



Diversity Equity Inclusion Justice and Belonging Committee

May 4, 2023

Meeting Minutes

Merrimack Valley High School

6:00PM – 8:00PM

1. Mayor Bouley, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:09PM.

Committee Members Present: Mayor Jim Bouley, Councilors Byron Champlin and Zandra Rice Hawkins.

2. Meeting overview by Committee Chair, Mayor Bouley.

Action: Mayor Bouley welcomed attendees to the meeting and introduced members of the committee Councilors Champlin and Rice Hawkins. Mayor Bouley provided an overview of the committee's mission, as outlined below. Mayor Bouley noted that this is the second of three listening sessions. He discussed how in years prior the City of Concord joined the National League of Cities, and as a result, the City reviewed internal policies particularly regarding hiring and personnel matters and further trained City staff. Mayor Bouley noted that while the internal review as a result of joining the National League of Cities was an internal look to improve, the City sought to hear from the community via these listening sessions about the community's desires for the future.

Mission:

To create and sustain an inclusive process for public engagement so all Concord residents feel a sense of belonging and can authentically participate in the decision-making processes that impact their lives. Committee members noted that this is a starting point for the committee, members acknowledged that their goals may change as they advance through the process.

Next, Councilor Champlin spoke to highlight and review initiatives the City has taken. Councilor Champlin discussed the Concord Police Department's involvement with the new American community, the Concord Public Library's involvement with the Multi-Cultural Festival, the review and subsequent reduction of fees to utilize the Citywide Community Center, the Human Resources Department's use of a vendor called CircaWorks to reach underrepresented communities with job postings, and the diversity training given to City department heads. Councilor Champlin noted that due to decreased staffing, the Concord Police Department has paused its proactive initiatives with the new American communities in order to focus on frontline policing.

Then, Councilor Rice Hawkins encouraged public comments on initiatives, personal experiences, and/or positive things residents would like to see the City continue. Councilor Rice Hawkins also encouraged the public to contact City Councilors and discussed a future survey. She then discussed a comment at the previous meeting regarding a land acknowledgement and noted that this would require a City policy, but she did provide one as an example. Councilor Rice Hawkins then opened the meeting to public comment.

3. Public Comment

Kalamoh Donzo, a member of the Community Development Advisory Committee, discussed greater representation of the refugee communities on City boards and committees. He added that members of the refugee community welcome the opportunity to give back to and serve the community that has become home.

Tracy Brickey, of Penacook commented on the request before the DEIJB Committee for greater diverse representation on City boards and committees. She asked why that was not listed in the DEIJB Committee's goals.

Roy Schweiker, a Concord resident, discussed a recent Zoning Board of Appeals meeting with what he described as a large turnout for public comment against a particular applicant. The applicant requested the hearing be postponed. Mr. Schweiker discussed the postponement as well as his desire for diverse viewpoints and greater than proportional representation from a diverse population on boards and committees.

Martin Toe stated that the Council should be made up of diverse skin tones.

Dean Arif, a Concord resident, discussed the submission of written comment. He stated his opinion that the public should have access to other people's written comments as a means of transparency.

Councilor Champlin asked if the sharing of personal, written comment may cause a feeling of exposure for some. He also discussed the tendency for online, open forums to become negative and lead to personal attacks.

Mr. Arif added that perhaps a public and private means of sharing can be available. He also noted that the risk of personal online attacks needs to be taken.

Sandra Polleys-Bunch called for lights in Keach Park. She also added that she hopes one day, society can evolve to value a person's integrity rather than a person's race.

Alan Hershlag, a Concord resident, spoke about mixed-income housing. He also discussed the concepts of access versus accessibility. Mr. Hershlag added that issues of accessibility are applicable to people of lower income, people with disabilities, and new Americans. He stated that the issues being discussed are important, but he wants to ensure nobody is left behind.

Fisto Ndayishimiye, of Penacook, thanked the Committee and noted the positive impact of the Committee's meetings. He discussed the responsibility of residents to check on their leaders and stated his opinion that the issues at hand are City policies. Mr. Ndayishimiye discussed the number of leaders and business owners from the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community. He encouraged the City to seek out bringing BIPOC-owned businesses to Concord. Mr. Ndayishimiye stated that many BIPOC community leaders are not attending the listening sessions due to a lack of hope. He then encouraged the group to not cast blame but to be positive, and he stated that it is the community's responsibility to ask their leaders for areas of change.

