

Race Equity Advisory Committee November 18, 2021 Minutes

Call to Order

Present: REAC members Deanna Martinez, Eric Stahl, James Friday, Peggi Erickson, Renni Bispham, Savanna Rovelstad, Sue Wilmot. Liaison Brenda Fantroy-Johnson.

Excused: Jing Fong

Moved by Eric to approve the minutes. Minutes were approved.

Moved by Savanna to approve the agenda. Agenda was approved.

No conflict of interest.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Subcommittee Progress

Finance – nothing to report.

Law and Policy

Renni shared the most current strategic plan that incorporated the very few edits proposed by REAC members, including:

- Foster collaborative relationships and establish clear and regular communications with city council members, REAC liaisons, city manager, staff, and city consultants so that there is a shared understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion and so we may achieve our race equity goals. Change: We simply added “city consultants” based on recent history with our experience
- Develop a process to regularly provide advice to the city council regarding COBI laws, policies, processes, and practices that bar or pose barriers to all people having equitable access and opportunity; identify gaps and recommend new laws, policies, processes, and practices that enable equal access and opportunity. Change: COBI laws policies processes and practices was struck
- Develop a process to provide advice and respond to requests from city committees and outside organizations regarding race equity and a racial equity lens as it applies to existing and new laws, policies, processes, and practices that enable equal access and opportunity.
- Build relationships with community organizations committed to equity (e.g., BIMA, BI Senior Center, ERACE, and others) to collaborate to support equity on BI.
- Articulate topics to the city council that REAC would both like to be consulted on and may offer advice, perspective, or strategy as it relates to race equity.

Along with the strategic plan, we want to incorporate the automatic referral or recommendation to the city council to automatically refer. We initially had a longer list and reduced it on recommendation from Blair.

Savanna moved that we accept the plan as presented. Sue seconded. Discussion ensued.

Eric asked if Brenda (as REAC liaison) has any thoughts on the most practical or best way to present this plan to the Council.

Brenda would defer to the city manager since REAC has been getting recommendations from him.

Eric wants to make sure the plan gets to the council appropriately and gets on their agenda—that it doesn't languish.

Brenda has a meeting next Tuesday with the city manager and can bring this up. She will get back to REAC at the next meeting (December 2).

Pending motion approved.

Events and Outreach

James had a meeting with the city manager today (Thursday November 18). MLK Day is coming up. We have funds available to develop this further. The events group needs to discuss this and to discern which events we want to have because we have so many on our list. We're going to have to tone it down, but we also need to start putting things into place where they are confirmed and ready to go.

Sue is going to talk with Savanna about the status of the social media event to promote our signs around the island. It is still in the works but not implemented.

James has been talking to businesses downtown about the significance of our decals (stickers) in their window; they are a sign of protectiveness of people who may feel like they're in distress and a sign that this is a welcoming business that is open to help someone in distress. It's been going really, really great.

James will also meet with the Chamber of Commerce leadership this week to talk further about the decals—the Chamber is going to include the decal program in its newsletter.

Brenda wanted to talk to REAC about a Martin Luther King Day event she discussed with the city manager. She will discuss with the event subcommittee as suggested by James.

Peggi: BIMA has again offered to host our MLK event in January—it's usually the Sunday closest to MLK day. Anyone on the REAC committee who would like to be involved in the MLK celebration planning at BIMA is welcome. I'll send out an email to everyone when I hear of a date.

BIMA is planning this event to be in-person. Last year it was online. I imagine there will be a plan for a march.

Training and GARE

Peggi: I hope all of you got the email that came from GARE on Wednesday at 9pm. They're going to have a hybrid conference April 19-21 this year in Portland. You can attend in person or remotely. If anybody wanted to do a workshop for this event, the request for proposals are due December 30. The RFP link is in the email.

Brenda asked if GARE is planning to do any cohorts (at the conference) because there are so many cities in Washington that are part of GARE. Peggi doesn't know but will look into it after she returns.

