



## Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality

Tuesday, July 6, 2021

5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Councilman Denny Whayne Conference Room • Busch Municipal Building 4<sup>th</sup> floor  
840 N. Boonville

**Members Present:** Saehee Duran and Doug Neff\*, Co-Chairs; Rita Baron, Barbara Block, Chantha Chimm\*, Christian Lewis, Christa Moss\*, John Oke-Thomas, Mike Powers\*, Francine Pratt, Bob Roberts, Robin Robeson, Jeff Schrag\*, Jeanne Skahan, Carol Taylor, Shurita Thomas-Tate.

**Members Absent:** Justin Clark.

**City Council:** None.

**Staff:** Anita Cotter, City Clerk; Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement, and Taj Suleyman, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

**Others:** None.

Clerk's Note: \*Indicates participation via Zoom

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### Welcome

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

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

### Approval of May 4, 2021 Minutes

The Initiative members reviewed the draft minutes of the May 4, 2021 meeting.

Ms. Robeson moved to approve the May 4, 2021 meeting minutes as presented.

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



**Opening Comments**

Co-Chair Duran thanked all that were able to attend, both in person and via Zoom. She expressed she and Co-Chair Neff wanted the group to meet and hear from Taj Suleyman, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and hear his vision for the group. She noted previous scheduling conflicts and a desire to hear from Mr. Suleyman lead to the previous short notice meeting cancelation.

**Key Issues in the News**

Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement, informed the Initiative of recent vandalism that occurred at the Bartley-Decature Neighborhood Center. She noted there has been a positive response from community members wishing to aid the organization in various ways.

Co-Chair Duran asked members their thoughts on the vandalism. Robin Robeson expressed her disgust with the vandalism. She further expressed her relief to see a positive fundraising effort on social media to aid the organization.

Co-Chair Duran asked Cora Scott if the graffiti has already been removed from the Center. Ms. Scott responded affirmatively and noted there are additional efforts underway to harness volunteers toward additional projects. Co-Chair Duran encouraged the group to communicate with each other regarding known opportunities to assist.

**Introduction of Guest Speaker**

Co-Chair Duran introduced Francine Pratt, Director of Prosper Springfield. She noted Ms. Pratt will provide an update on the work of Prosper Springfield, including Prosper Springfield’s Equity & Prosperity Commission evolution. Additionally, she noted the Impacting Poverty Commission created the October 2015 Community Call to Action Report and established the Prosper Springfield Initiative at that time. Two main goals were created: reduce poverty by five percentage points and increase additional education beyond high school (postsecondary educational attainment) to 60% — both by 2025. Prosper Springfield’s goals were developed based on what we knew then, commonly held assumptions and knowledge gained from initiatives that were started prior to the creation of the Commission.

Ms. Pratt gave a presentation virtually entitled “Mayor’s Initiative on Equity & Equality: Proper Springfield Equity & Prosperity Commission Update. *(Please refer to Exhibit A)*

The following is an outline of the presentation:

- A. Charge & Deliverable
- B. Prosper Springfield Background
- C. Prosper Springfield Initiative
- D. 2025 Goals
- E. 10-Year Poverty Level Trends
- F. 5-Year Poverty Reduction



- G. Focus on Three Main Pathways
- H. 2019 Poverty Rates
- I. Proper Springfield Equity & Prosperity Commission
- J. Poverty Rate – What Goal Can We Realistically Achieve?
- K. Springfield Unemployment Rate
- L. Equality Vs Equity
- M. Tough Talks Collaborative
- N. Five Principle of Inclusive Excellence
- O. Community Recommendations

### **Facilitated Discussion**

Following the presentation, Co-Chair Duran opened the floor for discussion.

Rabbi Barbara Block expressed concern over the unintended consequences of relying solely on promoting higher education as a means to gaining a better paying job. She further expressed all jobs should pay a livable wage. Ms. Pratt noted that part of the equation is balancing that concern, however, she stressed that a livable wage must be paid.

Christa Moss asked if there are particular sources the Initiative needs to consult in order to establish actual goals, rather than positive statements. Ms. Pratt noted Prosper Springfield’s next project is to release a four-year report, which will encompass that type of information.

