



Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality

Thursday, May 4, 2021

5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Being Held Electronically

Members Present: Saehee Duran and Doug Neff, Co-Chairs; Rabbi Barbara Block*, Dr. Justin Clark, Christian Lewis, Mike Powers, Francine Pratt, Robin Robeson, Jeff Schrag, and Dr. Shurita Thomas-Tate.

Members Absent: Rita Baron, Chantha Chimm, Christa Moss, John Oke-Thomas, Bob Roberts, Jeanne Skahan, and Carol Taylor.

City Council: None.

Staff: Anita Cotter, City Clerk; Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement.

Others: None.

Clerk's Note: *Rabbi Barbara Block arrived at approximately 5:40 p.m.

Welcome

Doug Neff, Co-Chair, welcomed everyone to tonight's meeting, which began at approximately 5:30 p.m.

Roll call was conducted. Present: Dr. Justin Clark, Christian Lewis, Mike Powers, Francine Pratt, Robin Robeson, Jeff Schrag, Dr. Shurita Thomas-Tate, Doug Neff, and Saehee Duran. Absent: Rita Baron, Rabbi Barbara Block*, Chantha Chimm, Christa Moss, John Oke-Thomas, Bob Roberts, Jeanne Skahan, and Carol Taylor.

Approval of April 8, 2021 Minutes

The Initiative members reviewed the draft minutes of the April 8, 2021 meeting.

Ms. Robeson moved to approve the April 8, 2021 meeting minutes as presented.

Ms. Pratt seconded the motion, and it was approved by the following vote: Ayes: Clark, Lewis, Powers, Pratt, Robeson, Schrag, Thomas-Tate, Neff, and Duran. Nays: None. Absent: Baron, Block*, Chimm, Moss, Oke-Thomas, Roberts, Skahan, and Taylor. Abstain: None.

Welcome New Members

Co-Chairman Neff welcomed Dr. Clark to tonight's meeting.



Self-Introductions of New Members

Dr. Clark noted he is a physician with Mercy, and is originally from Jacksonville, Florida.

Clerk's Note: Dr. Clark experienced some technical difficulties during his introduction.

Opening Comments

Co-Chair Neff encouraged everyone to participate and to provide any thoughts or observations during Initiative meetings.

Co-Chair Duran also encouraged everyone to feel free to participate in discussions and to provide insight and comments to the Initiative. She expressed her excitement about tonight's meeting to hear from Dr. Galanes.

Key Issues in the News

Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement, informed the Initiative that Taj Suleyman has been hired as the City's first Director of Diversity and Inclusion. She noted he will begin his new position on May 17, 2021. Ms. Scott noted Mr. Suleyman would be attending Initiative meetings once he begins his new position. She further noted Mr. Suleyman is a refugee from Lebanon and has a family who will accompany him to the community. She added he has been residing in Dubuque, Iowa.

Ms. Scott noted a virtual interview session was held with Mr. Suleyman. She further noted if anyone would like to view it, to please contact her and she would e-mail a video link of the interview. She added once Mr. Suleyman arrives to the community more interviews would be conducted.

Survey Presentations – Dr. Gloria Galanes

Co-Chair Neff introduced Dr. Gloria Galanes, who is a Missouri State University Professor Emerita and retired Dean of the College of Arts and Letters. He noted she donates her time and expertise to assist the City and other organizations in analyzing survey projects and research results with a particular interest in social justice issues. Co-Chair Neff noted Dr. Galanes will conduct a presentation tonight pertaining to an analysis of the results regarding a recent Mayor's Commission on Human Rights and Community Relations community inclusion survey.

