

North Adams Diversity Equity and Inclusion Working Group
Thursday August 6th, 2020
MEETING MINUTES

Members in Attendance

Benjamin Lamb
Lisa Blackmer
Michael Obasohan
Karen Ruiz Leon
Alicia Canary
Isamaya Hagstrom

The North Adams Diversity Equity and Inclusion Working Group met via zoom webinar on August 6th, 2020 at 6pm EST.

Call to Order – 6pm

B. Lamb read a statement citing Governor Baker’s allowance to hold meetings using remote technology during COVID-19 and noted that this meeting is being recorded.

COMMUNICATIONS

B. Lamb indicated that the group should have received an email communication from Drew Herzig that was sent following the prior meeting.

RETURNING BUSINESS

- B. Lamb indicated that attendees will have an opportunity to speak at each agenda item.

Discussion of expectations and objectives in regard to Council Paper 11,852

- B. Lamb mentioned he had shared the original paper with the group but knows that there may be some needed clarity still.
- I. Hagstrom mentioned that she would like clarification of what the council would like to see as a final product.
- A. Canary added that she wanted more clarity of how the training should be targeted in its outcomes.
- B. Lamb clarified from his own perspective that he hoped that the training would provide an improved level of awareness and collective base-knowledge on the issues around systemic racism and other identity groups as well as promising practices that could be translated into the day-to-day work of the councilors. He referenced a similar issue around our green community designation and how initially we weren’t following that identified status in our budgetary decisions until we began to directly focus attention on asking questions. It wasn’t in ordinance that we take those steps, but it is

informed by promising practice, he hopes this training and toolkit would provide that use-in-practice to have a lens on equity as we look at systems changes going forward.

- L. Blackmer referenced the series at MMA and how her thoughts focused heavily on how do we engage those who remain unengaged, how do we address and work with unconscious bias, how do we make sure we are responding to constituents in an appropriate manner that helps them navigate as well. She hopes to be able to listen and understand more deeply what the core challenges might be so she can best help refer them to the right points of support. She referenced her personal experience and recognizes that not everyone has the same experience, so its important that all the councilors can recognize their own experiential differences.
- M. Obasohan appreciated the clarity and noted that it would be helpful to better know the people that the training is being created for. He suggested asking the council what they would specifically like to know more about so that the training could be better geared to their particular needs. When he does curriculum work, he aims to get to know the students and their wants before building out the training and curriculum to fit best. There may be councilors who have lacked interactions with communities unlike themselves, so that variety of experience depth
- B. Lamb said that is an interesting prospect but the collection may offer some challenge. He also noted that this is not just meant for this council, so we wouldn't want to narrow the target too much. Because this is hopefully going to be used beyond just council, and because it will be applied to future councils, maybe having a structure and a framework in place would be better so that each time it is administered it can be tuned and adapted but still conveys some common pieces. Perhaps an input survey could be an intake piece before administering it, and it makes a lot of sense to gather that information.
- A. Canary asked about the other trainings that have been offered and that the Councilors have been invited, so it is important to know why people haven't attended.
- B. Lamb mentioned that he admits not getting an invitation by MCLA to attend a training so he was curious when and what those offerings were, and noted that there may be a lack of interest to attend but also a communication gap. He also noted that he attended a training put on by the school district some time back that several councilors had attended.
- L. Blackmer noted that the timing of trainings matters in that night time trainings would work better due to day jobs and also mentioned not getting information about the MCLA offering either. She mentioned that it used to be much more likely that councilors were local all day due to their job proximity, but now many of the councilors work outside the city for other people which changes their ability to do meetings during the work day.
- I. Hagstrom clarified that it was a training that the MCLA institute for arts and humanities had opened up to the community. She had personally invited a city councilor and knows it was an open invitation, but it may not have necessarily been sent as an invitation to attend to the Councilors. It brings up an important point that everyone in city government is stretched thin, and time is a very valuable resource. So what resources, especially time, would be available for training?