Co-Chair Neff expressed his desire to utilize Proper Springfield’s data to craft the Initiative’s mission.

Dr. Shurita Thomas-Tate expressed her concern on how the Initiative provides its principles. She further expressed that it is common to state principals but lack actual follow through. She also expressed that whatever is done, simply providing tools to educate people is not enough if the systems and structures in place continue to keep people down and impoverished.

Anita Cotter, City Clerk noted the latter half of the meeting will be spent discussing a set of shared principals the Initiative can use as a guiding force.

### **Introduction of Taj Suleyman**

Co-Chair Duran introduced Taj Suleyman, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. She noted Mr. Suleyman has spent the better part of the last ten years working in community outreach and direct services in non-profit organizations assisting individuals from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. She expressed his multicultural backgrounds have helped him professionally, and academically, to navigate intercultural groups, to successfully plan, recruit and provide outreach and education, and to effectively facilitate collaborative efforts across organizations.

### **Shared Vision Discussion**

Mr. Suleyman thanked Co-Chair Duran for the introduction. He noted there are many organizations in Springfield with seemingly overlapping missions. He expressed his desire to learn the Initiative’s goals on both the macro and micro level. He noted each member of the Initiative has a questionnaire at their place and asked everyone to take a few moments and fill it out. *(Please refer to Exhibit B)*



Members took turns reading the questions out loud, pausing for further directions from Mr. Suleyman. He noted the Initiative will end March 31, 2022 and asked members if one recommendation should be that this Initiative be moved forward beyond that date as a standing board.

Dr. Shurita Thomas-Tate expressed the thought had not occurred to her before. She noted there are some demographical groups that may not be represented on this Initiative that could be added. Mr. Suleyman noted there is a question at the end of the questionnaire that addresses this concern. Ms. Thomas-Tate expressed a desire to have a shared set of definitions for key words or phrases that appear on the questionnaire. Mr. Suleyman agreed.

Due to technical difficulties, Jeff Schrag emailed his statements to Cora Scott. Mr. Schrag noted that the Initiative is authorized by the City government and should align any recommendations within the authority of the City Council; going outside of this may set the group up for failure.

Anita Cotter, City Clerk, reiterated the Initiative's charge, noting that recommendations are related specifically to the Springfield community. Ms. Cotter expressed her belief the Initiative will provide a broad overview of what can be accomplished to tackle the issues.

Dr. Carol Taylor expressed there may be confusion among the group members regarding the charge of the Initiative. With the expiration date of March 31, 2022 already known, she expressed the charge should be establishing actionable steps to combat pressing issues rather than trying to identify why the Initiative exists. Mr. Suleyman acknowledged and agreed with Ms. Taylor's concerns, however, he expressed his belief the Initiative members have yet to answer key questions outlined on the questionnaire.

Ms. Thomas-Tate echoed Ms. Taylor's sentiments, expressing she does not wish for the lessons learned or data gathered to end up on a stagnate website with action never taken.

Co-Chair Neff echoed Ms. Taylor's sentiments. He suggested adding a potential question to the questionnaire asking what two or three things you would recommend to City Council today. He expressed his desire to have City Council increase awareness of systemic racism.

Ms. Taylor noted her support of a mission statement; however, she expressed her belief the Initiative exists to recommend actionable steps toward equity and equality.

Ms. Cotter noted she could add Mr. Neff's question to the questionnaire and send out an updated version for members to fill out that are not physically present at today's meeting.

Co-Chair Duran thanked everyone for their participation. She echoed the need to present to City Council actionable steps to solve pressing issues.

### **Adjourn**

With no further business coming before the Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality, Ms. Robeson moved to Adjourn. Jeanne Skahan seconded the motion, and it was approved by the following vote. Ayes: Block, Chimm, Lewis, Moss, Oke-Thomas, Powers, Pratt, Roberts, Robeson, Schrag, Skahan, Taylor, Thomas-Tate, Duran. Nays: None. Absent: Clark and Neff. Abstain: None. The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:36 p.m.

