

**CITY OF BARRE
PUBLIC BODY DRAFT MEETING MINUTES**

Committee/board: Diversity and Equity Committee

Date of meeting: Wednesday, October 5, 2020, 6:15 PM

Location of meeting: Zoom Videoconference with Call-in Option

Board/committee members in attendance:

- Ellen Kaye
- Danielle Owczarski
- William Toborg
- Joelen Mulvaney
- Marichel Vaught
- Christopher Roberts

Board/committee members absent:

- Susan Kaye (public)
- Jan (public)

Others in attendance:

- Steve Mackenzie (City Manager)

Topic(s) Discussed

1. Call to order at 6:15 PM.
 - a. Housekeeping by Joelen
 - i. Fist-to-five when asked support
 1. Strong support is five fingers
 2. No support is fist
 3. Other options show variation of support
2. Adjustments to the Agenda.
 - a. Removed c and changed d to c.
 - b. Need to check that members have the correct email for William (wult1@caa.columbia.edu) – the correct address is on the Barre website
3. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting
 - a. Danielle added links to ADA survey and results
 - b. Minutes approved.
4. Old Business:
 - a. Review Action Items
 - b. Definitions, data collection, listing what type of data is useful
 - i. Definitions – Joelen – should definitions be put to a subcommittee
 - ii. Ellen – definitions have been gathered together in one doc and she is willing to bring this back to the committee
 1. Subcommittee – Ellen, William, Marichel
 - iii. Data collection – Joelen – add to the new business to tackle in forming working groups
 - c. Finalize contact information spreadsheet – not addressed

5. New Business:

- a. Forming workgroups and assigning tasks with deadlines
 - i. Joelen reviewed the list of tasks with the committee
 - ii. Danielle recommended to provide more specificity for each task
 1. Joelen remarked that sub-committees could provide specificity
 - iii. Community Assessment Sub-committee
 1. Ellen and Danielle, Marichel is willing to help and track down data, Joelen is good in creating surveys and can help with that
 - iv. City Policy and Procedures Review Sub-committee
 1. Christopher and Danielle
 2. Joelen has been in contact with Tim Bombardier to access policies and procedure that may not be on-line. Joelen will share contact.
 - v. D&E Committee Development & People's Education Sub-committee
 1. Joelen and Marichel
 2. Danielle can help with presentation of information
 3. People's education was combined with D&E Committee Development
- b. Set timeline for Flag Policy review
 - i. Ellen provided statement (transcript provided in statement for minutes)
 - ii. Clarification on acronym Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), Latinx includes both male and female Latin Americans
 - iii. Ellen shared stories of BIPOC in Vermont in support of the Black Lives Matter flag and the urgency in providing guidance to the City Council
 1. Responses
 - a. William – Expressed he has not seen confederate flags, and is concerned with people equating a Trump flag as being a racist is a concern for him. Believes Trump has done a lot for Black people. Thinks people misinterpret actions they experience as racism.
 - b. Joelen said she can share examples of confederate flags hanging in Barre City
 - c. Danielle provided comment in the chat that she would have liked to provide a supporting statement but had to leave at 7PM. She supports the BLM flag being raised.
 2. Following minutes taken by Marichel starting at 7PM
 - a. Joelen advised we stay away from electoral issues after William expressed concern about Trump flags being seen as synonymous with confederate flags.
 - b. Chris has absolutely no personal issues with raising a BLM flag. He is completely supportive but has concerns with the legal repercussions of displaying a BLM flag.
- c. Review Council's revised flag policy
 - i. Marichel summarized Hemmerick's understanding of the flag policy he submitted to council. Although there are several strikethroughs, the

committee can put those back in or strike out other portions because it was never voted on. Mayor Herring has also expressed his request that the committee also look at display policies on street displays, lightposts, and gazebos.

ii. Joelen asked that each committee member review the policy as submitted by Hemmerick and bring feedback to the next meeting. We will also spend more time reviewing that flag policy then.

iii. Chris will review both the proposed Barre flag policy and Montpelier's flag and street display policy from a legal standpoint.

6. Set next meeting Date: Monday, October 19, 2020 at 6:15PM

7. Round Table

a. Ellen and Marichel expressed importance to keep in mind the mission of the committee. Our goal is not to decide whether or not racism exists. It is to be a voice for marginalized groups. We should not doubt or minimize the concerns BIPOC express to the committee.

b. The committee is appreciative of all the stories shared by BIPOC during Ellen's presentation.

8. Adjourned at 7:32 PM.

Action items

1. All committee members: Ensure emails sent to William are sent to the correct address.
2. All committee members: Review the flag policy as submitted by Hemmerick and bring feedback to the next meeting.
3. Joelen: Send contact information for Officer Bombardier to Chris for policy review
4. Chris: Will review both the proposed Barre flag policy and Montpelier's flag and street display policy from a legal standpoint.
5. All subcommittees: Start the process of organizing subcommittees.

1) Motion: Move to adopt minutes as amended.

