

North Adams Inclusion Diversity Equity and Access Working Group
Thursday August 27th, 2020
MEETING MINUTES

Members in Attendance

Amber Besaw
Lisa Blackmer
Alicia Canary
Benjamin Lamb
Michael Obasohan
Ashley Shade
Jessica Sweeney

The North Adams Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access Working Group met via zoom webinar on August 27th, 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.

APPROVAL OF BUSINESSES

- July 23rd, 2020 – Motion: J. Sweeney / Second: M. Obasohan
- In Favor: 5 / Opposed: 0 / Abstention: 2 – Motion Carries
August 6th, 2020 – Motion: L. Blackmer / Second: A. Canary
- In Favor: 4 / Opposed: 0 / Abstention: 3

COMMUNICATIONS

- B. Lamb reviewed communications sent to the working group, this included
- Email from Alicia Canary about the #DoTheWork 30 Day Course
 - Chat notes from the August 6th Meeting from Drew Herzig with links to the Harvard Implicit Bias Assessment

APPOINTMENT

- B. Lamb welcomed Ashley Shade as a new appointee to the Working Group and the members all introduced themselves.

NEW BUSINESS

- B. Lamb welcomed Mayor Bernard to discuss with the working group about training being provided for other boards, committees and city departments.

- B. Lamb raised the repeated points about the significant lift of the working group's work, and the desire to have the training developed applied as much as possible within the city hierarchy.
- Mayor Bernard acknowledged the work of Councilors Lamb, Blackmer and Sweeney that began to take hold following the MA Municipal Associations presentations and how COVID and the national landscape have both informed the timeline to date. He sees the charge of the group focused on the training and competency needed for the Council, and then hopefully seeing what can be offered more comprehensively across other city platforms. He emphasized that he wants this work to carry over to the city side that will inform the culture change. He wants to ensure there is accountability and ongoing assessment built into the city work as well.
- M. Obasohan emphasized the points around accountability and asked how the Mayor would like to see that look, and how will the administration raise that to a level of importance so that the work of this group is proven to be valued.
- Mayor Bernard noted he believes that the system needs to be built and that ongoing assessment is needed to keep the culture moving in the necessary direction. He would also like to see this working group take on additional roles around reviewing policies around public safety in alignment with the Obama Foundation work. This work will need to be done publicly and this group will be valuable in helping with that as they have capacity to do so. Starting out, a gap analysis is needed so the training can fulfill meeting those gaps. The approach needs to be both strategic and responsive so that actions reflect values.
- B. Lamb mentioned that Government Alliance on Race and Equity noted that the assessment is a huge piece of creating a successful process and program, so it will be important to assess the gaps at various levels, so we should maintain a conversation with the administration so that our training can be as cross-function appropriate as possible.
- Mayor Bernard agreed and noted that the work we all do together over the duration of this effort will help to identify the needs of people in a variety of roles and capacities. He clarified that we don't have a policy foundation to build on on the staff side, which emphasizes the need for a culture change in the city.
- L. Blackmer noted that her goal is focused on getting the training in front of those who will be doing the HR tasks inherently, like department heads and the chief administrators. Everyone needs to be able to respond to these issues and be aware of their biases and how they reflect in their work. She would hope that there would be a hierarchy of prioritization beginning with the department leads.
- Mayor Bernard agreed that it needs to begin with the senior staff and leadership teams to intentionally build the training, culture, norms and modeling that can then be brought down into the departments. He is already having these conversations during the recruitment of the next Administrative Officer as an example.

- A. Besaw raised the importance of having as many front-line staff who engage with the staff most heavily also have adequate training and preparation to work with a diversity of constituents, it can't just be the leadership.
- Mayor Bernard agreed up to a point but believes the supervisors need to model training and awareness for the front line staff to feel confident and to buy in.
- J. Sweeney asked how often the administration shares resources they are aware of with the full staff of the city and asked if that could be an opportunity to spread the trainings being offered by agencies already. That "soft" introduction might help since so much of the work is personal.
- Mayor Bernard agreed that some form of regular internal communication focused on training and offerings could be a good idea. He also mentioned that the new website which launched on Wednesday would be a good location for much of this work to live.
- A. Canary asked about the two routes of training, both training addressing historic inequity in North Adams, or training around being more conscientious and how would the Mayor see approaching this with the staff.
- Mayor Bernard noted he has been more focused on cultural competency than historic inequities since there is a heavy focus on city culture and customer service when it comes to staff. The works shouldn't be incumbent on individual staff or leaders, but should be part of the systems and work of the city, and while it hasn't been his focus, the history of inequity can play a role.
- M. Obasohan raised cultural construct change needing to include understanding of how cultural constructs have been built. It is important to understand the residents and rules and how those policies have ingrained potentially harmful cultural pieces. The policies need to be seen so there is a base to build off of.
- Mayor Bernard agreed and noted the complexities associated with policies and ordinance living in many different places and formats, but the ordinance is probably the most straight forward and easily accessible piece, while things like employment policies are all compliance based. Individual policies are easy to share piece by piece, and some lean on state level policies that then trickle down. It will be a matter of priority setting and sequencing.
- B. Lamb added that the Council Rules are another piece of function that could be useful for the working group to have. He also mentioned that there is real value in having this group ready to begin to review policies, both existing and new, to put critical eyes and assessment in an equity lens.
- Mayor Bernard noted a simple one that comes up regularly is the gendered language in our existing code.
- L. Blackmer noted that even that can be challenging based on how individuals are raised in terms of grammar, so it has a learning curve at that level as well.
- B. Lamb noted that that is something that is slowly chipped away at based on how things are edited and reviewed due to the cost of changing ordinance, while things like the Council Rules were easy to remove gendered language.
- A. Shade noted that training alone won't change the culture alone, so the group needs to listen to those to be trained so they will buy in to the training itself. The

