

# Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission Meeting Minutes

## January 29, 2025

### **1. 7:10 PM: Welcome and open meeting by roll call.**

Location: Flynn Building.

In-person attendees: Janine Taylor.

Other in-person attendees: Jennifer Roberts.

On-line attendees: Serena Hu, Safa Khan, Thomas Plihcik, and Nnenna Uneke.

Absent: Isaac Tesfay, Joanna Steffey.

### **2. 7:15 PM: Land Acknowledgement and Reflection.**

Janine Taylor read the Land Acknowledgement and shared a reflection about giving grace and being kind to one another as a community in the midst of changes from executive orders.

### **3. 7:20 PM: Public Comments.**

Manish Sharma wished everyone a Happy Lunar New Year and offered their support if the DEI ever wishes to reach out to senators. They also shared their experience of getting in touch with bankers and collaborating with the community.

Jennifer Roberts from the Select Board expressed her appreciation for the DEI Committee's work, emphasizing its importance in fostering fairness, equality, representation, and a sense of belonging in the Sudbury community, especially during challenging times for DEI efforts.

Charlie Russo, another Select Board member, echoed Jennifer Roberts' sentiments, acknowledging the recent anxiety faced by vulnerable populations. Russo emphasized that, despite changes at the national level, Sudbury's commitment to inclusion and DEI remains unwavering. Russo highlighted the Select Board's unified support for all residents and their dedication to standing by the DEI Committee and its work.

### **4. 7:25 PM: Approve prior Meeting Minutes.**

Approving prior meeting minutes have been tabled for the next discussion.

**4. 7:25 PM: Discuss 12/12/24 Email from Sally Purrington Hild - SVT invited to attend commission meeting.**

They were not able to attend this meeting so Janine Taylor tabled it to the next meeting.

**5. 7:25 PM: Discuss 11/19/24 Email from Colleen Gleason-Epple and 12/21/24 Email from Amanda Letts. Colleen and Amanda invited to join commission meeting:**

Amanda Letts, a representative for parents of trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming SPS students emphasized the need for consistent gender identity support policies across schools. They highlighted recurring issues, a lack of clear procedures, and the importance of an age-appropriate curriculum to foster understanding and support for students and families district-wide. Colleen Gleason-Epple echoed Letts' thoughts for more support towards the most vulnerable groups, especially in light of recent national rhetoric.

Janine Taylor asked if the request includes proactive education for all students to prevent harm, highlighting the importance of broader inclusion efforts, like pronoun training and identity education, based on her HR experience.

Gleason-Epple responded with hopes for gender identity curriculums to replace outdated practices, like asking students and families to teach about their transitions, ensuring inclusivity without placing the burden on them.

Lisa Kouchakdjian, drawing from past experience with the Commission on Disability, suggested that community-wide training, such as on brain-based disabilities, can help reduce stigma and bring people together. Kouchakdjian advocated for such initiatives and offered to help find speakers, noting that many in the community are willing to contribute. Kouchakdjian reiterated the importance of shaping the community into a more inclusive space.

Thomas Plhichik inquired whether the best practices and curriculum being discussed are for those who show up to events or if there is a suggested curriculum for all students in the school,

emphasizing the importance of reaching the entire school community, even those who may not actively seek it.

Letts explained that the policy includes adopting a curriculum for all students, similar to the disability curriculum, with short, low-effort lessons as part of the SEL curriculum, and offered to provide the most updated version of the policy, which has been edited with input from Safe Schools.

Nnenna Uneke suggested including affinity groups in the policy to provide a safer space for students to share and gather information, which could then be coordinated and forwarded to the appropriate school authorities. Letts explained that they're working on establishing an LGBTQ parent advisory council, similar to CPAC, to create a central point of contact for the community, streamline communication, and provide support while addressing underlying issues.

Taylor suggested creating an LGBTQ-specific group to provide a safe space for students who identify as LGBTQ+ but aren't out in other areas of their lives, as opposed to broader diversity groups. Letts responds that there are, however, a confidential setting becomes tricky because of group dynamics.

Plihczik believes the commission should be supportive but wonders how we can best do that. Taylor proposed looking at the updated expanded policy that will be shared and vote at next meeting to possibly write a letter of support.

#### **5. 8:10 PM: Update on position statements:**

Taylor updated that as soon as she receives the letterhead from the town, she will be able to send off the letter and proposes posting it on the Facebook page as well. Taylor also presented the DEI's position statement regarding celebrating diversity in Sudbury to the Select Board members and will post it on the Facebook page after support from the Select Board members.

#### **6. 8:20 PM: Discuss potential courageous conversations training for commission and town:**

Taylor discussed the idea of offering "courageous conversations" training to the community, aimed at helping people navigate difficult topics like identity and personal boundaries, using real-life examples, such as addressing uncomfortable situations where someone feels compelled to share personal experiences.

Kouchakdjian highly suggests that a professional in this field could provide guidance for support.

Safa Khan expressed their support for the idea of offering training from professionals to town members and emphasized the need for advertisement.

#### **7. 8:35 PM: Continue Mission Statement Review/Discussion:**

Taylor suggested that Dr. Fernandez, the DEI's consultant, review and make recommendations on the DEI mission statement. Plihcik and Roberts believe that using Dr. Fernandez's expertise on the mission statement would be helpful.

#### **8. 8:40 PM: Open Dialogue:**

The DEI Commission discussed reverting from hybrid to virtual meetings until the weather improved.

Safa Khan reminded the DEI about planning for the large multicultural festival and Taylor put it on the agenda for next month.

#### **9. 8:50 PM: Meeting close:**

**Thomas made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Nnenna seconded the motion.**

→ Roll call vote: Serena Hu yes; Nnenna Uneke yes; Safa Khan yes; Janine Taylor yes; Thomas Plihcik yes.