



## **Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality**

**Tuesday, August 3, 2021**

**5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.**

**Zoom**

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

**Members Absent:** Chantha Chimm, Justin Clark, and Shurita Thomas-Tate.

**City Council:** None.

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

**Others:** None.

Clerk's Note: \*Indicates arrival after role call.

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### **Welcome**

Doug Neff, Co-Chair, welcomed everyone to tonight's meeting, which began at approximately 5:47 p.m.

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

### **Approval of July 6, 2021 Minutes**

The Initiative members reviewed the draft minutes of the July 6, 2021 meeting.

Rabbi Barbara Block expressed her concern with how her comments were reflected in the previous minutes. Anita Cotter, City Clerk proposed staff review the video and revise the minutes to appropriately reflect her sentiments. She noted both sets of minutes would be on the agenda for approval at the next meeting. With no further comments or corrections, Co-Chair Neff proceeded with the meeting.

### **Opening Comments**

Co-Chairs Neff and Duran each thanked members of the Initiative for their participation. Co-Chair Duran expressed being part of the Initiative is a learning experience and journey, and if members have questions, that is understandable. Both Co-Chairs expressed progress is being made.



## **Discussion of Questionnaire Responses**

Taj Suleyman, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion gave a presentation virtually entitled “Questionnaire Results” (*Please refer to Exhibit A*).

The following is an outline of the presentation:

- A. What Category Best Describes Your Organization
- B. Vision Draft
- C. Vision Draft: Top 3 Choices
- D. Vision Draft Below: Other Thoughts
- E. Mission Draft
- F. Mission Draft: Other Thoughts
- G. Dialogue and Understanding
- H. Cultural Consciousness
- I. Advocacy and Partnerships
- J. Structural and Systemic Barriers
- K. Personal and Organizational Accountability
- L. Should the Initiative Move Forward Beyond its Expiration as a Standing Board?
- M. Philosophical and Theoretical Frameworks

Mr. Suleyman and Ms. Cotter provided an overview of the results from the questionnaire. He noted the questionnaire was designed to see where each member is, regarding their perception of the Initiative and issues before it. Ms. Cotter noted the top three selections members chose as their understanding of the vision statement. The following are the top choices in order of understanding:

- 1. “To have an informed, equitable and inclusive community where all people feel respected, valued and engaged.”
- 2. “Inclusion and diversity are critical to achieving a welcoming and flourishing community. Our role is to build an equitable, inclusive, and vibrant community culture.”
- 3. “Other.”

Ms. Cotter noted the top three selections members chose as their understanding of the mission statement. The following are the top choices in order of understanding:

- 1. “MIEE is tasked with developing guiding principles to improve equitable access to opportunities in our community, recognizing the inherent dignity, value, and worth of each individual.”
- 2. “Our goal is to attract, develop and retain the best and brightest from all walks of life and backgrounds. This requires our community to have a culture of inclusion where all individuals feel respected and are treated equitably.”
- 3. “MIEE is committed to a work environment and community governance that values and supports diversity and inclusion. Collectively we will strive to learn about diversity, educate



citizens, members of boards and committees and other volunteers, and promote acceptance of the differences of others.”

Co-Chairs Neff and Duran thanked members for participating in Mr. Suleyman’s questionnaire, expressing it helps him understand how members view their participation on the Initiative. They reiterated, regardless of the results, the mission the Initiative is tasked with remains the same.

Mr. Suleyman highlighted some additional questionnaire findings. Mr. Suleyman noted the non-profit sector has the highest category of participation on the Initiative, with five members self-identifying as such. He noted results indicated members wished to focus on the business and education sectors. Additionally, the majority of respondents identify as female; the majority of respondents earn \$150,000 or more a year; all participants on the Initiative are over the age of thirty; and the majority of respondents expressed it is too soon to determine whether to continue the Initiative as a standing committee upon its expiration.

### **Discussion of Committee Focus**

Co-Chair Neff asked for member reactions, thoughts, and questions regarding the data collected.

Rita Baron expressed her desire to contribute more to the group and help the community. She further expressed having more direction may help her to contribute to the group during these meetings.

Co-Chair Neff expressed interest in having the City establish an accountability pledge for businesses to sign, demonstrating their support for diversity and inclusion.

Christian Lewis expressed feeling the Initiative is lacking direction. He encouraged the group to investigate what other cities or groups are, or have been, doing. He expressed having more data, such as the data collected by Francine Pratt’s organization, Prosper Springfield, would aid in better conceptualizing next steps forward.

Ms. Baron noted much work has been done by community organizations and universities to gather insightful data. She expressed frustration that the data has not been properly utilized as a community to make a difference.

John Oke-Thomas expressed his belief the Initiative has not defined what it wants to accomplish. He further expressed once the group defines what it wants to accomplish, it may then begin to synthesize and find ways to move forward.

Francine Pratt noted members concerns, reiterating that much of the work has been done by prior organizations. She expressed concern with the Initiative discussing issues at length without achieving results. She noted the Initiative was provided a single year to come back with proposals because the data had already been collected and can be leveraged. She expressed in order for the Initiative to be successful, a focus needs to be on systems, regulations, practices, and policies that can be controlled in Springfield.

Ms. Baron asked Co-Chair Neff what his thoughts are regarding holding businesses accountable for their lack of diversity. He provided the example of a business compensating its executive team based on measures around diversity and inclusion in its workforce. He expressed his desire to see more businesses do the same.

Dr. Carol Taylor expressed feeling the Initiative is not fulfilling its charge to develop guiding principles.



Ms. Pratt noted the City of Springfield did not receive the “Talent Hub” designation by the Lumina Foundation during the prior city-wide assessment. One reason articulated was Springfield needed to establish a public commitment to racial equity with structures and documented processes to engage those most impacted by inequitable conditions. It was further noted that Springfield needed to develop goals, outcomes, and strategies, contextualized in the region’s history with racial inequity. She cautioned focusing on one particular group to address inequalities, as well as adopting a national approach on a local scale.

Mr. Oke-Thomas echoed several members frustrations regarding community organizations putting in time and effort to collect data, and write a report, with no progress coming from said efforts. He supported Co-Chair Neff’s comments urging accountability in the private sector.

Co-Chair Duran noted the “Mask-Up” campaign put on by the City of Springfield. She expressed support for doing a similar style campaign where the City promotes diversity and inclusion on television, radio, and other media sources. Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement noted her department would be able to help facilitate such a request. Co-Chair Duran requested clarification regarding which of the two sectors, business or education, members indicated they wanted to focus on.

Ms. Pratt suggested bringing a Certified Diversity Trainer to the Initiative to discuss like-language that should be used moving forward. She noted several examples of ways to reword phrases that help rather than hinder discussion.

Ms. Baron echoed the desire to highlight stories from the community that demonstrate diversity and inclusion, as Co-Chair Duran had previously mentioned. She expressed her belief Springfield does not get enough credit for the things it has done right to be a welcoming community.

Co-Chair Neff expressed Springfield is the greatest place he has lived, but work is still needed in our community. He further expressed the need to meet again as a group soon and will be thinking of ways to accommodate everyone, whether the meeting is physical, digital, or hybrid.

Ms. Pratt suggested potentially using a larger facility to spread out, such as the Springfield Art Museum.

### **Adjourn**

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

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:28 p.m.

Completed by Johnathan Saunders  
Approved as amended on September 21, 2021