trainees need to be a part of the process. It can be difficult for individuals to understand the changes in language and approach, but it's important. Explaining the harm that actions do can do a better job at creating the culture change.

- Mayor Bernard noted that that is a reason why a quality facilitator is needed along these lines too. It shouldn't just be compliance based training.
- B. Lamb noted that this is just the beginning of this dialogue and that we will need to stay in regular communication with the Mayor as we move through this. It is additionally important that we learn the needs and wants of those being trained and we should be seeking that information earlier to bake it into the process. Getting access to the staff would be helpful.
- Mayor Bernard noted the work of Bridges Out of Poverty and how there could be some level of opportunity that could be mimicked in North Adams so we don't reinvent the wheel to learn from the staff.
- J. Sweeney asked that having the superintendent in the future like this would be helpful to learn more about what is being done in the school system along these lines too.
- Mayor Bernard agreed, but suggested waiting until the school year is underway, but also that there is value in getting youth involved in these discussions as well.

RETURNING BUSINESS

- Report back on establishing definitions for development of the eventual training/tool kit in regard to Council Paper 11,852
 - A. Canary shared a rough draft of the definitions she had developed so far and shared the development process briefly. It was determined that it might be helpful for the group to review and discuss more in depth at the next meeting rather than trying to read it all at this time.

- Report back and discussion on identified potential accountability constructs in regard to Council Paper 11,852
 - M. Obasohan shared that finding how other communities and organizations are doing accountability has been very difficult. There isn't much out there which speaks volumes to there not being regular mechanisms for accountability or public knowledge of accountability constructs. He mentioned the National League of Cities which didn't have any specifically along the lines of accountability. This might be a situation of establishing it ourselves.
 - J. Sweeney had a similar situation of not finding enough to share anything of value and this speaks volumes to the work we have to do. She has also tried to find accountability structures outside of policies and wonders if media and public conversations play a role into it.
 - A. Besaw was surprised to not find anything easily as it seemed strange for it to be secretive but found a similar challenge to Michael and Jess. There doesn't seem to be any natural best practice along the accountability lines.
 - J. Sweeney found a lot about police accountability, which makes sense right now, but not in other realms of governance.

- A. Besaw noted this might be a moment for us to look at it differently for ourselves that really involves the community in holding the city and themselves accountable.
 - A. Shade noted that unless they build their own constructs, politicians don't have any real rules for behavior as accountability is held up by the voters. The rules for government would need to be passed by the government itself.
 - B. Lamb noted he is shocked but not surprised that they hadn't found anything out there, but he believes we need to set our own rules for this on the council since this approach was unanimously approved by the council, so the next step is for the Council to take on the task of creating their own accountability, starting with a new rule of the council. The more transparent a body is about their completion, or not, of training, the more the public can then hold their elected officials accountable, so the media and community conversations have an important role. On the city staff end, there is much more control in place versus elected officials, since the Mayor has administrative oversight of what he requires of the staff.
 - A. Canary brought up looking for racial equity impact assessments that you do as you are building policy. In a way, by requiring that, it institutes a practice of ongoing application.
 - A. Shade noted that even if there are rules, the elected officials don't need to follow them as they can't be fired. It is more a goal of hoping that people will comply.
 - L. Blackmer noted that the council could adapt their rules like they have done in the past. The rules need to reflect a commitment to values. There can be pressure and censure, which has proven to make a difference in the past, even if not codified.
 - B. Lamb noted that the discomfort of being called out or criticized can be a motivator to follow the rules and expectations. He noted there is consistency in what the three brought forward and that perhaps coming back with any new findings at the next meeting might be helpful.
 - J. Sweeney agreed and mentioned that the sharing of the Council Rules would be helpful to those ends.
 - No Public Comments Offered
- Discussion of training and workshops that this group should pursue internally
- L. Blackmer mentioned follow-up trainings being conducted by the MMA and how they have embraced the National League of Cities approach in their regular sessions and trainings. Many communities are also working with the NLC, though some can be cost prohibitive. In November a training for Councilors across the state around diversity and immigration will be happening.
 - B. Lamb mentioned that this was focused on offerings that this working group could and should go through mostly.
 - A. Besaw noted a training by Gwendolyn Van Sants foundational training that the coalition and the school district went through which will be opened up to more

community groups over several months to build on introspective personal work. To do good practice we need to understand ourselves and apply that to our work, and as those trainings come out it would be valuable for members of this group to try to participate in them.