Brenda would like to get a committee together to petition GARE to come out here since there are more REAC counterparts in the county. Peggi mentioned Edmonds and other surrounding cities, too. She is happy to dive into it and we can discuss the first week of December.

James has been talking with John Kydd about training sessions and pods that are based on teachings about equity out of Birmingham Alabama and the Episcopal church. It's really important that we can have an outlet for local citizens to have these video training sessions that educate the public about how to deal with race equity on a personal basis.

Peggi was in touch with John when he was talking about doing environmental justice training. Maybe we can make this part of the events group meeting.

Strategic Plan –included in Law and Policy discussion.

Climate Change Equity Lens

Deanna: I sent an email to the Climate Change Advisory Committee saying I'm really sorry that you have felt that we were a challenge to work with, and that we didn't have that communication right. Finding out about it on the back end of a public meeting didn't feel good.

We're talking again that REAC is not the same kind of committee. We're dealing with oppression. We're dealing with people. We're dealing with death. We're dealing with all kinds of things that are involved with equity. I just have a problem with the fact that people are not seeing this the way that it needs to be seen.

And we're not talking about roads here. Where does climate crisis stem from? It doesn't stem from indigenous folks, doesn't come from black folks. It comes from corporations that are mostly run by certain groups of people.

Through that email I said we probably should talk about realities and expectations of our groups working together. They said that they were willing to talk, but I still haven't heard back as far as a time when we're meeting together

James asked who is the committee contact. Savanna and Deanna are REAC committee contacts. Michael Cox is the Climate Change Advisory Committee contact.

Mostly I just want people to move into accountability. This stuff that we're dealing with right now is actually not having to do with race equity, it has to do with culture. People don't understand what they don't understand. When you are dealing with other cultures, but you don't have the cultural literacy, you don't understand that other cultures might be seeing it completely different. You can make mistakes.

It was only the co-chair that was expressing frustration with the timing —they had their plan and it's taken X amount of time and their expectation was that it would take a different amount of time. I have been informing them the whole time that we just got new members, we are restructuring with subcommittees and doing other work. If they truly understand what we're dealing with and the issues that we're dealing with and the issues that we're advocating for, I don't think that any committee in the city and even the city is in a position to tell REAC to speed it up.

In my opinion, the focus has mostly been on this tool and our input in relation to that tool. When things come up during meetings, if I see something an entry point of a barrier to equity, it's upon me to say something. We need to have a conversation because climate crisis isn't going anywhere anytime soon. We and folks that are most marginalized still need to be considered, and we, at the end of the day we all still need to come together.

City Council Meeting Report

Sue:

- Joe Deets mentioned the importance of equity in transportation.
- Brenda attended the first meeting of the Puget Sound Equity Advisory Committee.
- Mark Hoffman was appointed as interim planning community and development director. Blair said they're expecting it to be about four to five months before they appoint a permanent person.
- Two proclamations were approved: one for veterans day and one for Transgender Awareness Week (November 13-19). On Saturday, Nov. 20, there is an event at BIMA at 11 am. They will have a panel of guests. The proclamation is the first one and it will be added to the list of ongoing annual proclamations to be signed by the mayor.
- Eve Palais, a Bainbridge Island citizen, spoke about the intersectionality of veterans and transgender folks. The event is sponsored by Rainbow Crew Northwest and Bainbridge Pride. I'm hoping I can attend and some of us folks, too.
- There is now a process approved for a municipal court judge appointment. It's a four-year term. Blair discovered that there wasn't a job description, list of duties, minimal experience, and process in our code. Now there is a schedule in place to announce the job description, list of duties, and a minimum experience requirement for this position for appointment.

There was some vandalism at Waterfront Park. One of the sculptures was vandalized with a hate symbol. The news appeared on Facebook. I contacted Brenda. A number of people contacted the city about it. There's a statement on the city's website from us, as well as from the city.

James: I was asked to respond and I did the best that I could to try to represent us as a group, thinking of a statement that would be forthcoming about our principles.