- B. Lamb reiterated the time-of-day being an issue and mentioned that we aim to hold our meetings on weekday evenings usually after 6pm. Unfortunately there have been many different types of trainings offered mid-day that many can't attend. From his perspective, the goal would be to actually try to place this into a council meeting time slot since councilors are likely to be more reliably available at that time.
- M. Obasohan many times when these trainings are offered it's people who are interested in the work already, but the people who need this aren't the ones in the room. While councilors and others are already stretched thin, so that excuse doesn't sit well especially if you deem this work as appropriate and needed. He understands that during the day might not work, but what about offering them at multiple points and at multiple times to meet the schedules of anyone who needs to take it. Ultimately it comes down to accountability and those who need to be in the room should be in the room. As a group we need to find the closest to mandating by creating a pull to get them there, and even just asking what people want out of a training can pull them in.
- B. Lamb clarified that just because its in the middle of the day wouldn't mean he wouldn't try to attend something, and that now that we are in zoom it actually makes it more likely that people could attend things they couldn't have when travel was involved. He added that the idea of placing this on a standard council meeting time or schedules that we already know people have availability on makes the barrier to entry as low as possible. It's already at a meeting time you have saved, you collect information about what they want to learn, and then when you look at the accountability you create the structure. He suggested perhaps it's a matter of adding a council rule that both identifies it as a need, and also a way to publicly track participation of all councilors.
- L. Blackmer she referenced the workshops that new council groups used to go through and that perhaps this is the way this is run on an alternate Tuesday off-schedule from Council. Timing of the year should also be considered. She asked if we had gotten opinion on how workshops fit into open meeting law.
- B. Lamb said he needs to follow up with the state to get that clarity. It is much more likely that the deep learning needed will come out of a non-public-meeting workshop than if the workshop is run like a traditional public meeting.
- K. Ruiz Leon asked what the timeline for this then is, since it is important we have an action plan with specific dates and benchmarks to make sure we move forward. Along those lines she noted that without the accountability then what is the purpose? She understands that the councilors are busy, but so is everyone.
- B. Lamb answered that we had not set a timeline, but that was on purpose since the group really needs to set that timeline itself. He mentioned a call he was on this morning with the governmental alliance on race and equity (GARE) in which they talked about the long timelines that go into building trainings and promising practices for scaled application. He noted that the goals should be "aspirationally" optimistic since it's more important to do it right rather than fast, but not let perfect get in the way of progress. He agrees we need to set a timeline, but would like the full committee in attendance to do that but will put the timeline on the next agenda.
- No public comment raised

Report back and discussion on establishing definitions for development of the eventual training/tool kit in regard to Council Paper 11,852

- A. Canary noted that the subgroup began working on this but needed to get the clarity we had earlier in the meeting. They did have a discussion about adding accessibility into the discussion and adding the “A” to the groups name and focus to turn it into IDEA instead of DEI. They don’t have anything big to give at this moment but will move forward.
- B. Lamb said he thought the idea of adding Accessibility made a lot of sense and asked if it was something this group would be interested in.
- L. Blackmer noted she doesn’t like acronyms when it can be avoided, but would be fine with having accessibility included in the name.
- I. Hagstrom indicated that the who and the how are setting the paradigm for the training, and with North Adams being partially rural the need for access is heightened. Access cross-cuts Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.
- B. Lamb admitted that he assumed that access was built into inclusion, but notes that it’s a great idea to have it built into the name since it will help with building our definitions and objectives.
- I. Hagstrom noted that Alicia had really put much of this together but that the document the subgroup was working on should be shared with the full group.
- A. Canary mentioned that she wanted to wait to send it until the subgroup felt comfortable with what they had pulled together.
- I. Hagstrom asked if internal pdfs in the working group need to be public or not.
- B. Lamb said technically no, but it would make sense to have them accessible for transparency and access by public attendees. He mentioned that if everyone wants to funnel materials just to him and he can build the full packet of materials to everyone for the meetings to prevent inadvertent conversations. He asked for a recommendation to change the name.
- A. Canary moved to include Accessibility into the name of the group, L. Blackmer seconded.
- B. Lamb opened it up to public comment
 - o Drew Herzig, 46 Waverly St, Pittsfield spoke to the group needing a statement that outlines specifically what the words mean in the name so they don’t feel the need to add more and more going forward.
- 6 members voted to change the name, motion carries.

Report back and discussion on identified potential accountability constructs in regard to Council Paper 11,852

- M. Obasohan noted that the subgroup had not had a chance to meet yet due to scheduling conflicts. Once they are able to meet and discuss they will bring it back.
- No public comment raised

Report back and discussion on sourcing of best practices for training and workshops in regard to Council Paper 11,852