Ahni Malachi, of Penacook, discussed more ways for people to connect with each other. She discussed how access and accessibility to things in the community would help people connect and used an example of a community board where businesses can list their information.

Oscar Villacis, Executive Creative Director of First Gen Multimedia in Nashua, discussed an incident occurring outside a Nashua radio station and the manner in which the radio station responded to the incident. Mr. Villacis discussed being a first generation American and the implantation of a radio show and subsequent starting of a business. Mr. Villacis announced a new radio show highlighting immigrant voices and experiences. He asked the Committee to not just invite the BIPOC community to the meeting but to give them a seat at the table.

Martin Toe stated that the City should celebrate diversity, prioritize social justice, address systemic racism, and promote social and economic equity.

Harimaya, of Concord, came from Nepal in 2011. She is a passionate farmer and spoke about the challenges facing farmers from difficulty space in farmer's markets to lenders deeming the income unstable. Harimaya also spoke about the local Hindu community and lack of a temple to gather for worship between Manchester, Hooksett, and Concord. She spoke about people she knows moving out of state to Ohio or Pennsylvania seeking greater freedom to worship and gather. She noted that her religious community can financially contribute towards a temple but is not able to purchase a building. Lastly, Harimaya shared a personal account of discrimination.

Kevin Twombly, of Penacook, noted the need to celebrate diversity. He discussed the housing crisis across New England and noted that in Penacook, affordable housing developments are being built. However, in downtown Concord where there is greater access to services, luxury units are being built.

Tracy Bricchi, of Penacook, stated she would like expanded bus service as the service runs only Monday through Friday.

Jessica Wheeler-Russell, of Penacook, spoke about community members she believes would be beneficial for the DEIJB Committee and stated that Change for Concord should be contacted. Ms. Wheeler-Russell discussed the difficulty for all residents to access the Citywide Community Center because of its location in the Heights. Although she did mention the new library and community center. She then stated she would like to see the City implement its DEIJB work into all the City does.

Kalamoh Donzo, member of the Community Development Action Committee, discussed a need for community empowerment. He cited a struggling business wanting to expand and discussed assisting businesses from marginalized communities.

Reheb Abagegni, of Penacook, discussed the people who make negative, insensitive comments, and the need to focus on them and their children. She shared personal accounts of discrimination.

Dean Arif, of Concord, suggested that the DEIJB Committee an agenda and agenda monitoring program.

Sandra Polleys-Bunch encouraged people to defend others when disparaging remarks are made. She suggested an international potluck, free English classes, translation services, and a location on South Main Street for a Hindi temple. She also called for the federal government to be responsible for change.

Fisto Ndayishimiye, discussed the complexities of learning the English language. He noted the importance of individuals with similar, shared experiences having a role in leadership. Mr. Ndayishimiye cited the access fees to the Citywide Community Center as a lack of equity by members of the BIPOC community. He cited members of his church's congregation moving out of state and stated that people with stories of discrimination should have a role in leadership.

Ahni Malachi, of Penacook, shared her career experience working with matters relation to DEIJB. She spoke of a toolkit available to schools for use in bias incidents and their prevention. Any also spoke about holding a Penacook potluck and how community events spark connection.

Reheb Abagegni discussed her former work in matters relating to DEIJB and the suggestion by a former manager to use humor to unite people. Rahab suggested a comedian named Tissa Hami.

Fisto Ndayishimiye suggested that the community organizers connect after the meeting.

There being no further public comment, Councilor Rice Hawkins closed the public comment. She announced that meeting minutes will be public and posted to the City website, and she also discussed a path forward.

Mayor Bouley discussed the upcoming timeline for City Council. He announced that the Council will receive the City budget on May 11 with budget hearings being held in May and June. Mayor Bouley stated that these hearings are available for people who are passionate about certain issues and the relative City funding. As an example, Mayor Bouley discussed Concord Area Transit (CAT) which runs the bus service in Concord. CAT is funded by multiple sources including the City of Concord. Mayor Bouley discussed how if the bus service is an area of interest, that one may come to Council and speak about investing in justice in this area.

4. Adjournment.

Action: At 8:19PM, there being no further discussion, Councilor Rice Hawkins moved to adjourn the meeting.

A true copy: I attest:

*Elisabeth Harrington
Deputy City Clerk*