Dr. Galanes gave a presentation virtually entitled Springfield Inclusiveness Survey Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality. *(Please refer to Exhibit A)*

The following is an outline of the presentation:

- A. About the Mayor's Commission on Human Rights and Community Relations
- B. Purpose of the Inclusion Survey
- C. Inclusion Survey Details
- D. The Questions
- E. Responses
- F. Quantitative and Qualitative Data



- G. Process of Analysis
- H. Key Findings
- I. Sample Comments
- J. Sample Comments, continued:
- K. Key Findings
- L. Key Findings, continued
- M. Recommendations Summarized (couple slides)
- N. Faith-based examples of discrimination:
- O. Recommendations Summarized (continued)
- P. Important quote from the study:
- Q. Next Steps
- R. Questions?

Research Review and Facilitated Discussion

Following the presentation, Dr. Galanes responded to questions posed by the Initiative.

Pertaining to equity and diversity relations, Mr. Schrag asked for clarification regarding the percentage of individuals that may be unreachable. Dr. Galanes noted the percentage is approximately 10% or less. Mr. Schrag expressed his belief a representative from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) community should have been appointed to serve on the Initiative, which should be addressed. He further expressed his belief the Initiative members were formed for discussion only and possible outcomes, solutions, or actions will not be implemented. Dr. Galanes expressed there were comments made during the survey from individuals with this same belief of only discussion will take place and no possible outcomes, solutions, or actions would be developed or implemented.

Ms. Pratt informed the Initiative there is an Equity and Prosperity Commission, which has also been meeting since November 2020 and have met with City officials. She noted this Commission is developing recommendations for education, housing, health, financial job security, transportation, and public safety. She further noted once those recommendations have been made by the Commission, which may be around July 2021, those recommendations would be sent to the Initiative for review. Ms. Pratt added Prosper Springfield recently held a cabinet meeting, and their possible recommendations regarding equity and equality will also be forwarded to the Initiative for review. She noted Prosper Springfield was formed several years ago to work with roughly 300 plus entities to make the community more prosperous. She further noted Prosper Springfield is charged with reporting to the community how well we are progressing with the recommendations in the report from the Impacting Poverty Commission. Ms. Pratt noted the community has two goals to increase the prosperity for our community: 1) Reduce the poverty level from 25.7% to 20.7%; and 2) Increase post-secondary attainment from 39.5% to 48% both by year 2025. She further noted Springfield is made of many different subgroups. She added there are several goals related to the issue of poverty: race and ethnicity; individuals with disabilities; health (mental or physical) disparities; and unemployment. Ms. Pratt noted since the Initiative was formed by the Mayor, there will be accountability. She informed the Initiative she would e-mail them additional information for their review.

Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement, thanked Dr. Galanes for today's presentation, as well as Ms. Pratt for informing the Initiative about Prosper Springfield.



Co-Chair Neff asked for clarification whether the Equity and Prosperity Commission has addressed any issues for the LGBTQ community. Ms. Pratt answered affirmatively and noted there was representation from the LGBTQ community on the Commission and subcommittees to discuss the various goals for recommendations. Ms. Pratt asked Ms. Scott to forward a copy of a presentation that would include data statistics for comparison that was referred to in a past press release to the Initiative for their information.

Co-Chair Neff requested Ms. Pratt conduct a presentation regarding the Equity and Prosperity Commission's work at an upcoming Initiative meeting.

Co-Chair Neff expressed his belief Springfield has many citizens who do not feel they discriminate against others nor have racial biases. He asked for clarification regarding possible recommendations for helping to educate and engage citizens about the issues of equity and equality. Dr. Galanes expressed her opinion this is the real question and many citizens believe there are no major equity and equality issues in Springfield. She noted the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce tried to address the issue of diversity approximately 10-12 years ago when some companies would not locate to Springfield due to not having a diversified business workforce nor having a welcoming climate for minorities. Dr. Galanes noted the issue of equity and equality will not be a quick fix but helping to educate citizens within the community about diversity issues will help with biases toward minorities. Ms. Pratt expressed her opinion the challenges with facing racism cannot be sugar coated. She further expressed her opinion leaders within the community should not only learn about diversity, such as inclusive excellence, but apply the techniques they have learned within their entire businesses and companies. She expressed her belief it must be a commitment. Dr. Galanes noted a peer to peer approach for local business and companies who have been successful at implementing diversity education and programs would be a good start.

