



FAIRBANKS DIVERSITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
NOVEMBER 9, 2021, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M.
HELD VIA [ZOOM WEBINAR](#) AND AT
FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
800 CUSHMAN STREET, FAIRBANKS, ALASKA



The **Fairbanks Diversity Council (FDC)** convened at 5:30 p.m. on the above date to conduct a Regular Meeting via Zoom Webinar and at the City Council Chambers, 800 Cushman Street, Fairbanks, Alaska, with Chair Andrew Aquino (Seat G) presiding (P) and with the following members in attendance [Z = Zoom; P = In Person]:

Members Present: (Z) Timothy Ledna, Seat A (P) Kelvin Lee, Seat I
(Z) Robert Dorton, Seat B (P) Cheyenna Kuplack, Seat J
(Z) Juanita Webb, Seat D (Z) Abigail North, Seat K
(Z) Dorothy Shockley, Seat F (Z) June Rogers, Councilmember
(P) Wendy Tisland, Seat H (P) Angela Foster-Snow, HR Director

Members Absent: Jose Martinez II, Seat C Jim Matherly, Mayor
Shelissa Thomas, Seat E (excused)

Also Present: (P) Danyielle Snider, City Clerk (P) Mike Meeks, Chief of Staff

CALL TO ORDER & READING OF THE FDC MISSION STATEMENT

Chair Aquino called the meeting to order and read the FDC mission statement.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Aquino led the FDC in the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

B. Dorton, seconded by **K. Lee**, moved to APPROVE the Agenda.

There being no objection or proposed changes, the minutes were APPROVED.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS (Limited to 3 Minutes)

There were no Citizens' Comments.

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Chair Aquino wished everyone a happy Native American Heritage Month. He stated that he works at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and he is pleased with what the University is doing right now in putting forth to the Board of Regents the Alaska Native Success Initiative. He stated that the board questioned why the University's population does not reflect the population of the state. He stated that all the universities came together to identify barriers, baselines, and what can be done to improve. He expressed hope that the plan would be approved by the Board Thursday. He indicated that there would soon be messaging that the University is committed to

developing cultural awareness training for all students, faculty, and staff. **Chair Aquino** shared that there are also plans to increase Indigenous representation through art, signage, building-naming, etc. He expressed hope that those changes would trickle down into the community. He invited everyone to tune in to the Board of Regents meeting.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

a) Regular Meeting Minutes of October 12, 2021

W. Tisland, seconded by **C. Kuplack**, moved to APPROVE the minutes of October 12, 2021.

There being no objection or proposed changes, the minutes were APPROVED.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a) Resolution No. 4981, Reading of Land Acknowledgement at City Council Meetings

Chair Aquino asked D. Shockley to share her findings on her land acknowledgement research.

D. Shockley stated that she did not have contact information for Chair Aquino or B. Dorton but indicated that she did reach out to Steve Ginnis at the Fairbanks Native Association (FNA), Allan Hayton at Doyon, Dewey Hoffman at Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC), and Jim Kari, an Alaska Native Language expert at UAF. She stated that she shared a couple of documents with the FDC, one in regard to the Native Village of Chena and the iconic place name *Ch'eno'* and the other was a land acknowledgement from the TVSFA. **D. Shockley** stated she did not work on the acknowledgement language as much as she had wanted to but stated that she believes it is appropriate to recognize that people today work and live on the traditional lands of the *Ch'eno'* people of Interior Alaska.

Chair Aquino provided a brief update on the City Council's referral of the land acknowledgement resolution to the FDC. Clerk Snider clarified the City Council has requested a recommendation from the FDC by the first regular City Council meeting in January.

Chair Aquino stated that he gave some thought to the purpose of and distinctions between the City Council and the FDC. He suggested that the FDC could have stronger, more powerful language in its land acknowledgement. He stated that the land acknowledgement put forth in the resolution sponsored by (former) Council Member Kun was vetted through some local groups. He stated that he would like to entertain the idea of recommending the language in the resolution to the City Council and possibly developing a separate, but complimentary one for the FDC. He asked members for their input on the idea of two land acknowledgements.

B. Dorton stated that D. Shockley did a great job with her research in regard to the *Ch'eno'* people. He stated that he had gotten into some research himself after speaking with Lee Saylor, and D. Shockley's research is correct.

C. Kuplack stated that she recalls seeing something about the village of *Ch'eno'*; she offered to look for it and send it to members. She asked D. Shockley whether she had spoken with the Elders at Denakkanaaga to get their insight. **D. Shockley** replied that she had not. **C. Kuplack** stated that they are very knowledgeable.

Chair Aquino stated it seems as though there are a bunch of resources available. He asked D. Shockley if she feels comfortable bringing a draft to the next meeting. He stated that the FDC could have a deeper discussion at that time and hopefully approve a recommendation at the January meeting. **D. Shockley** stated that she wants to make sure to have the correct acknowledgement for the people who lived here and strong language for the resolution. She shared that she talked to some people who she thought could help draft strong language, but she stated that the most important thing is to recognize the correct Native people. She stated that she will reach out to Denakkanaaga since they crafted part of the language in the resolution; she stated she would like their blessing on the land acknowledgement.

