

**Race Equity Advisory Committee
Regular Meeting Minutes
October 21, 2021**

CALL TO ORDER

Present: REAC members Savanna Rovelstad, Eric Stahl, Peggi Erickson, Sue Wilmot, Renni Bispham, Jing Fong; Liaison Rasham Nasssar
Excused: Deanna Martinez, James Friday

AGENDA AND MINUTES

No modification was made to the agenda. Peggi moved to accept. Eric seconded. Approved.

Peggi moved to accept the minutes with the amendment to correct “Jing, Renni, and I “ to “Jing and Renni.” Sue seconded. Approved.

No conflict of interest was expressed. There was no public comment

SCOTT WINN, RACE EQUITY CONSULTANT

Scott: I really appreciate the introductions because relationships are the foundation of our work. I’ve been doing grassroots social change work in Seattle the past 30 years. I co-founded the Community Coalition for Environmental Justice in 1994. In 2000, I founded the Coalition of Anti-Racist Whites. For eight years, I worked for the City of Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative, recognizing that government is the creator and perpetuator of the problems we face and a crucial part of the solution. I’ve worked with government the last 10-15 years.

Leading with a racial equity lens is a crucial strategy to create equity and justice for all. If we don’t look at the way racism is embedded in our systems—the logic of genocide, the logic of enslavement—we’re not going to be able to change things.

I first heard from Kate Brown (HR). Chris, who was the former director of FutureWise (bringing race equity to development in state of Washington), and I worked together for a few years, and he put my name in the hat.

Who are the crucial partners in this work? Clearly, city staff and leadership, city council, the mayor, the community, and REAC. You are an important body as an advisor to support this work moving forward.

If leadership is not involved and centered in this work, it’s not going to work. So, I suggested [to executive leadership] we start with working with city government or city leadership to create that common framework and language around how we do this work.

We talked about meeting with you to make sure you are engaged in this work. It should have happened earlier, but it didn’t. And I’m really glad that we’re talking now about how you can inform this work moving forward to make sure we get at what you all want to do.

What I've done so far is strategy sessions with leadership, how to center this work. We've done one training around the overarching frame. We have a training schedule in a few weeks around the role of leadership in operationalizing race equity. That curriculum comes from Race Forward—the heart of GARE work. I'm an affiliate trainer with GARE.

Peggi: How can we leverage the work that Scott's doing with the city to bring council (city) in to bring REAC in and to try to get a shared understanding of the work we want to do?

In the third GARE training, the city creates a race equity plan. A plan of action should follow from training. I'm wondering if those things [race equity plan and action plan] are in the works for your work with Bainbridge Island.

Scott: The contract I have isn't to create a race equity plan but to prepare for that plan. I call it Phase One.

North Star document: One page, three paragraphs about why we are doing this work, why it's important for the city of Bainbridge Island not only to do racial equity work but also to lead with that as a strategy to make sure there's liberation and justice for everyone and then puts forward ideas around long-term, audacious, beautiful, outcomes.

That document becomes the first page of the plan. It's a way to support the visioning of where you want to go.

Next step for me is to train on the role of leadership. How do you lead on this plan? Staff, council, mayor, even REAC and other commissions are part of this conversation and introduced to the book and manual of how to operationalize this work. The process is more important than the product.

Eric: Are you working with the political leadership or is it strictly administrative?

Scott: Phase 1 is administrative.

Eric: What is the path to engage the political leadership? There is a history with discussions about race that sends people off the rails. I'm hoping to see us speaking a common language and comfortable having a conversation and operationalizing them so that we have a tool to evaluate policy through an equity lens. How do you see us getting there and what do you see our role in facilitating this?

Scott: I believe in engagement. The way it worked out was executive leadership approached me first, so it's about how do we support them in engaging with you, council, and staff. Staff's easier because they [exec. Leadership] are the bosses. Council is crucial. How do we make sure we have enough people on council to do this? The way we're going to build a movement is to start with the person closest to us and expand from there (gave example of councilmember who said they wanted training).

If council's not on board, it's going to fail. This is why I put the North Star document as an organizer. The document becomes a decision-making point. Can the city and REAC agree on this document? Can council and staff agree on this document? Can council and REAC agree on this document?

Eric: This is for Blair's benefit. You said that even REAC should be part of the process that leads to the plan you're working on. I think it's essential that this committee be part of the process. We're here as a resource. That's why we exist. I want to be clear that whatever comes out of this, we need to be in the loop.

Scott: I agree.

Blair: From my meeting with James, we want to improve the level of communication and have a freer, two-way communication. This exercise that executive staff has been going through started off a bit siloed. We're at a crossroads. How do we go forward?

One of my objectives is to spread this to all of staff (131).