Ms. Robeson noted a meeting was held at the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce in 2019 about equity and equality, which was disappointing due to the lack of participation from local businesses and companies. She further noted she recently attended a conference a couple of weeks ago held at Missouri State University about the issue of diversity. She added she felt the conference speaker was phenomenal.

Co-Chair Duran noted she participated in training with the United Academy, which was offered by the United Way, in January 2021. She expressed her belief the inclusion and belonging training was very helpful. She further expressed this training also helped build connections with individuals within the community about the issue of diversity outside of a training atmosphere. She expressed her belief it is about building relationships with others within the community, which will help facilitate an understanding about diversity. She further expressed her belief it is about building a relationship driven culture with people as opposed to a program driven culture for diversity, equity, and equality.

Dr. Thomas-Tate noted the Springfield R.12 School District is currently dealing with diversity related issues. She expressed her belief one of the possible barriers for helping to promote the issues of diversity, equity, and equality within the community are the churches and religious organizations. She further expressed her belief the issues are not at the individual level but at the systemic level, which must be addressed. She expressed her opinion systems and practices need to be changed within the community to make a difference regarding diversity, equity, and equality.



Co-Chair Neff expressed his belief there are individuals within the community who are good, but who may not understand their biases towards others with diverse backgrounds. He further expressed his belief education needs to play a key role in informing individuals within the community about diversity, equity, and equality. He expressed his agreement with Co-Chair Duran about building relationships with others within the community are important to help promote diversity, equity, and equality.

Dr. Thomas-Tate expressed her belief building relationships are very important, but dealing with diversity, equity, and equality on a systemic level pertaining to policies and procedures is needed within the community. She expressed her opinion not dealing with it is causing disparity within the community.

Dr. Galanes expressed her opinion a multi-pronged approach will be needed to help facilitate diversity, equity, and equality on a systemic level.

Ms. Pratt expressed her belief the inclusive excellence model would be a good starting point for the Initiative to review, which has measurability.

Co-Chairman Neff reiterated a request for Ms. Pratt to conduct a presentation pertaining to the Equity and Prosperity Commission's work at the next Initiative meeting. He also asked the Initiative to compile a couple of their most important priorities based upon the charge and submit those to Ms. Scott and Anita Cotter, City Clerk, for accumulating for the Initiative to review for prioritizing at their next meeting.

Rabbi Block asked for clarification regarding the Equity and Prosperity Commission's work compared with the Initiative's charge. Ms. Pratt noted the Equity and Prosperity Commission's work is not only about economics, but also about equity and prosperity within the community. She noted her presentation would include a history for helping reduce the poverty rate within the community for the Initiative's information. She further noted she would include information about the Commission's work and their focus. Rabbi Block expressed her belief the LGBTQ community issues are not economically related, but more policy discriminated. Ms. Pratt noted the City may be unable to control policies and procedures for privately-owned businesses and companies, which would need to be handled on a federal level.

Dr. Clark expressed his excitement about serving on the Initiative. He noted he will try to attend as many meetings as possible, but due to his work, he may be on call and unable to attend at times.

Co-Chairs Neff and Duran thanked Dr. Galanes for tonight's presentation, as well as everyone for their participation and attendance.

Adjourn

With no further business coming before the Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality, Ms. Robeson moved to Adjourn. Rabbi Block seconded the motion, and it was approved by the following vote. Ayes: Block, Clark, Lewis, Pratt, Robeson, Schrag, Thomas-Tate, Neff, and Duran. Nays: None. Absent: Baron, Chimm, Moss, Oke-Thomas, Powers, Roberts, Skahan, and Taylor. Abstain: None. The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:17 p.m.

Completed by Anita Baker
Approved on July 6, 2021.