- L. Blackmer found that there are some good resources out there including the National League of Cities and much of what she found was around hiring practices and policies. She has saved a number of links that she will send to Ben to provide to the full group. The materials she found focused heavily on seeking diverse recruits, using appropriate language and the like but wasn't sure if this was something that we would be looking to bring forward. She mentioned an MMA training for their board coming up that she is happy to bring back information on. She will share the other resources to Ben as well to send along.
- A. Canary noted that she thought there was an added layer of what best practices communities are putting into place around their policies. She also noted that for recruitment it needs to be inward looking just as much as the outward recruitment, addressing the issues experienced by diverse populations that may prevent them from seeking employment or from being retained.
- B. Lamb referenced the GARE training he attended and how it did focus on the need to do an internal audit of practice and process to address what the issues are within the system so they can be changed. That is a starting point, that then plans build from. This also speaks to needing to tune training to the group being trained how Michael noted.
- I. Hagstrom brought up the structural or foot analysis being a process that this group could pursue to an extent, but asked if there are pre-existing statistics that could be accessible to the council to help guide how to build policies.
- B. Lamb noted that there will be information to those ends, but it is likely not readily accessed and thus practices aren't as data informed as they could be.
- No public comment raised

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion of meeting structure and equitable practices to employ

- A. Canary introduced the topic along the lines of how the group operates and if there was an interest in restructuring to allow for others to facilitate the group.
- B. Lamb noted he would be happy to transition or share the responsibilities of facilitation, whether that was something we would want to change on a regular basis or not.
- M. Obasohan noted that he recognizes the power dynamic being something we need to be cognizant of but didn't see it as a power dynamic struggle. He would just want any changes in structure and communication to be crystal clear so that we all know the flow and maintain consistency. He worries that it could be confusing if it is too regular of a changeover. He also feels that he would want more training himself on legislative practice before moving the dynamic around.
- L. Blackmer noted that she prefers structure, and due to the structure it makes sense to keep a standing practice for 6 to 12 months
- B. Lamb referenced that even council has a changeover of leadership, and noted that he intentionally structured this group with a "facilitator" role versus a chair as a means to hopefully not impose power constructs but to have the logistics maintained.
- M. Obasohan liked the idea of an annual opportunity to change facilitator.

- A. Canary noted she just wanted to have a discussion on it to make sure everyone is on the same page.
- I. Hagstrom asked to those ends what expectations we are holding ourselves and each other to within this group. It would be good to establish those expectations internally.
- K. Ruiz Leon asked if aspects of the trainings could be run as webinars to allow people to do elements of it on their own time verses trying to fit the training into everyone's calendars.
- B. Lamb mentioned that based on our discussion at the last meeting, the in-person aspects are needed for the more challenging learning opportunities, but he is a fan of the flipped classroom where you have some web-based learning and then leverage that during an in-person interaction that allows one to practice and engage around the topics learned online.
- A. Canary mentioned Rachel Cargle's workshop called Do the Work, it's a 30 day training that is individualized and it prompts actions along the way. It could be a model for us to look at to get the involvement without having the classroom involvement. It could work for some components.
- B. Lamb indicated that his should be put on an agenda as its own item to fully address the format of training
- L. Blackmer asked if we were talking about the council training or the training for the working group.
- B. Lamb said he believed they were discussing the training for the council and city departments.
- L. Blackmer asked if perhaps we should do something like this ourselves too as a working group.
- A. Canary noted that that's somewhat in line with what we are doing, and perhaps there are trainings we need to do as a group.
- No public comment raised

Discussion of recent incidents and their connection to this work

- A. Canary mentioned the resignation of Councilor Moulton and that this could be important to this work, or may not affect it at all.
- B. Lamb noted that it definitely informs our work, but doesn't necessarily change it. There is still a base knowledge that we would want everyone to have, but there is a real risk of aversion by certain individuals who should go through the training.
- I. Hagstrom noted that she had asked Alicia about this after reading the news articles as she wasn't fully informed about the official censure on the agenda and what the status of that was. While she personally disagrees with what Former Councilor Moulton had said, he does represent a significant cross-section of the North Adams population. We want people to engage in these conversations, and with such a fast moving resignation that does seem to put a damper on the interactions in the future and was curious if there is a story to hear or learn about.
- B. Lamb noted that from his knowledge, firstly there is "censure" and a "censor". A censure is a legislative tool to collectively state a united disagreement and a declaration of not being supportive of something done or said by a fellow member within the body.

It is usually in extenuating circumstances and is not meant to be a forcing out, it is meant to be a unified voice in the hopes that it can help lead to positive action, such as an apology or opportunity to learn more. The original censure is on the council agenda and is out there for public consumption, but will likely not go forward because it no longer has a purpose since the person is no longer part of the body. Former Councilor Moulton did submit his resignation and that was a current end point, but he could run again in the future, it was not a lifetime resignation. People can resign from elected roles at any time for number of things and some run again in the future. There is a lack of depth in terms of what we can discuss just because there isn't really a depth of story available.