Peggi read the statement:

Below is a statement from the city of Bainbridge Island in partnership with the Race Equity Advisory Committee regarding a public art sculpture, that was vandalized with a symbol of hate.

The City of Bainbridge Island is distressed with the racist vandalism of the art in our public park.

This vandalism does not represent the open and welcoming spirit of the Bainbridge Island community. Our condolences are extended to those who have been harmed or experienced pain due to this racist vandalism.

The Race Equity Advisory Committee condemns the behavior of those that chose to bring their racist ideas to our Community and to deface the art.

We, as representatives of the community of Bainbridge Island realize that we must be vigilant in our pursuits to be a community that embraces equity for all of our citizens and visitors.

We are committed to keeping our Community free from racist activity and promoting safe and understanding relationships between all here on Bainbridge Island.

We applaud the efforts of our community to instill values in our Community that are bringing change to the meaning of what equity for all means.

The art will be repaired and restored as quickly as possible, but the restoration the City of Bainbridge Island will recommit itself to being a welcoming Committee, open to all races people and face.

This is an opportunity for the Community to pledge to be anti-racist and to look for ways to extend friendship to neighbors residents and visitors.

Renni: The statement referenced those who would bring their racist values. I just want to be really clear that those who would bring those values doesn't mean that it's somebody off the rock. It's very likely it is somebody on the rock. So anybody that's watching this, please don't misunderstand that to we're all seeing this as outsiders bringing that in. it really is here.

Deanna: Currently, the multicultural advisory council is trying to change the narrative that this is not a White island, that this is a multicultural island. We are here and other people were here before us. We're in the middle of trying to work with the school district and other groups to do this heavy lift.

Renni: I just want a second what Deanna said. We are a multicultural island and I do believe we have allies on the island. We are a multicultural island and we're all in this together.

Request from Organizations and Committees for Input and Meetings with REAC

Renni: The Law and Policy Committee began to draft a process for anyone who wants to come and speak to REAC. It's not ready yet, but I would expect that by the next REAC meeting, we will be ready to share a recommendation that is consistent in who gets to speak, how long to speak, and how we address and respond to requests.

I think what we what we're trying to guard against is having REAC be used as a checkbox or a "REAC's on our side."

Peggi: We got an email from #NoBIPDExpansion group. They wanted to come and talk at this meeting. Are we going to wait until after we have a process to allow people to come in talk because it would be good to get back to them. They're wanting to talk about the equity issues involved with the expansion of police space and possibly police themselves.

Eric: Has anybody gotten back to the NoBIPD group? They emailed us a few days ago. I don't think we need to wait until our formal processes is in place that realistically will take a month at best before it's on the books. We've had guests in the past. I don't see any reason why we wouldn't try to get this group on the agenda. It's a good procedure and good manners to get back to them. I'd be happy to have them come sometime in December.

James: I get 275 emails per month to REAC. The door is always open. For the sake of truth, there's just no way that we can address the amount of emails I get per month and give everyone a platform with REAC.

Deanna: That's what Renni and the Strategic Planning Committee are talking about. When those emails come in, what is the best process for all parties, including future REAC.

I wanted to advocate for #NoBIPDExpansion to be able to come and inform us. This is part of what we are talking about when we say we need to listen. There are other viewpoints to the expansion and that those other viewpoints and perspectives be heard sooner rather than later ish if we can.

Eric: I just wanted to add it's not just within our purview and our strategic plan, it's in our founding ordinance that we're charged with dealing with law enforcement issues. So, I take James's point about the flood of email he gets from REAC. It's not possible to accommodate everybody. I would like us to try to figure out a way to accommodate this group in the near future.

Peggi: I agree with Eric and Deanna just because it is a Bainbridge Island issue and it is a criminal justice issue. I would like to hear what people have to say and what they've come up with. I think it's pretty relevant to our work.

James: The issue of the police department has been going through litigation for two years now, and this city council has been going back and forth on this issue, made approvals, has studies its paid for. Maybe we need to be have a source within the city council that we need to confer with and reference to what kind of progress is being made. This issue has been going on for so long, Ultimately, this decision is going to be based on what the City Council decides.

