

MINUTES

ACCESSIBILITY AND DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Held via MS Teams

770 Vernon Avenue

Wednesday, February 5, 2025 at 5:02 p.m.

Present: Councillor Teale Phelps Bondaroff, Caroline Quan (5:10 p.m.), Laurie Anne-Keith, Manjit Bains, Rishi Sharma, Sean Dhillon, Sierra Irving, Susan Mader, Swapna Mazumder (5:05 p.m.), and Tony Kiyak

Staff: Carroll Porter, Senior Manager, Human Resources; Dale Samsonoff, Manager, Planning and Programs; Mais Hajaj, HR Consultant - Accessibility, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and Colton Whittaker, Committee Clerk

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

MOVED by S. Dhillon and Seconded by S. Mader: "That the Minutes of the Accessibility and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee meeting held January 8, 2025, be adopted as circulated."

The following discussion ensued:

- The previous minutes do not reference having the Chief Accessibility Officer of Canada speak to the committee. This item was recorded in the committee's Action List.

The Motion was then Put and CARRIED

CHAIRS REMARKS

No comments were made.

TERMS OF REFERENCE DISCUSSION

The committee reviewed the Terms of Reference, and the following was noted:

- The committee may provide recommendations to Council on topics outlined in the Terms of Reference.
- Presentations on the *Accessible British Columbia Act*, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Report and Action Framework, and the Accessibility Plan would be beneficial. These plans, created in 2023, were developed in response to Provincial legislation.
- The District's webpage includes statements regarding its commitment to Indigenous relations and reconciliation.
- The Accessibility Plan is a three-year plan with annual reviews. It remains flexible and can be amended as needed.
- There are over 80 actions outlined across the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic

- Report and Action Framework, and the Accessibility Plan.
- Saanich staff will ensure clarity when seeking feedback on internal documents.
 - Saanich Police and Fire have previously presented to the committee and may do so in the future as relevant topics arise. Past presentations have covered supporting unhoused populations and emergency response considerations related to accessibility.
 - Staff and Council may refer specific topics to the committee for discussion before presenting them in greater detail at Council.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION AND SPECIAL EVENTS UPDATE

The HR Consultant - Accessibility, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion gave a presentation (PowerPoint on file). The following was noted in response to questions and during committee discussion:

- The content gathered in this presentation is focused on action items within the control of Corporate Services.
- Additional action items related to Accessibility and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ADEI) from other departments may be presented to the committee in the future.
- In the Accessibility Plan, 42% of initiatives fall under Human Resources, while in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Report and Action Framework, 45% of initiatives are under Human Resources.
- February is Black History Month. The District will offer multiple learning opportunities for staff.
- Language diversity is included in the Action List, with several initiatives aimed at supporting individuals whose first language is not English within the District.
- The committee would appreciate the opportunity to review the calendar for days of commemoration.
- The committee would like to explore the definition of the committee's mandate, both internally and externally.
- The District prioritizes an ADEI lens in its communications.
- The process of hiring an Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation position is ongoing, this role will report to an equity office.

MOVED BY R. Sharma and Seconded by S. Irving: "That the Accessibility and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee receive the presentation brought forward by the HR Consultant - Accessibility, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for information."

CARRIED

ACTION LIST

The committee discussed the Action List, and the following was noted:

- Issuing a statement on behalf of the committee could help reaffirm the District's commitment to ADEI.
- The statement should emphasize the paradigm shift in Canada resulting from changes in government in the United States.
- Consideration should be given to ensuring the committee's statement remains relevant over the next 5–10 years.

- The intent of the statement is to provide an immediate response to changes affecting ADEI in the United States and Canada.
- Given the broad scope of the statement, the term diverse communities is preferred to ensure inclusivity.
- The rapidly changing global landscape reinforces the urgency of drafting this statement.
- The statement should incorporate a Saanich lens to maintain local relevance.
- Ableism should be addressed in the statement.
- Recommendations passed by the committee will be sent to Council upon adoption of the meeting minutes.
- It could be beneficial to include a call to action encouraging other municipalities to take similar steps.