The council has agreed to talk about how they might be included in this. Part of my job is to work with the team to provide options. One of the options may be to refer that question of how the council is involved to REAC. Another question: Should we expand Scott Winn's contract? Are there other resources for us? Perhaps we stumbled coming out of the gate. I am impressed with executive team's desire to do the right thing.

I want to show up from time to time, strategize with you and think of how we can present to council a plan that would involve REAC with the council.

As the city manager, I have a responsibility to make sure I am providing training. I want to be as successful as I can with Scott and Ellen to incorporate this with everybody on staff and exposing them to what they need to give them the tools to be a better human being and respond to race appropriately.

Peggi: It was music to my ears to hear the word community come from you, Scott. What ways have you seen community be involved in this?

Scott: So often, government out of good intention to engage with community, does it poorly and actually deepens the mistrust. I think it's important for REAC to be seen as connections to the community, not representatives. No one person can represent a community and they shouldn't be asked to.

To me, the ultimate goal is a democratic process where decisions that impact people involve those people—not just to hear what they think.

Jing: Blair, I'm encouraged by what you say about establishing communications. To have us all around the table so this is a coordinated and sustainable effort.

We do have diverse communities, but Bainbridge is a predominantly White community. I don't know the composition of executive leadership staff or of staff. I do know what it is on the council. Scott, what is your approach with a predominantly White government?

Scott: You should ask for this data. Blair is the only person of color on the executive team. It's important that we look at the composition of who works for the city and where they are in the rank of who makes decisions. That's crucial because it becomes a vision that the makeup of city government becomes a mirror of the community it serves.

It's easy to stop White folks from doing this work. It's actually really hard to get them to want to do this work. What I'm really good at is supporting folks to realize they have a stake in this work. Racism is a centralizing logic and way of being in our system that stops the gay community from being free. We need to make sure that White folks realize that while they're not oppressed by racism, they are harmed by it. And therefore, they benefit from it going away.

Peggi: How can REAC stay involved in this work you're doing with the city?

Scott: I think that is what clearly needs to be defined. What is the purpose and function of the committee? Then, leverage the power of that function. If you know you're advisory, then you work that lane really well. Write some stuff down—even if it's an element of White culture—and send an email. It becomes part of the public record.

When a consultant comes into an organization, it becomes disruptive in really healthy ways. So I entered and there was some disruption.

And now it's leading to really important questions. Now Blair and your chair (James) are going meet for lunch every two months. He's here tonight. This communication tonight is a deepening step of that work. You matter. You are volunteers, some of the city's best volunteers who are showing up not just once a month but every two weeks.

Blair: This is two-way communication and I really appreciate that James and Jing came to see me. This is a relationship business. I'm new. This is my fifth month and I hope to establish relationship with this committee and you individually. I personally feel comfortable being in this environment.

Savannah mentioned what it's like to grow up in a mixed-race household. I feel I have a kinship for what she said because I identify with that. And so I feel comfortable with you. I know what we're trying to do. We're trying to do something good, and I want to prove that it's a relationship I'm committed to.

Savanna: I'd like to suggest a subcommittee to meet with Scott and Blair on a monthly basis. It might be prudent that the Chair and Secretary meet, discuss, and bring it back to our meetings so that we can fill everybody in.

Blair: If I can offer suggestion. Scott's stock and trade is his time, so he charges for that.

You can decide how would you like to participate with Scott, then we can talk about that and I can get a sense of cost. Maybe that's something that the committee can think about. I'm happy to participate.

Scott talked about this North Star document that we're working on. We also have the council that's interested. We want to get the grant committee(?) involved, and some ideas from you. If it's a quarterly report, or a training from Scott you think would be helpful or from someone else. We can talk about that and figure out what we could do to move forward.

Scott: I love Savanna's idea of formalizing connections because that's how we operationalize that work and become accountable to getting stuff done when we say we're going to do something.

You have formal liaisons with City Council and that might be a real leverage point to really think about how do you engage with council. You are officially advising council, not staff. Go to Blair, if you want to, but maybe you want to go to Blair's boss!

Scott: What do y'all think I should be doing?

Renni: My message is this: We would like to have input on anything regarding race equity work. if you're going to draft a plan or a guiding document, we would like to have input before it gets to the point of where everyone who's involved in the thing is so vested in it that if anybody says anything to it, it feels like criticism. I would like to see us be involved before it gets to the place where it's almost done.

Peggi: I think we should schedule a meeting with Scott, to give input on the North Star document.

Scott: You should really meet with city leadership who are crafting the document. Then, support them, not just in crafting it but deciding what's going to happen with it. I'm really impressed with executive leadership; they really have all showed up really leaned into difficult, painful conversations and are building alignment around where we're going to go.

Ellen: I think tonight I'm really just listening and trying to hear what you all are thinking, and I'll work with Scott and with Blair to come up with what we think we can do, but certainly open to hearing whatever kinds of input, you want to provide.