Mover/Second: Ellen/Chris

Result of vote: Approved by all

Meeting adjourned: not recorded

Mover/Second: not recorded

Time: 7:32 PM

Next meeting date/time/location: Monday, October 19, 2020 at 6:15 PM via Zoom

Minutes submitted by

Danielle Owczarski – Secretary

Marichel Vaught – Vice-Chair

Making a Statement that Black lives matter – Why it's Urgent
Ellen Kaye, Barre City Diversity and Equity Committee
October 5, 2020

I have been asked to back up my assertion that it is urgent for Barre City to unequivocally make a statement that Black lives matter.

First, I want to unpack what is meant when we say Black lives matter. It's worth noting that Patrisse Cullors, who first coined the phrase, and began the current movement for Black lives, stated in an interview that it means that Black lives matter, too. The statement speaks to the historical and current devaluing of Black lives, and supports the demand that Black lives be included, valued, and held as precious in this country. Black lives matter, as a statement, is larger than any organization or campaign. It is a fundamental statement of inclusion.

First, some data, illustrating the devaluing of Black lives in Vermont

- In Vermont: Black drivers are 2.7-3.9 times more likely to be stopped by police
- In Vermont: Only 1 percent of the population in Vermont is African-American but 11 percent of its prison population is black (8.5% in 2017). Vermont has the highest rate in the country of adult black male incarceration, and has the third highest rate of African-Americans in prison. (From Sentencing Project Report)
- In Vermont: Students with Disabilities Were Nearly Three Times More Likely than Students without Disabilities to be suspended. (VT Legal Aid)
- In Vermont: Black/African-American and Native American students were 2-3 times more likely than white students to be suspended.
- In Barre City schools: 12% of students are BIPOC. The percentage of BIPOC teachers seems to be negligible.

Here are some high-profile snapshots of the experiences of BIPOC in Vermont, recently:

- Kiah Morris –suffered constant threats and harassment as the only Black state representative in Vermont. Resigned because of it.
- Tabitha Moore – President, NAACP of Rutland, and 5th generation Vermonter. Her daughter was part of a campaign to raise a Black lives matter flag at her school. She suffered harassment and intimidation. Family is moving.
- A Latinx family in Barre: Stuart Rollins (Barre) – threatened, harassed, intimidated Latino neighbors, including children. Charged with federal hate crime.

In order to give substance to the urgency of making this statement, I asked BIPOC Vermonters, including Black, Latinx, and Asian residents, why, in their words, is it urgent for municipalities to say that Black lives matter. Here's what they said:

N, Greensboro

In the past 2 months, I have been witness to the mental breakdown of multiple Black Vermont residents. I have heard stories of Black youth contemplating suicide because of overt racism in our school districts. I have heard countless tales of fellow People of Color within our own state, within our own towns that you visit in a daily basis, say that racism is now more prevalent than ever, evidenced by extreme harassment of POC community leaders and Black Lives Matter advocates across our state. But - to us - it's just another typical day.

No justice was served this week, with the decision Louisville. Consider that. We experience racism in all forms, in all capacities, every day of the week. Municipalities of all types owe a responsibility to its most marginalized citizens. To express that Black Lives Matter is not to formally align with the group (as I'm sure most would be too scared to do that), but it is a step in the right direction for community leadership and setting a standard. If our authority figures are keeping silent, it is as good as being an accomplice. They owe a responsibility, first and foremost, to promote and grow trust within their communities. There can be no trust when BIPOC folks are getting harassed in their own towns every day of the week.

N, Montpelier (Youth)

Because it's a predominantly white area, people in Barre and VT are sheltered/protected from diversity and culture. People in VT can go their whole life without seeing BIPOC. They don't know how to relate and act toward people of other cultures. We see ourselves as a liberal/progressive state. We can't forget there are people who don't believe that Black lives matter. We can't let them win. If they knew the history of US, b/m, racism, they would understand why it's important.

Black people understood that the murder George Floyd wasn't the first, but some white people may have seen it as the first. We don't want to have an incident like that in Vermont.

Saying that Black lives matter will set a precedent, hold cities and residents accountable to protect all of the community. Saying it officially and publicly encourages people to take it into account when making decisions.

We want more BIPOC to move to Vermont, and to advertise that welcoming. More representation is important. Seeing doctors, nurses, teachers, elected officials gives an extra level of comfort for BIPOC. Especially for kids of color to see themselves in their teachers, in nurses, doctors. My dad was the only black teacher in Montpelier school district. When you don't see yourself in your school, you don't get an idea of who you can be. It's the work of the community to show that diversity and love.

M, Barre

I see lots of trump and confederate flags here. I'm surprised when I see Black lives matter lawn signs in Barre. It makes me feel comfortable. When all I see are white people, I feel

like I don't belong here. People pull rank, letting you know you're an outsider, saying their families lived here longer, that's how we do things here, etc..

Signs, like Black lives matter, especially when I don't see BIPOC, make me feel safer. I want to put a sign on my lawn, but it doesn't feel safe. I'm scared when in my own yard – cars slow down, I get glared at. I have friends and family that don't visit because they feel intimidated. I have been followed in stores in Barre. I only feel safe walking around downtown Barre with my husband, who is white. I don't feel comfortable spending money in local businesses when treated with suspicion and like an outsider. When I walk in towns that have publicly affirmed that black lives matter I feel so safe and welcome, because of that affirmation.

