

Diversity Council Meeting Agenda
Tuesday, February 25, 2025 at 6:30pm
Hybrid Meeting: In-Person and on Zoom
Meeting Room 1-2, City Hall, 111 N. Main St., Bristol, CT

Attendees: Marcus Patton – Interim Chair, Council Members Sandra Kamens, Jeff Israel (Zoom), and David Rackliffe

Absent: City Council Member, Mark Dickau, and Diversity Council Member Tony Lopes

Guests: None

I. Call to Order

The Interim Chair called the meeting to order at 6:30pm. A quorum was present.

II. Approval of Minutes

a. Minutes from the January 28, 2025 Regular Meeting

The Interim Chair called for an approval of the meeting minutes from January 28, 2025. Council Member Rackliffe made the motion to approve the minutes which was seconded by Council Member Kamens. There was no discussion or need for changes. All were in favor and the Minutes were accepted into the record.

III. Public Participation

City Council Member, Erick Rosengren, congratulated Interim Chair Patton in his role leading the Diversity Council. He thanked him for taking the responsibility and stated he believed Marcus will be a positive influence and do great things for the city.

Additional members of the public in attendance:

Rachael D’Agostino, Bishop Street, Bristol

Sgt. Demond Wilson, Bristol Police Dept.

Lt. Jason Warner, Bristol Police Dept.

Jacqueline Patton, Bristol

Maria Caceres, The Bristol Edition (Zoom)

Cheryl Thibeault, Bristol City Council

Maria Caceres let the Council know that if they reach out to the Bristol Edition in advance, they can do a piece on the Council’s events, including having someone cover the event.

Interim Chair Patton advised the Council that they were invited to write articles for the Bristol Edition regarding diversity, equity and inclusion. More than one member could write the article,

and there are Bristol residents who write and take photos and could be included for the community to share in the opportunity.

IV. Council attendance and introductions

The Council Members took a moment to introduce themselves, and share why they're serving on the Diversity Council.

Jeff Israel has been a member of the Diversity Council, along with Marcus, since its inception. He is also a member of the Bristol Interfaith Coalition, and a Board Member of Voices of Hope. Voices of Hope is an organization comprised of Holocaust survivors and descendants, of which he is one. Jeff speaks in schools, especially during the upcoming months when students are studying the Holocaust.

Sandy Kamens joined the Diversity Council because she believes it's important that people learn how to get along with everyone no matter their faith, nationality or skin color. We should all be able to get along. Sandy's background includes working for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services which had a Cultural Competency Program. The program featured speakers from various cultures sharing their experiences, and she felt she benefited from the program.

David Rackliffe has been with the Diversity Council since 2021, has lived in Bristol since 1995, and is currently retired. He is the Chairman of the Board at the Prudence Crandall Center for Women, is active with the Men and Boys Fund and with Rotary. He feels the Diversity Council can have a significant impact on the community, from discussions and conversations about issues that divide us, and that could unite us. He is very interested in holding conversations with a focus on unity in the community.

Marcus Patton joined the Diversity Council at the beginning, and was looking for a way to give to the city that had given so much to him. Marcus recalled a moment when high school students made a presentation to the council for assistance in holding a Pride Day, and it showed him that there was definitely a need to help people in Bristol. He believes that people appear very divided on the surface, but knows that underneath, we are still very much connected, and he will work to continue to bring that to the surface.

V. Current Business

a. Operating under City of Bristol umbrella vs. Task Force or similar

The Interim Chair asked each Council Member to share their thoughts and current leanings in regards to the consideration of the Council continuing to operate under the city, or move out as a Task Force.

Jeff Israel sees positives on both sides and is still taking it under consideration. His leaning is towards remaining under the city. He would like to see more city council members helping with that, wants to see the community involved, and to hear from them more with the focus on unity

in the community. Jeff sees the need to bring in neighbors and fellow residents with the conversations being one way to hear from them.