Brenda: I just wanted to piggyback on what James was saying. Your source In the city would be the city manager and I believe the City Council has left that task of research with him and to bring that back to the Council.

REAC Member Vacancy

James: We can go through the same policy with prior candidates that were chosen during the time that this member was a part of REAC. That would be the faster procedure for getting a new membership.

Deanna: Clarity question: Are you advocating for us to go the faster route?

James: Absolutely. I think we need for more members.

Deanna: I don't necessarily have a stance on more members or how many members. I am more on the side of having a process that opens it up to more people. I would rather have a slower process to get people that really want to be doing this work and really understand the assignment. There might be people that were not available previously on that original list of people and are available to apply now.

Peggi: I endorse what Deanna is saying. I think it's more democratic. I feel like we will get better candidates if we open the process up. There may be people who aren't interested anymore and people that may have not been available before and who've just moved to the island.

Sue: I just have a couple of clarifying questions: How many candidates are there that applied? What is the timeframe of when they submitted the applications? How much time has passed since they applied?

Maybe we can reach out to those folks who applied last time and let them know that we're starting an application process again if we do decide to go that way.

James: What I'm suggesting is that the people who applied during that process (where we chose Renni and Jing as our newest members) would be candidates that we could consider for this vacant position.

Brenda: I thought Roz sent an email about the process couple of meetings ago. I think the balls in your court to pick up the process. I think she (Roz) told you the boundaries.

Savanna: I will meet and discuss this with Brenda and Rasham if we can get the two of them together.

Good of the Order

Brenda: I would like to invite everybody to my swearing-in which is going to be formally at the City Hall on November 29 between 8:00 and 8:30 am.

Deanna: I just wanted to bring up again the Port Madison Dialogues and how amazing they were. I really think that we should have some discussion around some of the things that were brought up. Also, if we have a moment to hear what the public has to say when we're done with our agenda, it would be great to check in with them.

Peggi: Civil Survival, which is a group that advocates for formerly incarcerated people, is having a showing of a film about the criminal justice system in the Puget Sound area. It's happening on November 30 and you can go to the civil survival site and register to attend virtually. They're going to have a panel afterwards. I encourage everyone to go to that event, if you get a chance.

Savanna: Can we make sure that everybody who's putting things into the chat make sure that they email them as well to all of us since I don't think the chat is public records.

Deanna: I want for us to be able to listen to the public and sometimes that doesn't always fall within the process or structure that has been given to us. I just want to advocate for that and have it on the record.

Sue: I want to yield my time to the to the member of the public who had something to say. Is that possible for me to do?

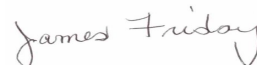
Akueya Karen Vargas: Hello everyone. I'm so glad that you all are doing this work but as we continue to move forward, we have to look at the systems in which we are advocating for undoing the institutionalized pieces and that sometimes means challenging the system or the city on how they are conducting their processes and aligning ourselves with what is happening not only on our island, but on state levels.

I wanted to really admonish all the work that is going forward but also understand that there are the systemic pieces that we need to be advocating for improvement, whether it is our plans or whether it is the structure or whether it is the processes. I wanted just to throw that on the table because I think that the committee or the Council was formulated to support equity within that realm within our governmental structures and for us to really look at how our city government are not making things equitable for those that they are serving.

I know that you all are getting training with GARE. I would hope the mission for REAC is to begin to decolonize the practice and policies in the structures that have been so marginalizing for many of our underserved and diverse populations that our city council is charged to serve. I understand that there's been some racial incidents that have happened within the City of Bainbridge, with our Jewish community (swastikas). How the city responded and how law enforcement is responding, I think are valid questions our Community will bring to this Council and to those that are working on REAC.

Please continue to do the wonderful work that you all have doing. We know that it is not easy work doing equity work within governmental structures. We definitely have the opportunity to make change within those systems. Thank you.

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.



James Friday, Chair

12/02/21