

REIB City Council Committee

February 25, 2025

5:30 – 7:30 pm

Champlain Room, 149 Church Street, 3rd Floor City Hall, Burlington, VT

Attendees:

Christian Berry, Interim Director REIB

Katie Greene, Community and Belonging Program Manager REIB

Councilor Melo Grant

Councilor Gene Bergman

Mark Hughes

Jacob Alfar

Meeting Convened: 5:33 PM

Agenda:

- **Motion to Approve Agenda**

Councilor Melo Grant motioned to approve. Councilor Gene Bergman seconded.
Unanimous pass.

- **Motion to Approve Meeting Minutes**

- a. **October 2024**

- b. **December 2024**

Approval of minutes moved to next month

- **Public Forum**

N/A

- **REIB Updates**

- a. **Staffing**

- Currently five positions available in the department but not yet posted. Discussion on incorporating roles focused on New American communities, health equity, Indigenous representation, and education.
- Councilor Grant inquired if the five positions represent cutbacks. Christian clarified that while different, the positions align with available resources for the upcoming fiscal year and will evolve based on office needs.

- b. **Education & Training**

- i. **City-wide Bias Awareness Trainings**

- Christian shared that this initiative stems from the 2020 resolution and responses to the open letter. A training and education model has been presented to the administration and will be included in FY26 to ensure continuous learning throughout the City.
- Councilor Grant asked about the continuation of past bias awareness trainings. Christian confirmed that the last sessions stopped under previous leadership and were not continued due to transitions within the office.
- Christian confirmed plans to collaborate with HR and track training progress via UKG. Updates will be provided to the committee.

ii. BPD Bias Awareness Trainings (BPOA survey)

- Councilor Grant highlighted the results of a police survey showing dismissive attitudes toward racial disparities. Concerns were raised about continued bias awareness training for officers.
- Body cam footage reportedly shows racial profiling of Black and New American youth.
- A discussion was held about how REIB should engage with the Mayor and interim police chief regarding training needs.
- Councilor Bergman suggested preparing a report on bias training to present to the City Council.
- Christian noted that this is the first time all department heads have equity-based goals.

c. Programmatic / Event Updates

i. Vision / Purpose Next Steps

- Seven engagement sessions held across the city in the fall.
- Next phase: Engaging businesses and schools, creating space for youth input.
- Timeline: Expected completion by mid-to-late March.

ii. Juneteenth 2025 Planning

- Christian stated that REIB will work closely with BCA on event production.
- Due to budget constraints, REIB is seeking sponsorship and working with Doreen for fundraising efforts.
- Current estimated budget: \$70,000, with only half secured so far. Fundraising discussions with BCA are ongoing.
- Councilor Grant asked about the possibility of a community dinner; Christian said it's too early to confirm but smaller welcoming events are planned.

d. Project Updates

i. Empowerment Grant Update

- Part 1 completed in the fall; Part 2 to be released in early March.
- Adjustments made based on feedback to reduce applicant burden.
- Responses expected by May.
- Councilor Bergman suggested highlighting grant impacts through personal stories.
- Councilor Grant recommended incorporating photos and videos.

ii. VNAAC Report

- Follow-up discussions on momentum from prior presentation.
- Shared with department heads; discussions on collaboration underway.
- Mayor and Christian met with VNAAC representatives to discuss next steps.

iii. 2020 Resolution

- Discussion held on ensuring tangible next steps for progress.

a. Committees / Task Forces

- **Burlington Advisory Committee on Accessibility:** Awaiting restart; REIB will collaborate closely.
- **Vermont Language Justice Project:** Focus on disseminating legislative changes and digestible updates to the public.
- **IDEAL Vermont:** Monthly state-led meetings on inclusion, diversity, and equity across municipalities. Christian to extend an invitation to Xusana Davis.
- Community Forum
 - **Community Safety Issues Affecting BIPOC Kids:** Discussion tabled for next meeting.
 - Suggestions to invite representatives from King Street Center and Boys & Girls Club.
 - **Concerns in the New American Community:** Possible collaboration with AALV and community partners.
 - **Committee Meeting Locations:** Discussions on holding meetings at community centers for accessibility.

Public Comment: Jacob Alfar's Experience at BPD

- Former CSO Jacob Alfar shared concerns about workplace culture at BPD, describing a lack of inclusion and hierarchical division.
- Issues highlighted:
 - Officers physically and socially separate from CSOs and other staff.

- Lack of basic workplace courtesy (e.g., greetings from leadership).
 - Racial disparities in BPD's workforce composition.
 - Under-enforcement of laws in certain areas.
- Councilor Grant and Bergman acknowledged concerns and requested written testimony for committee records.
- Discussion on potential engagement with the interim police chief regarding department culture.

Reparations

- Mark Hughes provided an update on reparations discussions.
- A pending state-level reparations bill mirrors H432.
- Discussion on advocating for release of related constitutional articles post-Town Meeting Day.
- Police oversight bill (H361) under review, with implications for city-level accountability.

- Motion to Adjourn

Councilor Melo Grant motioned to approve. Councilor Gene Bergman seconded. Unanimous pass.

Adjourned at 7:05 PM

Zoom information:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/92744162495?pwd=YVNhUUUzU3RFYjIwODFlZm8xTFc0Zz09>

Meeting ID: 927 4416 2495

Passcode: 225169