Chair Aquino indicated that Clerk Snider may be able to put D. Shockley in touch with Ms. Kun.

W. Tisland stated that she did not realize that Denakkanaaga Elders had crafted and approved the land acknowledgement in the resolution. She stated it would be respectful to reach out to them if the FDC is going to propose any changes.

D. Shockley asked Chair Aquino about his idea of having two land acknowledgements. **Chair Aquino** stated that his suggestion was to possibly have two acknowledgements: one for the City Council and one for the FDC. He stated, however, that he would defer to D. Shockley's guidance since she is doing the research. **J. Rogers** asked Chair Aquino for his reasoning behind having two separate acknowledgements. **Chair Aquino** stated that the purpose of the two bodies, the City Council and the FDC, differ. He referenced the FDC mission statement and stated that a theme that stands out to him is advancement. He suggested a more progressive land acknowledgement for the FDC that is not word-limited. **J. Webb** expressed disagreement with the idea of two acknowledgements and stated that two statements may take away from each other. **D. Shockley** stated she agrees with J. Webb. She stated that once a land acknowledgement is adopted, it would be great if everyone adopted it.

Chair Aquino stated that the most important thing is to get the acknowledgement right. He stated that some trouble he has noticed with land acknowledgements is that they state the "what" but not the "why." He stated that it is about more than going through the motions.

Members discussed briefly how long a land acknowledgement should be and how the length could affect the impact. **D. Shockley** asked B. Dorton to offer his thoughts. **B. Dorton** stated that it should not be too long or too short. He stated he believes what D. Shockley has come up with so far is good, the "meat and potatoes." He spoke about his conversations with Lee Saylor and clarified that Saylor's had pronounced *Ch'eno'* as Chih-NUH.

Chair Aquino asked B. Dorton whether he would be willing to work with D. Shockley on the land acknowledgement; **B. Dorton** stated that he would, and he gave D. Shockley Lee Saylor's phone number. Clerk Snider stated that she would send out an updated FDC member roster to everyone. **C. Kuplack** stated that she works at Doyon Limited, and she offered to help with the land acknowledgement as well. **Chair Aquino** stated that it appears there is a full committee.

D. Shockley stated she would like to know more about Chair Aquino's idea regarding the "what" and the "why." **Chair Aquino** stated that he would like the land acknowledgement to include the purpose behind it, which includes the terrible things that happened to Alaska Native peoples. He stated that there is a tone of toxic positivity in the world currently, where everything is staying

positive while people are being tone deaf. He spoke to the need for critical hope. **D. Shockley** questioned whether that could be accomplished in a couple sentences. **Chair Aquino** stated that if the FDC proposed two land acknowledgements, one could go be more substantive and go into the “why” and the other one could be similar to most land acknowledgements and be the “what.”

C. Kuplack asked about the goal of the land acknowledgement resolution and whether it should include the who, what, and the why. **Chair Aquino** confirmed that is what he would like to see. He stated that if Ms. Shockley comes up with something that is lengthy, he hopes the FDC would not be opposed to reviewing it.

T. Ledna wondered whether the language about “their land” might be more associated with colonialism and westernization. He stated that from his knowledge of the Native culture, it seems contrary to what he has been taught that a lot of Native peoples would not have said that this was their land. He stated they might recognize the land as belonging to the Creator or something greater than themselves.

B. Dorton stated that he heard that the term Ch’eno’ was harder to pronounce, so people began using the term Chena. He stated that Ch’eno’ means gathering place. **T. Ledna** suggested that using the term “gathering place” is much more inclusive than saying that the land belongs to *me* or to *us*. **A. North** stated that she has heard people use the phrase “unseeded territory” in land acknowledgements, which she likes.

Chair Aquino asked J. Rogers whether a land acknowledgement was shared at the previous night’s City Council meeting. **J. Rogers** replied that no one shared a land acknowledgement.

D. Shockley shared that when she was at the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) some years ago, people that spoke acknowledged recognized the Dena’ina people. She commented that was a huge statement that spoke volumes. She stated that the recognition is very powerful, and she hopes that people and groups throughout the City recognize the land of the Ch’eno’ people. She spoke to the power in the statement.

B. Dorton spoke about his pride in his grandmother and others in his family dating back to the 1920s. In reference to D. Shockley’s comments about a powerful statement, he stated that he could almost feel the presence of his family.

K. Lee spoke to all that the early people had to give up: their name, their language, their land. He spoke against watering down the land acknowledgement. He stated that people should be mindful that the lands were taken, and it should be acknowledged that the land belonged to certain people. He spoke in favor of using the term “their land.” **C. Kuplack** agreed that that is respectful. She stated that some speakers will do research on the place they are speaking and acknowledge the specific group of people who the land belongs to. She commented that it shows a great deal of respect.