The only people saying “all lives matter” in response to “Black lives matter” are white people. Not Asian people, not Latino people, not LGBTQ people. Taking a stand for equality is not divisive. Normalize diversity; normalize inclusion, so that it becomes natural in our community.

The feeling of insignificance and invisibility when you don't see support or welcoming and can dampen your ability to participate and contribute to your community. We need to encourage every single member of our community by including everyone.

To have a visual welcome feels urgent. It's like seeing a ramp, which conveys that people with disabilities are considered, and welcomed. If the flag is up, it signals that the decision makers in the city are supporting equity.

P, Barre

I don't know how much more urgent the moment can be right now. The President is telling militias, Proud Boys, white supremacists to “stand by.”

M, Barre

I grew up in central Vermont, and heard “go back to where you came from.” Watching abuse of BIPOC every day makes people of color feel unsafe wherever they live. To say “Black lives matter” would be a validation of universal human rights, as opposed to separate rules for BIPOC and white people. I'm a school employee – schools are not meeting needs of students of color. My input as an employee of color has been ignored in the past. If Barre City would publicly say that Black lives matter, it would give support to efforts in school to make changes.

N, Northfield

The past week and a half has been incredibly traumatic for me. From the loss of RBG and the announcement of her possible replacement, to the Executive order stating that diversity training is anti-American, to the Breonna Taylor verdict to Trump publicly giving permission to white supremacist groups to stand back and stand by, to seeing the hateful racist actions of members of my small community; I have been reminded over and over by various governing institutions and actions, that my life does not matter.

This has become a daily state for me now, to wake up every morning feeling fear for my life and the lives of my children. To feel uncomfortable doing basic things like buying gas or buying a drink at the local store. To feel like I have to censor how I present or respond to any given situation because I never know which one could be the "one" that makes me a statistic. Or god forbid, one of my children, a hashtag. I now live every moment of my day in a state of trauma that I have never experienced before. I live in fear I can't keep my children safe. Yet I wake up every morning, get my kids ready for school and head to work as if everything is fine. My basic needs are not being met, but I am expected to continue as if everything is ok.

V, Washington

I've been here for 2 years. It's not comfortable. I'm a pretty hardy person. I've lived in NYC and the deep South. I've dealt with racism – deeply intense and not so intense. I'm no longer comfortable walking in Barre, or even being out in my own yard. People have yelled stuff, thrown stuff, slowed down. My neighbor shot at my dog, put up American flags all over his house. Continues to threaten to shoot my dog.

There's a temperature shift here in VT. There are not enough BIPOC to make our own voices heard. My safety is in the hands of people that have no stake. There is the idea of VT being progressive place, but there are a lot of people who feel disenfranchised and are not heard. Many have no exposure to BIPOC, only via TV. People are telling them that people asking for equal rights are just being disruptive. That people questioning police are being paid. This narrative has taken hold – being repeated by politicians and media. As a result, white people see me as their enemy

I grew up Black. I spent my entire life trying to disarm white people. Being a sycophant, being too nice. It's no answer anymore. It's become a poisonous thing. It makes people of color question ourselves, and our identities.

People in power need to challenge that narrative and bring us together. Who else do we have?

These statements stand on their own. I was moved by them, and by the willingness for BIPOC Vermonters to tell me their stories and share their thoughts. It was notable that not one of them hesitated to say that this is urgent. What was apparent was how insulated non-BIPOC residents are from the daily, lived experience of racism and exclusion, and how important amplifying these voices is.

On June 30, 2020, Barre City Council approved a resolution stating, among other things, that

- "as public leaders we have a responsibility to speak out against violence, racism, bias, discrimination and police brutality, in addition to hate crimes and violence that create fearful and unstable neighborhoods," and
- "the City of Barre commits to protect the rights of all people and will speak out when it sees injustice happen,"

- and “the Barre City Council stands together to speak out about any form of bigotry, discrimination or hate, in speech or action, against any groups, from whatever the source.”

And I will remind us that Barre City aspires to welcome more people to live, work, shop and visit here. It hosts several state offices and institutions, which bring people here from other parts of Vermont on a regular basis. It wants our young people to stay. Do we want to convey that we are a welcoming, open and inclusive place, where folks can feel comfortable and protected, or do we want our public silence to convey that we condone the increasing racism and violence that threaten, intimidate, exhaust, and harm BIPOC every day? By publicly, and officially expressing that Black lives matter, now, we stand in solidarity with BIPOC, and against those forces that promote hatred and repression and violence.

In short, this is urgent, because every single day, every single moment, people of color are thinking, “Will I be next? Will my child be next? Am I safe where I live? Who can I trust? Who can I be myself with?” And, “Who will stand up with me?” Right now is the time for our city to say that Black lives matter, Black joy matters, Black futures matter, as a first, and necessary step to changing how people of color are treated in our community.