



FAIRBANKS DIVERSITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
DECEMBER 10, 2019 – 5:30 P.M.
FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
800 CUSHMAN STREET, FAIRBANKS, ALASKA



The **Fairbanks Diversity Council (FDC)** convened at 5:32 p.m. on the above date to conduct a Regular Meeting at the City Council Chambers, 800 Cushman Street, Fairbanks, Alaska, with Vice Chair Sara Harriger (Seat K) presiding and with the following members in attendance:

Members Present: Robert Dorton, Seat B Jeff Walters, Seat H
 Juanita Webb, Seat D (telephonic) Kelvin Lee, Seat I
 Shelissa Thomas, Seat E Doug Toelle, Seat J
 Rita Davis, Seat F June Rogers, City Council Member
 David Rucker, Seat G Angela Foster-Snow, HR Director

Members Absent: Kennita Williams, Seat A Montean Jackson, Seat C
 Jim Matherly, Mayor (excused)

Also Present: D. Danyielle Snider, City Clerk Mike Meeks, Chief of Staff

CALL TO ORDER & READING OF THE FDC MISSION STATEMENT

Vice Chair Harriger read the FDC Mission Statement.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice Chair Harriger led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Toelle, seconded by **Ms. Davis**, moved to APPROVE the Agenda.

Hearing no objection, **Vice Chair Harriger** declared the Agenda APPROVED.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS (Limited to 3 Minutes) – None

MAYOR'S COMMENTS & REPORT

Vice Chair Harriger invited Chief of Staff Mike Meeks to give a report on the Mayor's behalf.

Mr. Meeks stated that the Mayor is attending an event for his children. Mr. Meeks stated that the Mayor has been discussing some potential tasks for the FDC which are as follows: 1) Help repair the breakdown of communication between the City administration and the Alaska Native community; 2) Recommend a diversity training program to be used for City employees; and 3)

Develop a list of mobility-challenged areas in the City, prioritized in order of importance. He clarified that the list need not be limited to City properties.

Ms. Thomas shared that there will be a diversity training the following day in Fairbanks by a national organization. **Mr. Rucker** stated that the training can be in block format and can accommodate groups of up to 30. He stated that the School District will be rolling it out to the community, businesses, and organizations. **Mr. Walters** asked who the target audience is for the training **Ms. Thomas** mentioned. **Ms. Thomas** stated that City employees may attend the training; **Mr. Rucker** stated that the training is geared toward non-profits, but it can be tailored depending on the audience. He stated the district wants to put on six trainings per quarter in the area. He stated that the training focuses on how to build bridges cross-culturally and help people relate to one another. **Mr. Walters** requested that the training item placed on the January agenda for feedback and to see whether the FDC wants to pursue it. **Ms. Davis** asked where and what time the training would take place. **Ms. Thomas** stated it would start at 10 a.m. in Council Chambers.

Mr. Walters stated that he feels comfortable with tasks 2 and 3, but he would like to know what overtures the Mayor has made directly pertaining to task 1. **Mr. Meeks** explained that the administration used to have regular meetings with the Native community, but the meetings have dropped off. He stated the administration has reached out unsuccessfully. He stated that when a third party gets involved, it may generate more honest discussion. **Vice Chair Harriger** asked whether it would be worth forming a committee to discuss. **Mr. Walters** wondered whether the item should be a part of the FDC's strategic plan discussion. **Mr. Toelle** asked whether the Mayor attends potlaches and other events in the Native community. **Mr. Meeks** stated that the Mayor attends some events, but he would like more interaction. **Ms. Rogers** stated that having participated in the FDC since beginning and with her own Native heritage, she does not believe the relationship will be healed quickly. She stated that if the parties are not open with each other, it will make the gap larger. She stated, however, that she is glad to see acknowledgement of the problem. **Ms. Rogers** indicated that there is a great deal of history with the issue, and she spoke about community, understanding, communication, and forgiveness. She stressed the importance of being genuine in these types of concerns and stated she is glad the item is at the top of the list. **Mr. Dorton** stated that, in his experience, Native organizations are very quick to close up if they feel insulted, and he shared a story about a personal experience. He stated he is willing to help the Mayor build rapport with the Native community, but there are no promises of success. He stated that the Mayor came and danced with everyone at a potlatch, and it made a difference to people there. **Ms. Webb** expressed concern that having the FDC step in on the issue may just add another layer and possibly push people further away. She indicated that whoever is having a problem with communication should be present for the discussion. **Ms. Thomas** stated she does not believe the Mayor is asking the FDC to be a spokesperson for him; rather he is asking the FDC for ideas to help bridge a gap. She stated she believes it is part of the role of the FDC to do so. She stated the FDC should be able to work together to bridge diversity issues.