M. Bains exited the meeting at 6:38 p.m.

MOVED by R. Sharma and Seconded by L. Keith: “That the Accessibility and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee recommend that Saanich Council publicly endorse and release the following statement and call on neighbouring municipalities to affirm their support and commitment to these values:

Every Council and committee meeting opens with the District’s territorial acknowledgement: “We acknowledge that the District of Saanich lies within the territories of the ləkʷəŋən peoples represented by the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations and the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples represented by the W̱JOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), BOKÉCEN (Pauquachin), STĀUTW̱ (Tsawout), W̱SIKEM (Tseycum) and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nations.” And the District’s diversity statement: “Saanich is committed to celebrating the rich diversity of people in our community and we are guided by the principle that embracing diversity enriches the lives of all people. We all share the responsibility for creating an equitable and inclusive community and for addressing discrimination in all forms.” Given the current political climate, it is important that we take a moment to positively affirm the District’s ongoing commitment to these words and most importantly, to the values that underpin them.

Around the world, we are witnessing a troubling resurgence and normalization of regressive policies and ideologies that seek to marginalize diverse communities, diminish hard-won rights, dismantle efforts toward equity and justice, as well as perpetuate colonialism, neo-colonialism, and systems of supremacy. In particular, the new regime in the United States has openly rolled back critical diversity, equity, and inclusion measures and this is having a paradigm shift in the wrong direction in Canada. In the face of these challenges, it is imperative for municipalities like ours to stand as beacons of inclusion, fairness, and compassion. We have a duty to resist these harmful trends and to ensure that our policies, programs, and public spaces reflect our shared values of respect, dignity, and opportunity for all.

Our ongoing work in accessibility, diversity, equity and inclusion (ADEI) is not merely about compliance or optics; it is about building a community where everyone has the chance to succeed and where barriers – whether physical, systemic, or attitudinal – are dismantled. Accessibility ensures that people of all abilities can navigate and participate in public life without hindrance. Diversity enriches our community, bringing new ideas, perspectives, and cultural vibrancy.

Equity ensures that resources and opportunities are distributed fairly, addressing historical and systemic injustices. Inclusion fosters a sense of belonging, empowering every individual to contribute to, and benefit from, the community's collective growth.

To affirm our commitment in this challenging political climate is to reaffirm our identity as a municipality that values justice and compassion. It is to send a clear message to those we serve, to neighbouring communities, and to the world: we re-commit to the pursuit of a more ethical, equitable, and inclusive society. We will continue to invest in programs that break down barriers, amplify marginalized voices, and create meaningful opportunities for all. We will continue to challenge systems of oppression, confront ongoing legacies of colonialism and neo-colonialism, reject discriminatory policies, ableism and supremacy, oppose bigotry, nativism, and hate in all forms, and model the kind of governance that prioritizes equity, reconciliation, and the well-being of every resident of Saanich.

We recognize that the work of ADEI is never truly complete. It requires ongoing uncomfortable conversations, reflection, and action. It demands courage and perseverance in the face of opposition. But we are steadfast in our belief that this work is not only necessary – it is transformative. Together, we will work towards building a Saanich that is not only equitable and inclusive but also a source of inspiration and hope for others.”

The following discussion ensued:

- This issue may not be a priority for the committee, and it may be more valuable to focus on local concerns rather than commenting on other countries.
- Reaffirming the committee's commitment to ADEI values remains important.
- The committee is interested in exploring a separate statement specifically addressing Reconciliation.
- The statement should incorporate a forward-looking and ongoing perspective.

**The Motion was then Put and CARRIED
With T. Kiyak OPPOSED**

S. Mader exited the meeting at 6:58 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion from S. Dhillon, the meeting adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for March 5, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.

COUNCILLOR PHELPS BONDAROFF, CHAIR

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

COLTON WHITTAKER, COMMITTEE CLERK

DRAFT