- A. Canary noted that it is important going forward that we find a way to have the conversations we didn't get a chance to have with the speed of this most recent incident.
- B. Lamb mentioned that that is a good question and one that is hard to answer depending on the incident and individual's personal decisions.
- I. Hagstrom was thankful to learn the difference between a censure and a censor as she was much more concerned prior to the explanation.
- B. Lamb noted that she was not alone in not knowing the difference and that he's had this conversation with a number of people.
- No Public Comments raised

Discussion of issues the working group needs to address internally to work effectively

- A. Canary introduced the topic that we should address internal working group dynamics and training that needs to be addressed or attended so we can work together more effectively.
- M. Obasohan added that each time he attends a training it gives him a different perspective on himself, and for us to work effectively we need to address who we are as people and how we work with others and the world. It's necessary for us to know how we hear and process and how others do as well. In order for us to really put together the most effective opportunity, whether we do it individually or collectively, some trainings and reflection would support building our cohesiveness. This type of intergroup dialogue creates deeper openness.
- K. Ruiz Leon added that we need to do this on our own and the work never stops. We need to work the muscle out every day, and wanted to note that the work needs to come from each individual. It shouldn't be the job of people of color to teach others "how."
- B. Lamb asked if anyone might know what that internal work might look like for this group, and acknowledged this can come back next time but is curious what folks have to offer.
- A. Canary reiterated the Rachel Cargle "Do The Work" program. She has done 10 days of it and it's been very helpful.
- B. Lamb asked if there is an expense with it
- A. Canary said it's free for individuals.
- I. Hagstrom asked about the legalities of meeting as a group for trainings.

- B. Lamb said he needs to get a state ethics opinion on what can happen for trainings in terms of open meeting.
- L. Blackmer suggested the attorney general's office as well and mentioned there are other points of contact that we can ask. She said she will provide that contact information so we can reach out.
- K. Ruiz Leon asked if the peoples institute for survival and beyond is an opportunity. They have an education module called "undoing community racism" which really unpacks the systems so individuals have a clearer understanding. A condensed version was conducted at MCLA, but perhaps there is an opportunity to work with them over zoom to do a training.
- I. Hagstrom noted they have come to the Berkshires at least a couple of times so they are familiar with the area. Multicultural bridge is also a resource, though they are extremely swamped with inquiries. There are so many resources available, but for it to function it would need to be a group dialogue like Michael noted. While we are always doing the work internally, it is about garnering the learning and awareness between people as well.
- B. Lamb said he will add this to the next agenda as well since there are three individuals not present today.
- M. Obasohan noted that there are some great links being added by attendees that he would like saved and sent out to the group.
- K. Ruiz Leon noted that the implicit bias test by Harvard is a great resource and that there are multiple tools on that site that can be accessed as well.
- M. Obasohan noted he needs to depart momentarily.
- No public comment raised.

Discussion of policy around training/tool kit participation/use and expectations

- B. Lamb noted that the group had discussed components of this inherently in their other discussions but asked if there was any further discussion at this time.

Discussion of potential budget needs for an effective training / tool kit

- B. Lamb noted this was important to have on the agenda because we often assume we can get these trainings and get them for free, but it is important to appreciate the skills needed to administer a training and so we should keep in mind what those trainings might cost so it can be accounted for when provided for budgeting purposes. He suggested some work be done to ball-park some expenses to that end.
- K. Ruiz Leon agreed and that this training is often the livelihood of a lot of people so paying them is important.
- A. Canary agreed that we need to be paying people for doing this work
- A. Canary, L. Blackmer and B. Lamb will rough out some budgetary numbers
- L. Blackmer suggested we look at what grants might be out there for these trainings as well.
- No public comment raised

Identification of sub-group work/duties to work on for the August 27th, 2020 meeting

- B. Lamb stated that the previous sub-groups stand but wasn't sure if other work needs to be parsed out.
- M. Obasohan asked about looking at current policies and what is in place, and this group looking at if those policies are equitable or not and feels this is a place where this group could be a review body of types and would like this to be on the agenda for the next meeting.
- B. Lamb acknowledge that he had not been putting that on the agenda yet since the original charge of this body did not account for that, and that we have a decent amount of work to do in just getting a training put together, but this will go on the next agenda.
- A. Canary asked about looping in the work of the other policy group that Amber had mentioned at the last meeting as well.
- M. Obasohan is also part of the City Spirit group and they aren't really looking at policy review as much as they are looking at a community dialogue. They are looking to get the key community members in the room for a dialogue, but won't be looking deeply into policy most likely.
- B. Lamb noted that it would be valuable to stay attuned to what other bodies are doing for sure, including the food equity / access group.
- No public comment raised

Motion to Adjourn: M. Obasohan

Second: L. Blackmer

Meeting Adjourned 7:34pm