- J. Sweeney mentioned the Artist Impact Coalition has been hosting anti-racism conversations digitally and will be holding one on the 17th of September as well. The focus has been on break outs centered on a specific topic. These are monthly and will be ongoing.
 - B. Lamb asked if maybe this is a good ongoing thing for us to do to bring up trainings and offerings that might benefit this group or to help promote to the public. Perhaps a Gwendolyn training for this group could be helpful to see what we might be able to glean. Ben and Amber will try and reach out to see what can be done.
 - L. Blackmer noted that getting some numbers on training costs could be helpful now, but also that by keeping professional development funding in the council budget line it could be a resource to leverage.
 - B. Lamb noted that the #DoTheWork training is actually not meant to be a time capacity challenge, but instead just makes you think and push beyond your comfort zone to practice individual improvements, and that the 30 sessions isn't meant to be a deterrent.
 - A. Canary noted that it's meant to be one action per day so that individuals can reflect and process accordingly.
 - J. Sweeney recommended bringing in council directly into that training if we are able to get her to work with us.
 - A. Besaw noted that her training is unique in the focus on culture shift and it pushes that forward. It could help us to better assess how members of the community feel welcomed and engaged or not.
 - No Public Comment Offered
- Discussion of policy and legalities in terms of conducting trainings in regard to open meeting laws
- B. Lamb shared that legal opinion would allow for trainings as long as there is not deliberation that applies directly to the work of the body, or no more than half of the group could go through the training together, but from a conversation and dialogue, having the full group together feels important.
 - L. Blackmer felt that works well for the Council but is worried about this group since it is a topical area we are continually discussing.
 - B. Lamb noted that this group doesn't have jurisdiction, we are an advisory body who doesn't have direct oversight into changing rules, laws or otherwise, which would seem to bypass that issue for the working group. He also emphasized the work of this group is still incredibly important. He feels this is a good outcome to get from the attorney general's office.
- Discussion of expectations of training/tool kit use and application and accountability

- B. Lamb noted this has been addressed otherwise already
- Discussion of potential budget needs for an effective training / tool kit program
 - B. Lamb noted this was brought up in regards to Gwendolyn and shared a rough outline of some examples of costs associated with existing trainings. He noted the Groundwater Approach on Racial Equity, the Government Alliance on Racial Equity toolsets, the National League of Cities, and the Peoples Institute for Surviving and Beyond.
 - A. Canary mentioned the programs through Bend Oregon
 - L. Blackmer noted that there are not currently any programs through our insurance company, but that the NLC trainings could be a good resource if we are in a position to re-establish our membership. She wonders where there may be small pots of funding we can work with to support a full training spread.
 - A. Canary noted that the Bend Oregon work really went through a full assessment and process of setting new protocols for policy setting and application.
 - B. Lamb noted that a search for available funding pools both within the city and outside would be helpful. He also mentioned he has reached out to some private foundations that might be good resources to tap into.
 - J. Sweeney noted the importance of Councilors potentially paying themselves for some of their training to show buy-in.
 - B. Lamb reiterated how this may be a way we can leverage funds we would normally use to go to MMA to instead shift our own individual professional development resources towards this specific training.
 - L. Blackmer said we need to fight to keep those funds in our budget so we can use them accordingly.
 - No Public Comments Offered

NEW BUSINESS

- Discussion of timeline and benchmarks to set short and long-term plan
 - B. Lamb will provide an outline to the working group for the next meeting to discuss more in depth.
 - M. Obasohan agreed on that approach so we can then work on that visual and move ahead with.
- Discussion of training/tool kit formats and what may work best for this effort
 - B. Lamb noted the group had addressed aspects of that already in the discussion.
 - M. Obasohan asked for clarification.
 - B. Lamb indicated that this was in regards to the actual logistics of administering the training virtually, in person, or in a synchronous/asynchronous fashion, not so much about the content.
 - M. Obasohan mentioned that it should not be a one-and-done and that a hybrid model is a good approach but we should create something that allows people to

do work on their own to return with. It shouldn't just be distributed content to participants.

- A. Canary mentioned concerns about asking staff to do the training off-work hours. They should be paid for the time they are doing the training.
 - B. Lamb agreed and noted that based on the schedule of various employees, there will also need to be some variations of how training is administered, and that staff should not be expected to be doing this work without it being part of their paid time.
 - No Public Comment Offered
- Sharing of local trainings / workshops already in place
 - B. Lamb noted this will be done as a regular piece.
 - Expectation setting for the I.D.E.A. working group itself
 - B. Lamb noted this had been brought up and suggested moving it to a future agenda. A draft of this should be created and then worked on or drawn from other sources. He will put this on the next agenda and individuals can bring any expectations they find elsewhere to consider.
 - Discussion of what a transition to a "Policy Review/Feedback" entity might look like going forward
 - B. Lamb noted that this was covered during prior discussions in the evening but will be brought back at a future agenda.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: L. Blackmer

Second: J. Sweeney

Motion Carries

Meeting Adjourned: 8:01pm