RACE EQUITY QUESTIONS FOR ECODATA

Peggi: The City of Bainbridge Island now has not only a climate change plan, but also a climate change officer. One of my visions, is that the City of Bainbridge Island have a race equity plan and possibly a part-time race equity officer.

Equity questions for Lara Hansen:

- Who is impacted by climate? How will they be present at the decision-making table? How will they get to the table? How will their voices be heard? Their opinions incorporated?

- Is there a historic perspective to any of the impacts on racial or ethnic groups by this environmental project? Have previous generations been negatively affected, and, if so, how have they been negatively affected?
- What are the racial inequities associated with this project? How might each BIPOC community be affected differently? Is there disparity in the impacts?
- Have BIPOC communities impacted by the project been contacted so their voices are heard? And, a survey doesn't count—that usually doesn't get the voice of BIPOC communities.
- Are the voices of people who work in or travel to the impacted area being included?

Savanna would like comments by Monday.

SUBCOMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORTS

Finance: Nothing to report

Law and Policy:

Renni: One of the things that we talked about is trying to find ways to get some council to refer things to us. As I understand it, it's a regular thing that council does with other committees, where there are things that trigger an automatic referral. To date, I'm not aware of anything that's come from the city council to us, even though I'm sure there are many things that have been discussed or talked about that would have impact on racial equity on Bainbridge.

We drafted a recommendation for the city council. If you have edits and suggestions, we can finalize it at our next meeting.

The REAC strongly recommends that the City Council adopt the practice of automatic referral for advice on any policy, law, regulation, or other matter which:

1. May impact the BIPOC Community on Bainbridge Island, including:
 - a. May impact economically challenged members of our community
 - b. Will require the expenditure of funds greater than \$50,000, including allocations to fund the City Budget, and out of cycle funding requests
 - c. Impact law enforcement
 - d. Will have climate impact
 - e. Governance policies & procedures
 - f. Involves race/equity policy, training, hiring, etc.

Eric: I think this meshes really well with what Scott was saying earlier about how we interact with the Council and carve out our own place.

Peggi: When you say refer I'm assuming that you mean refer for advice.

Renni: Yes, Just to clarify that we're going to give them an opinion from a race equity perspective.

Eric: Is there anything else that should be on this list or how do we refine this list?
I think this needs kind of more of a framing and justification—all the whereas's.
I want this to be something that explains what we're expecting and bolsters its justification.
Maybe we can do without the climate because that's already got has its own committee.

Peggi: I question the 50 grand. 50 grand is like a drop in the bucket. Blair, you might think differently than me, but I would say 100 grand.

Sue: Could we say, “automatic advisory referral” and also change “would impact” to “may or potentially impact” so it's not so strong.

Renni: In my mind the automatic referral for advice is the same as saying “automatic advisory referral.”

Sue: I wanted to include the word *advisory* because we're an advisory committee

Peggi: It would be nice to get clarity on what things council is willing to send us

Blair: I think your sentiment is well taken and I want this to be taken seriously.
My advice is to pare this list down and really focus on those big impactful pieces—the annual budget being one of them, including the CAP improvement program. I think the issue of automatic referral presents a variety of problems.

CITY COUNCIL REPORT

Peggi: Leslie Schneider recommended to the Council that they get equity training. Rasham and Brenda both brought up that they felt like it ought to be run by REAC.
Leslie said she didn't feel like it should necessarily have to go by us. They voted on it. It passed.
Brenda and Rasham both voted against it—not because they don't want equity training, but because they felt like it would be good to involve REAC.

GARE Training – nothing to report

Events and Outreach – nothing to report

Strategic Plan – has a draft plan to share via email and will discuss next meeting

GOOD OF THE ORDER

Jing: What is the procedure for Kamara resigning? What happens?

Savanna: I reached out to the liaisons and have not heard back. James and I will discuss. We will potentially go back through the people that had applied and pick somebody from the same group. Hopefully, I will have an answer for you by the next meeting.

Peggi: I think we should always open it up again to new people.

Savanna: If we want somebody on it right away, we have to pick from what we already have, otherwise we will have to start the process again—write it up, put it in the paper and COBI Connects. It'll probably be at least three months.

Renni: Position number four, which Kamara vacated, the term expires June 2022.

Sue: The Poulsbo City Council is talking about starting a race equity advisory committee. They are checking in with us about what we are working on and how we proceeded. The mayor said they would want to join GARE so Poulsbo can finally catch up.

Peggi: I'm thinking, the last Thursday in January might be a good time for us to meet with Bremerton Race Equity Task Force.

Sue: If you know people in Poulsbo interested in being on this advisory committee, have them email the city council.

Peggi moved to adjourn. Renni seconded. Approved.

Adjourned at 7:49 p.m.



Chair

11/4/20201