag or something else. **Shayne moved to ask the village trustees to raise the Black Lives Matter flag on the village green until the committee has another request and the motion was passed.**

Sophia said the Black Lives Matter flag we have is made of thick material. She doesn't know if we want to get one with thinner material that would flow better and be more visible. The committee agreed to have the village put the current one back up and consider a new BLM flag the next time a different flag is put up.

Jackie asked if Sophia and Jeff asked the selectboard to let them know if they are going to put a display policy on the agenda. They said yes. Jeff said they are currently working on ARPA spending and some other priorities. They have ATVs and some other issues to deal with.

Jackie said she sent out a piece by Dana Kaplan about the harm being done to LGBTQ people in Vermont. It discusses the situation in Randolph but the problem is larger than that. Local experts like Dana Kaplan are the people we can refer to when we make requests for public displays. They had to cancel community conversations about the issue in Randolph because of the threats of harm. That is the level of hostility and danger that exists. Shayne said it seems like the people pushing the conflict are very much of one opinion and don't care that they are attacking a child in order to push that opinion. Jackie said Outright does a fire truck pull every year. They have been doing it for over 10 years and this year for the first time protesters showed up. Shayne said the same group of people showed up carrying transphobic signs at the Pride parade in early September. The group, the LGB Alliance, includes Fred Sargeant, a longtime gay activist who was at Stonewall. People crowded

around them at the Pride parade and held banners up to block the offensive signs from view and Fred portrayed it as him being assaulted. Sophia said she was there. She described what she saw. Shayne said they claim he was knocked to the ground at one point. He did have coffee dumped on him, which technically is assault. The group was angry that the mayor didn't take their complaints seriously and then they showed up at the fire truck pull to continue to try to draw attention to themselves. They are very involved with the national right wing organization that is taking up the Randolph volleyball student's lawsuit.

Sophia asked Jackie to re-send the email with the Dana Kaplan article.

Shayne agreed to email the trustees to request that they hang the Black Lives Matter flag again.

**11. *Spring and Summer Calendar***

Sophie suggested leading with this topic at the next meeting. Jeff said he has a good idea for MLK Day.

**12. *Other Business***

Jackie said there is a play at NVU November 3-6 that sounds good, a satirical comedy by a Native American playwright.

Jackie asked if Sophia is going to ask the selectboard to discuss the mission statement this Monday. Sophia said yes.

**13. *Adjourn***

**Jeff moved to adjourn at 7:39 and the motion was passed.**

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*