A. Foster-Snow stated she believes they are doing a land acknowledgement at Borough Assembly meetings. She suggested getting a copy of their acknowledgement since the FDC supports both the City and the Borough. She suggested that there could be a unified statement. **W. Tisland** stated that the Borough covers an extensive span of land that may include a lot of different historical tribes and groups that may be different than the history of the land in the City. **A. Foster-Snow** stated that it would be good to be aware of the Borough’s statement to perhaps compliment

what they are doing. **J. Rogers** stated that the City could share its acknowledgement during Borough Assembly meetings when the City representative has the opportunity to speak. She stated that she believes it is wise to keep the land acknowledgement simple and brief. She stated that, sadly, a longer statement does not have as great an impact. She added it seems the group wishes to acknowledge the gathering place. **B. Dorton** agreed.

b) Appointment of Vice Chair

Chair Aquino stated that he received no nominations since the last meeting. **T. Ledna** requested to nominate B. Dorton; **B. Dorton** thanked T. Ledna for the nomination but respectfully declined. **B. Dorton** spoke in favor of nominating D. Shockley. **Chair Aquino** stated that D. Shockley has been nominated.

Chair Aquino, seconded by **T. Ledna**, moved to appoint D. Shockley as the Vice Chair.

Chair Aquino took a voice vote on the motion to appoint D. Shockley as Vice Chair. The motion passed unanimously.

FDC MEMBERS' COMMENTS

Chair Aquino thanked the D. Shockley and the subcommittee for taking on the land acknowledgement project. **Vice Chair Shockley** stated that she has been wanting to serve on the FDC for a while. She asked whether the FDC will do anything to recognize the Native American heritage or the land. **Chair Aquino** suggested that is something that should be built into the Diversity Action Plan (DAP). He stated that he did not come to the meeting with a plan, but it is something he would love to see happen. **T. Ledna** stated that sometimes there is a lot going on in the community that people are not aware of. He stated that it may not be necessary to reinvent the wheel but rather support the organizations who are already doing things in the community. He suggested that each FDC member serve as a volunteer in the community and support the good things that are already happening. **C. Kuplack** asked whether it would be possible to recommend social media posts to recognize certain things. **Chair Aquino** stated that would be a good thing to do.

J. Rogers suggested that the FDC request a three-Mayor Proclamation on a land acknowledgement. She stated she would be willing to take care of the submittal if someone could provide her with language for the Proclamation. **Vice Chair Shockley** stated she believes it would be more appropriate to recognize the bigger population of Native Americans in the State and in the U.S. in a Proclamation. She offered to review language if someone drafted it. She went on to say that she would like to see more recognition of all ethnic groups. She stated that she believes that *everyone* has a culture and an ethnic background, and each should be recognized throughout the year to make people feel more like they belong. **Chair Aquino** stated that C. Kuplack has volunteered to draft the Proclamation language. He asked C. Kuplack to send the language to B. Dorton and D. Shockley and, once it is solidified, forward it to the Clerk for distribution to the FDC.

J. Rogers stated she appreciates what D. Shockley was just saying and stated that everyone is a part of a larger family throughout the world. She spoke about her own heritage. She stated that the meeting has been inspiring. **Chair Aquino** stated that he learned a lot in the meeting. **B. Dorton** stated that his grandfather, Walter Northway, lived to be the second oldest man in North

America. He shared he once asked his grandfather how he lived so long, and he replied that it was because he lived by the river.

C. Kuplack stated that she would like to hear more about each member's background at the next meeting so that everyone can learn about the diversity of the FDC. **Chair Aquino** agreed.

MEETING DATES

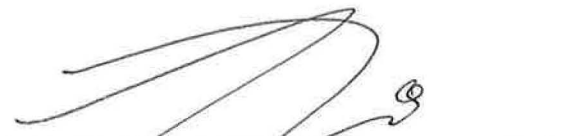
Chair Aquino stated that the next regular meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 14, 2021. He stated that he received three responses to the poll he sent out to the FDC regarding meeting time and frequency. He stated that the responses leaned toward keeping things the same.

J. Rogers asked Clerk Snider to remind FDC members about the Open Meetings Act (OMA). Clerk Snider explained that the Work Session had been publicly noticed and is open to the public, but it is a time for brainstorming and informal discussion. She stated that no action of the FDC may be taken during the Work Session. She further explained that FDC members should avoid having group discussions on social media and other forms of electronic media, including email. She cautioned against members sending emails to the entire body on subject matter relating to FDC business. She stated that members should send items to her for distribution to the full body. She stated that members may contact her if they have questions regarding the OMA. She stated that she and the City Attorney give an annual presentation to the FDC on the OMA.

ADJOURNMENT

B. Dorton, seconded by **W. Tisland**, moved to ADJOURN the meeting.

Hearing no objection, **Chair Aquino** declared the meeting
ADJOURNED at 6:48 p.m.



Andrew Aquino, Chair



D. Danyielle Snider, MMC, City Clerk

Transcribed by: DS

An informal Work Session to review the FDC policies and procedures and the DAP was held immediately following the regular meeting. The Work Session was not recorded.