



# CITY OF PORTSMOUTH

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION WORKING GROUP

*Nancy Colbert Puff, Steve Butzel, Juliet Walker, Kelly Harper, Vincent Hayes, Tracy Gora, Jane Ferrini, Jessica Griffin, Nicole Cloutier, Eliza Gilmore, Katie Czajkowski, Laura Horwood-Benton, Elise Annunziata, Brinn Sullivan, Jordan Wells, Brian Goetz...*

### Minutes

Wednesday, January 27, 2021

Zoom Meeting, 10 am

In attendance: Nancy Colbert Puff, Jessica Griffin, Steve Butzel, Katie Czajkowski, Laura Horwood-Benton, Jordan Wells, Steve Zadavec, Elise Annunziata, Vincent Hayes, Juliet Walker, Robin Nielsen

- I. **Introductions/Welcome to New Members:** Superintendent of Schools Steve Zadavec and Reference Librarian Robyn Nielsen introduced themselves to the group. Steve noted that the Schools have been working for a few years on DEI, with the School Committee having adopted a policy committing the department to an inclusive, barrier-free, equitable learning environment. Robyn explained that she has been a part of the Library's TIDE (Taskforce for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity) group, and is very interested in hearing more about what the City is doing.
  
- II. **Acceptance of Minutes from 1/6/21:** unanimously accepted.
  
- III. **Progress Updates on Goals**
  1. Using broad employee input, develop a values statement for the organization to be used in recruitment and retention efforts. (Elise, Kelly, Laura)

Elise reviewed the revised introductory email and survey with the group. Due to the volume of information being transmitted, it works better as two communications. Elise consulted the recommendation materials provided by Ann Romney when she led the Library's racism workshops and selected 3, short videos to suggest to all staff. Perhaps there would be a week lag between the introductory email and the survey.

We discussed shortening the length of the introduction and providing a link to the full Council resolution, as well as a link to the employee DEI page. (As an aside: the password cannot be changed to a simpler one, but can be highlighted to draw people's attention).

Steve noted that the Schools have been doing a lot of DEI work, and that the School Board passes an Equity and Excellence education policy a few years ago. He offered to provide it to the group.

Elise mentioned resources associated with a 21-day challenge, and whether we should be inviting all staff to participate. Nancy suggested that maybe the Cyberhoot model, which is a monthly training, could be implemented, after the introductory email and subsequent survey. After three "all staff" interactions then perhaps a subgroup of more interested staff could opt into more intensive daily exercise.

Nancy offered to run the email and survey by the City Manager for her approval.

Juliet suggested that a group email address be established so that members could all view survey responses and everyone can view communications. There may be some shifting of the group over the coming months, and streamlining communication may be helpful. Nancy offered to work with Alan to establish the DEI workgroup email inbox.

2. Begin to offer monthly luncheon series "Sometimes It Takes a Story..." to all employees to promote discussions on DEI. (Tracy, Nancy)

We again reviewed the luncheon series with an eye towards attracting additional volunteer speakers and participants. Ideas include:

- i. Recipe sharing
- ii. Book discussion
- iii. Cultural excursion, museum experience

Members of the workgroup should volunteer a person to moderate the discussions. Katie suggested that some educational resources be provided alongside the luncheon, for example, to clearly connect travel to say cultural appreciation vs. appropriation. Juliet mentioned speaking with representatives from the Holocaust Center in Keene

about how to engage people in discussion about differences and diversity in a non-threatening way – informally bringing people into a broader conversation about race and equity. If we pick a topic, it may be a little less threatening.

Alternately, we could start discussions with stories that are once removed from yourself.

Laura observed that the outreach efforts she and Vincent are spearheading are creating connections that have spurred other actions – and that these are turning into partnerships that may lead to other initiatives into the future. She appreciates that this DEI group and the Story series helps us get to know one another, and is enjoyable, but want to make sure we also keep our focus on examining our privilege and challenging our assumptions at the same time. Katie’s suggestion about having some reading to do in relationship to the topic alongside the lunches is a good idea.

