

DEI Committee Meeting Minutes – January 13th, 2025 Meeting

Status

1. Called to order by the Chair at 5:36 PM.

Present: Breese Reagle, Syed Zafar, Scott Whiting, Maura Oakes, Shelly Gibson, Danica Lamontagne, Bistra Nikiforova

Anne Morrissey (via Zoom)

Absent: Ariane Meno Kobo, Flo Leighton

2. Public Comment (3 minute limit per speaker)

No one from the public was present for comment.

3. Approval of Minutes

- 3.a December 9 2024 DEI Committee Meeting Minutes

Maura made a motion to approve the minutes, Breese seconded the motion; the motion passes unanimously.

4. Discussion Items

- 4.a Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Proclamation

Syed suggested peaceful instead of non-violent; a few people commented that this language is associated with the movement and was seemingly intentional.

Scott made a motion to approve the MLK proclamation, Maura seconded the motion; the motion passes unanimously.

- 4.b Review a Comprehensive Timeline for 2025 (events, proclamations, and meeting dates)

Shelly reviewed a draft timeline for 2025, to include council meetings, DEI committee meetings, and events where the committee would need representation/volunteers.

Anne suggested adding a pride planning group for June and volunteered to be on that committee (this is already coordinated through Heart of Biddeford).

After reviewing the year on a whole, the committee went through each month and asked for volunteers to join Winterfest. Instead of Saturday's event, it was suggested that the committee might be present on Sunday, for ice skating at the Westbrook rink. This could be an opportunity to bring other community members to join and/or try skating, in an environment that is welcoming. Committee members could invite others and be present for support and fun!

Maura offered to make t-shirts for everyone on the committee, with the DEI logo, so the group could be recognizable at local events. The group agreed that if interested, they would drop off a shirt of their choosing (t-shirt, sweatshirt, etc., preferably of a solid

color), at City Hall by Wednesday, January 29th. All drop offs can go to Shelly's office on the first floor, in Human Resources. Shelly will then coordinate an exchange with Maura to print the shirts and have them ready by the February 9th skating day.

Syed agreed to draft Black History Month proclamation for approval at the February committee meeting.

A number of other volunteers signed up for events throughout 2025. Shelly agreed to share the calendar with updates after the meeting.

4.c Project Work for 2025

Bistra shared a recap of some recent social media posts and a suggestion to write an article in the Courier to educate those speaking out against DEI. There could be a lack of knowledge and awareness that is fueling these narratives, so Bistra wondered if the Courier could be an opportunity to talk about the committee's work, with a potential picture of the group, to build connection and community among our neighbors in the City. There continues to be negative perceptions about DEI work so it's important that the committee consider if education is part of the work to do. A few other members suggested an article that highlights successes, events, what the committee is currently doing instead of research and responses to DEI work and push back.

Danica has contacts at Courier and Saco Bay News Source and is willing to reach out to see if they want to write something, versus members of the committee having to do it (potentially at Winterfest)? Bringing attention to the work the group is doing to build connections and relationships around Biddeford might be more effective for the community than defining language around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

This group discussed 2 potential strategic projects for the upcoming year: a potential partnership with the Rec department and commission partnership, or research and information gathering about potential public bathrooms throughout the City. Ultimately, the group would likely offer a recommendation to the City for public bathrooms, not necessarily dictate whether they are built.

There was no clear majority on which project to choose. Supporting staffing for the Rec department was discussed as well as establishing relationships among various departments in a way that could build the foundation for projects (like bathrooms) long-term.

Bistra suggested getting more information about both projects before the group makes a decision; she and Scott volunteered to attend the next Rec Commission meeting to learn more about their work and if a partnership is even possible. They will share their findings at the February meeting.

The group agreed this was sufficient for now on this decision.

5. Meeting Adjourned at 7:01 PM.