Vice Chair Harriger noted the recent passing of a regular attendee, Frank Turney. She requested a moment of silence.

Ms. Rogers commented that Mr. Turney was very consistent about certain things when she first met him, and they gradually worked those things out. She stated that she spoke with him regularly,

and she still has his last two messages on her voicemail. She stated it is good to know that in the last week of his life he was in very good spirits.

Vice Chair Harriger stated she learned a lot about the community from Mr. Turney, and she had admiration for him.

Mr. Dorton stated that Mr. Turney somehow got his phone number also. He stated that when they spoke, Mr. Turney asked him to help him with the jury issue. He shared that he saw Mr. Turney a lot at Mary Siah pool, and he was a good person to know.

Mr. Walters stated that Mr. Turney could be vexing at times, but he admired him in many ways. He stated that he will miss Mr. Turney's presence at meetings and that he admired his tenacity and willingness to work for justice.

FIVE-MINUTE PRESENTATIONS (Representatives from: City Council, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Military, Indigenous People, and FNSB School District)

Ms. Rogers stated the Council meeting the evening prior was lengthy, and she is not having a good recollection. Clerk Snider gave a brief report of the previous evening's City Council meeting.

Mr. Rucker shared that the District would soon be putting together its hiring presentation report for the School Board. He announced that he would soon be leaving the state, and his seat on the FDC will become vacant. He strongly recommended that someone from the School District be selected to replace him on the FDC. He stated the District's Diversity Committee will not meet in December but will probably meet in January.

Mr. Dorton shared that the Ralph Perdue Center has added ten more beds.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS – None

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

a) Regular Meeting Minutes of November 12, 2019

Mr. Toelle, seconded by **Mr. Walters**, moved to APPROVE the Regular Meeting Minutes of November 12, 2019.

Hearing no objection, **Vice Chair Harriger** declared the Minutes APPROVED.

HUMAN RESOURCES REPORT

Ms. Foster-Snow reported that the Plumbing Inspector position is vacant, and there are a couple of applicants. She stated the Structural Inspector position in the Building Department is still vacant. She stated that the Fairbanks Police Department (FPD) still has two Clerk positions open, which are entry-level positions. She stated the City is still recruiting for Dispatch and Police

Officer positions. She was happy to report that there will be 17 police officer candidates testing the following week, the largest group since she began working for the City.

DIVERSITY TOPIC OF THE MONTH – None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – None

NEW BUSINESS

a) Format, Date, and Agenda for 2020 FDC Work Session

Members briefly discussed a date to hold the Work Session and agreed to meet on February 11 from 5:30 – 8:30 p.m. **Vice Chair Harriger** stated that the existing Diversity Action Plan (DAP) can be used as the basis for the Work Session. **Mr. Walters** requested that copies of the DAP be provided to members at the January meeting for a quick overview. He stated he does not believe a new strategic plan has to be in the same format. **Ms. Foster-Snow** suggested that the session be held in a different room, and **Vice Chair Harriger** suggested that members bring dinner. **Ms. Rogers** stated the meeting space in Council Chambers could be rearranged into a more relaxed format, like a circle. Clerk Snider stated that if the group agreed to that format, there would be no recording of the session. She stated it would still be a public meeting. She suggested that the FDC decide whether it will allow the public to participate in the Work Session. She stated that the meeting minutes can simply include the date, time, and location of the meeting, who was present, and the time of adjournment. She stated that there are generally no actions taken during a Work Session.

Members discussed concerns relating to the continuity between brainstorming and planning. **Vice Chair Harriger** stated that so far, she is hearing that the FDC wants to meet on February 11, hold discussions in a circle format, bring food, make the meeting open to the public, and focus on brainstorming. Members discussed at length whether the public should be invited to participate in the Work Session, and, if so, how and to what degree. **Mr. Toelle** spoke in favor of the circle idea and suggested selecting a facilitator. Members agreed to put out a question in advance inviting the community to offer suggestions on what issues they believe are important for the FDC to address. There was a consensus that the Clerk could gather responses and report all feedback to the FDC at the January 14 meeting; the group agreed to leave the comment period open until the February Work Session.