3. Identify/assemble resources to begin developing a framework.
  - CIP Adoption – February 8 public hearing, March 8 adoption
  - New ICMA guidance “Governing for Equity”

Nancy reminded the group that a capital project for assistance in developing a DEI strategic plan is before the City Council, and the public hearing is on Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>. Ultimately the project is part of this year’s capital budget, which is approved at the same time the City budget, in June. At the Council work session on the CIP there were questions about the plan, with some councilors clearly misunderstanding the request for additional training, and missing that it is intended to be a city-wide plan, with links to the Master Plan. Elise wondered if there may be other funding sources for this effort, and offered to do some research into this.

Steve asked if the DEI request was a bit out of the ordinary for the CIP, which is more often full of infrastructure requests. Nancy replied that while that is true, the CIP does also fund planning efforts, especially since they are non-recurring items. One Councilor did comment that they would prefer to see this as an operating cost, so if that translated into a recurring annual budget for the DEI group, that would be great.

Nancy introduced a new publication called "Governing for Equity" to the group, which is a primer to the topic which lends a lot of credence to the group's initial efforts thus far, and illustrates what other municipalities have done all over the country. She encouraged all to read it.

4. Engage with partners to develop resources and identify educational/outreach opportunities beyond the City's internal employee pool. (Vincent, Laura)

Vincent talk about possibly inviting representatives from the Center for Holocaust and Genocide, Genocidal studies, where the director is Peter McBride, a gentleman from Northern Ireland. For those of you who don't know, Northern Ireland is it's actually part of the United Kingdom. It's on it's on the island of Ireland. But it's been home to a lot of violence, sectarian and ethnic violence for the last probably centuries, but there was a big flare up back in the 70s. And that's the environment in which Peter grew up, grew up in. And he specializes in post conflict, mental health and reconciliation. We had an illuminating conversation with him. Especially given the current events in the United States. And, you know, we thought that maybe it might be a good idea for him to come to the city and give a presentation about reconciliation and mental health, given the current political climate. Tom White is also part of that conversation, and he has a much longer history with the center and has been a leading and facilitating community discussions about racial equity for years.

Laura noted that the Library is doing this indigenous story series, and targeting to have a conversation with Adam Moscow, who's one of the filmmakers for Dawnland, which some of us have seen and is specifically about truth and reconciliation problems.

Vincent described the outreach to Gather, Portsmouth's center for providing meals to the hungry. He noted that hunger was much more pervasive in the community that you may think, and that it impacts certain demographics more than others, which fits in well with our conversation. Gather had moved into social justice work kind of right before the pandemic started and wanting to really spend some of their time and effort on raising awareness in the community about hunger. And when they started tackling

some of those issues they thought we need to restructure so that we're living up to the principles and that meant that now they're both paid for and get paid \$15 an hour, which they were not before. It was a really inspiring example of people sort of really starting to do this work in an outward facing way and realizing that there was real change that needs to happen in their organization, which is probably a lot easier for small nonprofits than an entire city. They try to incorporate their values into their organization: for example, they are intentional about creating a low barrier to access for people that you have to prove in order to access the services that they provide - you don't have to verify your income, they adopt a choice model, where you can shop and have dignity in being able to choose the foods you would like (rather than being given an assembled box of food someone else has determined for you).

The Chase Home is the next scheduled outreach discussion. Jordan mentioned that the Police Department has a good working relationship with the Chase Home, which provides temporary care and shelter to teenagers who need it. The School system also is in close contact with them, as the children often attend school in Portsmouth while living at the Chase Home.

An invitation to all was extended to the group to join in these outreach conversations. Vincent offered that he and Laura have been taking notes, which may lead to a report. Each outreach contact has been asked if they would be interested in participating in a regular meeting, perhaps quarterly, to share ideas.

Crossroads House, the NAACP, and Haven are also on the list of future contacts. Jordan offered that Brienne in the PD has done a lot of victim witness advocate work, and may be a great resource.

We also reached out to Providence, RI and Northhampton, MA. And had a follow up conversation with Burlington, VT, both of whom have done a lot of work with their Police departments.

Elise expressed dismay that sometimes federal reporting requirements can be obstacles to participation – and that it was great that Gather was able to remove some of those barriers. She also reminded the group that as the CDBG administrator, she also has contacts with several of these organizations, and is excited about the City strengthening these connections.