

DEI Committee Meeting Minutes – September 11th, 2023

Meeting Called to Order at 5:38 PM

Present: Martha Jacques, Andrew Lovley, Flo Leighton, Kayla Lewis, Anne Morrissey, Liam LaFountain, Bistra Nikiforova, Shelly Gibson

Motion to accept minutes made by **Bistra** and seconded by **Kayla**. Approved unanimously.

Public Attendance & Comment: Lauren Schuyler Giddings, a member of the School Committee, was present at the meeting. She expressed appreciation for the Committee's efforts and was keen to understand how their work could be integrated into the Biddeford Schools.

Agenda Items:

1. Committee Roles - Information

- a. Shelly briefed the Committee on the efforts she and Danica have undertaken concerning the structure of the DEI Committee and others. The recommendations are still in draft form and are expected to be formalized once a new Mayor is in office.
- b. For the next phase of the Committee, Shelly proposes the election of a Committee Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary. She also believes that each Subcommittee should have its designated Chair.
- c. Kayla supports the idea of an elected Chair, noting that such a representative could attend other events, engage in meetings, and relay updates back to the Committee.
- d. Flo inquired about the responsibilities associated with each role.
- e. Shelly explained:
 - i. The Chair typically collaborates with the staff liaison to set the meeting's agenda, ensuring the inclusion of input and priorities from Committee members. The Chair also leads the meeting.
 - ii. The Vice Chair steps in for the Chair during their absence.
 - iii. The Secretary is responsible for documenting meeting minutes
- f. Anne and Flo recommended that the Chairs of the Subcommittees would be ideal candidates for the roles of Chair and Vice Chair of the main Committee, a sentiment echoed by other members.
- g. Flo further recommended that the Chair represent the Committee at City Council meetings, especially when an agenda item covers topics the Committee has discussed..

- h. It was decided that while Chairs for each Subcommittee will be elected soon, the election of a Committee Chair will be postponed until the beginning of the next term.

2. Planning - Indigenous People's Day:

- a. Shelly inquired about the group's plans for Indigenous Peoples Day. She mentioned that while there are events related to Indigenous Peoples scheduled in the Biddeford-Saco area, none are on Indigenous Peoples Day itself.
- b. Bistra asked about any previous city celebrations for this day. Shelly responded that the city hadn't organized any events in the past.
- c. Kayla proposed that the Committee play a supportive role, assisting other organizations that are coordinating events.
- d. Anne recommended the Committee facilitate an educational screening of a new documentary titled "Fighting Indians." She pointed out that the McArthur Library could potentially partner and host this screening.
- e. Shelly committed to collaborating with the Education and Outreach Committee to finalize plans.
- f. For future celebrations, Kayla emphasized the potential benefits of collaborating with groups already organizing such events to create a more expansive celebration. She also proposed liaising with the Maine Arts Council to connect with Indigenous artists for upcoming events.

3. Sub Committee Report-Outs:

a. Education and Outreach Committee

- i. Flo updated the Committee on the Diversity Calendar for the next month.
- ii. The subcommittee has been researching and writing Proclamations, fun facts, and language to include in the Biddeford Beat Newsletter to highlight aspects of the Diversity Calendar.
- iii. This September the Diversity Calendar recognized the following: Jewish High Holidays, World Suicide Prevention Day, National Hispanic Heritage Month, and National Recovery Month.
- iv. The Recovery Softball Event is scheduled for Saturday, September 30th. They are still looking for volunteers.
- v. Kayla asked about specific guidelines for Proclamations. Liam clarified to the group that Proclamations traditionally follow the "Whereas" & "Therefore" format. All Proclamations must receive the Mayor's approval before being presented.

b. Zoom Bombing Hate Speech at City Council Meeting

- i. Flo informed the Committee about a recent "Zoom bombing" incident during the City Council meeting on September 5th. During the public comment segment, four Zoom participants used racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, and prejudiced language. Although City staff quickly shut down these participants, their hate speech disrupted the meeting and intimidated attendees.
- ii. Other municipalities across Maine including Bangor, Hallowell, Portland, and South Portland have experienced similar incidents.
- iii. Many Committee members were previously unaware of the incident and expressed strong disapproval of the bigotry displayed, urging the city to respond.
- iv. Anne emphasized that such behaviors aim to foster fear and intimidation, particularly among historically marginalized groups. She suggested the City consider measures to tighten Zoom access to deter hate speech during public sessions.
- v. The consensus among Committee members was that the City should address and develop policies and procedures to prevent such hate speech incidents.
- vi. Liam concurred on the need for City action and pointed out that completely restricting Zoom access might disenfranchise community members who can't attend in person due to work, childcare, health issues, transportation, and other reasons.
- vii. Shelly offered to convey the Committee's feedback to her supervisor and proposed a meeting with the City Manager. The aim is to ensure that the City Council receives and acts upon recommendations to establish a safe environment for public comments during official meetings.
- viii. Shelly will keep the Committee updated via email as more information becomes available.

c. Policy Subcommittee:

- i. Bistra updated the Committee on the advancements made during the subcommittee's recent two sessions.
- ii. The group is crafting guidelines and best practices for community engagement, emphasizing a DEI perspective.
- iii. In their previous session, the subcommittee finalized the framework. This month, their focus is on refining its content and structure.

- iv. Kayla noted the document's potential value for various community sectors – from non-profits and municipal committees to elected officials. She emphasized the importance of fostering stronger relationships between these entities and the DEI Committee.

4. DEI Coordinator - Monthly Update:

- a. Shelly will email the DEI Coordinator Monthly Update this to the committee.
- b. One of the initiatives that she is particularly enthusiastic about is her collaboration with a coalition of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) practitioners focused on municipalities. She looks forward to sharing further updates as their work progresses.

Upcoming Dates: Next meeting: **October 16th**; Education & Outreach Subcommittee: **September 26th** Policy Subcommittee: **October 5th**

Motion to adjourn at 6:58 pm made by **Martha**, seconded by **Kayla**, and passed unanimously.