Sandy Kamens prefers moving to a Task Force, especially when joining the Diversity Council now requires an interview with the mayor. It's not intimidating though some people may see, or have seen that as such. Additionally, as a Task Force, they can pursue fundraising and grant opportunities, and funding is not coming while they remain under the city.

David Rackliffe is leaning more towards a Task Force, including developing it as a 501c3. He noted that as long as the Council is under the city, there is a political representation requirement per city ordinance, and he doesn't believe there is a place for politics in this; this is all about people. The 501c3 status would allow for officers, and opportunities to raise money, plus it will provide tax-exempt status. David sees an opportunity for the Council to expand and develop more commitment from the public, to work with the city, but not to be under the city.

Marcus Patton is leaning towards becoming a Task Force. He has seen what it looks like to operate under the city, and what is unknown is what it looks like to operate out from under the city. Currently, there are meeting requirements and restrictions, such as not being able to meet outside of a regular or special meeting. He also mentioned the political representation requirement. Marcus believes a lot of this can run on passion at this time, that funding will come, though not from the city as has been confirmed, with opportunities to be good neighbors and support the community being at the heart of their mission.

All members shared optimism in growing participation and commitments of new members over time. There was positive interaction on a post the Interim Chair made on Bristol Talks (Facebook) which encouraged them that there is interest and a need. Additional discussion followed, including aligning the Council's goals with the city's goals. Erick Rosengren and Cheryl Thibeault, both Bristol City Council members, were acknowledged for their support of the Diversity Council, as well as the current Council Liaison, Mark Dickau, and Sebastian Panioto, the former Council Liaison, and Mayor Caggiano.

Discussion concluded with a decision to table the Task Force vote for the March 2025 Diversity Council meeting to allow for Council Member Tony Lopes to be present. Council Member Israel offered to gather information on what other cities are doing regarding formatting their Diversity Councils and share it at the next meeting.

VI. New Business

- a. Diversity Council Event:**
Safe Spaces - A Bristol Community Meet and Greet (Meet Your Neighbors)
- b. When? March, April or May?**
- c. Format?**
- d. Facilitators**

Interim Chair Patton advised of research he completed regarding holding the community event the Council had been discussing, including venues, specifically the Bristol Public Library. Event formats and dates were also considered.

The Interim Chair shared about emails received by the Diversity Council from Bristol residents offering to share their stories and resources. The overall message is that there are voices to be heard, and this Council can provide the opportunity. Council Member Israel also emphasized seeking out and partnering up with events already taking place in the city.

Discussion also included incorporating a facilitator with facilitating experience for the conversations. Of specific concern is that the facilitator sets expectations for a safe space or brave space, where attendees know that things discussed may not be in alignment with their current beliefs, and it's understood that they're willing to hear the information being shared.

Concerns about finding, and keeping, a balance in the flow of conversation included this first event being more casual with general introductions, attendees sharing about themselves, and reserving a time for questions after. April or May were considered as dates for the first event. Interim Chair clarified this would be separate from the regular Diversity Council meeting date and time, allowing for it to be free from city meeting requirements. *Note: This means no agenda or minutes, no voting by the Council, and the Council will reserve discussion of action by the Council for the next Diversity Council meeting.*

VII. Notable Events, News and Notes

Men and Boy's Fund Annual Breakfast June 3rd at DoubleTree with an ESPN Speaker

Prudence Crandall's Hope Breakfast is May 30th and is free to attend. There is a fundraiser, but it is a donation is not a requirement to attend.

Interfaith National Day of Prayer is on May 1st hosted by Prospect Methodist Church

Additional details are coming for a Peace March in August

Creative Jam Art Co on Riverside Avenue is hosting a first Open Mic Night at 7pm, with sign-ups are at 6:45pm. This event will take place the last Wednesday of every month.

VIII. Adjournment

Council Member Rackliffe made the motion to adjourn, and the motion was seconded by Council Member Israel. The meeting adjourned at 8:01 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Sharon Arsego
Recording Secretary