Vice Chair Harriger summarized the plan for the Work Session, which would include limited public comment. She stated that the FDC can finalize the Work Session agenda in January. She asked whether the FDC is interested in having a facilitator. **Mr. Dorton** nominated Ms. Thomas to serve as the Work Session facilitator. No members objected to the plan.

FDC COMMITTEE REPORTS – None

FDC MEMBERS' COMMENTS

Mr. Dorton stated that the mobile crisis unit was recently discussed at a Homeless and Housing Coalition meeting. He stated that he has been speaking with a lot of local leaders about the program, and many of them believe that getting involved with the program is like jumping off a cliff. He stated that with the large state budget cuts, some leaders are not willing to take the risk for fear that it will not be a sustainable program. He wondered what Fairbanks could do to help make the mobile crisis unit program happen and stated it is very needed in the community.

Ms. Thomas stated that the crisis unit deals not only with inebriated people, but also people experiencing mental health issues; she agreed that it is needed in the community. She stated that the Alaska Mental Health Trust is willing to help with startup funds, and they are currently in negotiations. She spoke to the significance of mental health problems in Fairbanks and stated she has never seen so many soldiers struggling with substance abuse as she has seen recently. She stated Fairbanks is a safe place that she calls home, and she would like the community to tackle mental health issues. She spoke briefly to various mental health services that have gone away.

Ms. Davis stated she had no comments.

Ms. Foster Snow wished everyone safe and happy holidays. She stated she will miss Mr. Rucker, and she wished him the best.

Mr. Toelle stated there does not seem to be an offseason in the tourism industry nowadays, which is good for the local economy. He stated he will miss Mr. Rucker. He expressed pride in announcing that his daughter will graduate from college on Sunday.

Mr. Lee stated he had no comments.

Mr. Rucker stated that he came to Fairbanks a year and a half ago, somewhat on a whim, and found a job. He stated that the Fairbanks community has embraced him, and he feels like it is his second home. He thanked Mayor Matherly for having him serve on the FDC and stated that it has been an interesting experience. He shared about how embracing the Fairbanks community is and that that when he first came to Fairbanks, he remembers people smiling and being friendly in the supermarket; he stated he will never forget that. He stated he will miss everyone when he leaves.

Ms. Rogers stated everyone will miss Mr. Rucker. She asked Mr. Rucker to come share his experiences with everyone when he comes back to visit. She stated she has learned a lot from Mr. Rucker and appreciates all he has done in the short time he has been in Fairbanks. In regard to Mr. Dorton's earlier comments about taking risks amid state budget cuts, Ms. Rogers stated that things are done either for money or for people. She stated that when we do things for money, we fail people, and it shows a lack of determination. She stated that everyone must work help decision-makers understand the community's needs, passion, and commitment. She wished everyone happy holidays.

Mr. Walters thanked Mr. Rucker for his service to the community. He stated that he read the November meeting minutes, and he thought the jury issue was going to be a part of the FDC work

session. He expressed hope that the Mayor will continue to work on that issue. He expressed interest in the TV show involving FPD that would be released in January and in the diversity training that would be taking place the following day. He encouraged Mr. Rucker to see if he knows anyone who may want to apply to serve on the FDC.

Ms. Webb wished everyone happy holidays and stated that Mr. Rucker will be missed.

Vice Chair Harriger stated she would like to hear about how the diversity training goes. She highlighted a project happening at the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center put on by the Alaska Veterans Foundation with initiatives aimed at curbing homelessness and suicide among veterans. She stated that currently they are doing a reading group using Homer's the *Odyssey* as a jumping off point for discussion focused on suicide prevention. She stated she would be more than happy to provide additional information to anyone interested. She thanked Mr. Rucker for his service and stated that will be missed. She wished everyone happy holidays.

Ms. Rogers shared that there is a group on suicide prevention that meets regularly at the local IBEW. She stated the next meeting will be January 28 at 5:45 p.m., and people may bring food. She stated that there is a pretty diverse group of attendees, including professionals in the field.

MEETING DATES

The next Regular Meeting of the FDC is scheduled for Tuesday, January 14, 2020.

ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chair Harriger declared the meeting ADJOURNED at 7:03 p.m.



Jim Matherly, Mayor/Chair



D. Danyielle Snider, CMC, City Clerk

Transcribed by: DS