



## Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality

Thursday, April 8, 2021

5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Being Held Electronically

**Members Present:** Saehee Duran and Doug Neff, Co-Chairs; Rabbi Barbara Block, Chantha Chimm, Christin Lewis, John Oke-Thomas, Mike Powers, Francine Pratt, Bob Roberts\*, Robin Robeson, Jeff Schrag, Jeanne Skahan\*, and Dr. Shurita Thomas-Tate.

**Members Absent:** Rita Baron, Dr. Justin Clark, Christa Moss, and Carol Taylor.

**City Council:** Mayor Ken McClure.

**Staff:** Anita Cotter, City Clerk; Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement.

**Others:** None.

**Clerk's Note:** Jeanne Skahan arrived at approximately 5:40 p.m. Bob Roberts arrived at approximately 6:00 p.m.

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### Welcome

Doug Neff, Co-Chair, welcomed everyone to tonight's meeting, which began at approximately 5:30 p.m.

Roll call was conducted. Present: Rabbi Barbara Block, Chantha Chimm, Christin Lewis, John Oke-Thomas, Mike Powers, Francine Pratt, Robin Robeson, Jeff Schrag, Dr. Shurita Thomas-Tate, Doug Neff and Saehee Duran. Absent: Rita Baron, Dr. Justin Clark, Bob Roberts, Jeanne Skahan, Christa Moss, and Carol Taylor.

Mayor McClure expressed his appreciation to everyone for their dedicated service to the Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality. He also thanked Co-Chair Neff and Saehee Duran for serving as Co-Chairs.

Mayor McClure also expressed his appreciation to Anita Cotter, City Clerk, and Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement, for their assistance with the Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality.

### Staff Self-Introductions

Ms. Cotter noted she serves as the City Clerk of the City of Springfield. She further noted she has worked for the City over 25 years.

Ms. Scott noted she serves as the Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement for the City of Springfield. She further noted she has worked for the City over 9 years. Ms. Scott added before coming to the City, she worked for Mercy within their Communications Department for approximately 18 years.



Co-Chair Neff noted the Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality was established by Resolution No. 10560. *(Please refer to Exhibit A)* He further noted the Initiative is subject to the Sunshine Law.

### **Sunshine Law Compliance**

Ms. Cotter reiterated the Initiative is subject to the Sunshine Law. She noted the Sunshine Law helps provide transparency and a commitment to openness in government to citizens. She further noted it provides a public policy that meetings, records, votes, actions, and deliberations of public governmental bodies be open to the public unless otherwise provided by law, such as for litigation or personnel. She added if subcommittees are formed, these will also be subject to the Sunshine Law. She noted agenda meeting postings require at least 24 hours-notice, which would be posted on the City's website on the Calendar for public viewing and on the posting board within the City Clerk's Office. She further noted minutes of their meetings would be drafted for any actions by the Initiative and meeting minutes would be sent out for review and consideration for approval prior to their next meeting. Ms. Cotter added there is a chat function on ZOOM, which may be utilized for discussions. She noted the chat discussions would be maintained and archived by the City, which are subject to be requested as open to the public per Sunshine Law requirements.

Ms. Cotter asked if any member would like to invite a speaker to present information to the Initiative, to please contact her so proper protocols can be conducted by City staff due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She further asked members to follow the outlined agenda topics during meetings, so no Sunshine Law violations occur. She noted there must be a quorum of the members, which is one half of the serving members plus one, present for a scheduled meeting to be officially conducted. Ms. Cotter asked for members to be aware of not congregating around together to conduct conversations when no meeting is being held, because it could be construed as an unposted meeting, which is a violation of the Sunshine Law.

Ms. Cotter noted if anyone has any questions about the Sunshine Law to please contact her.

Handout information entitled Procedures for Meetings of City Appointed Boards, Commissions, Committees, Subcommittees and Task Forces was outlined by Ms. Cotter, as well as procedures for meetings. *(Please refer to Exhibits B and C)*

### **Meeting Protocols and Facilitation**

Ms. Scott noted meetings will primarily be held electronically via ZOOM due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She further noted based upon member availability, the first Tuesday of every month appears to be the best day for conducting meetings. She noted the next scheduled meeting would be held on May 4, 2021 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Ms. Scott further noted meetings will be recorded, so individuals may request a copy. She added the agenda, minutes, and a copy of the recording will be available on the City's website for public viewing. She noted materials for background information is available on the City's website for reviewing. Ms. Scott further noted information would be uploaded as needed for public viewing and a citizen input form would be available for citizen comments to the Initiative. She reiterated the chat function may be utilized by the members and chat conversations are subject to be requested as open records per Sunshine Law requirements.



### **Co-Chair Self-Introductions**

Co-Chair self-introductions were conducted.

Co-Chair Duran noted she was born and raised in South Korea. She further noted she is Lead Pastor with Life 360 Church. She added her favorite things are being a parent, wife, pastor, police chaplain, and professor. She noted her favorite dessert is anything with green tea and favorite destination is going to South Korea. Ms. Duran noted the following words best describe herself: lifelong learner; listener; and a lover of God, family, and community. She expressed her opinion about one thing she would like regarding the Initiative is for everyone to be respectful and to agree to disagree. She added not everyone thinks or feels the same way, but everyone should feel free to have an opinion without being openly criticized for their beliefs.

Co-Chair Neff noted he was born in central Kansas on a farm. He further noted he has been employed with Commerce Bank for approximately 30 years. He further noted his favorite dessert is cookies, especially chocolate chip and his favorite destination is Table Rock Lake. He noted the following words best describe himself: likes being direct; genuine; and empathic. He expressed his agreement with Co-Chair Duran he would like everyone to be respectful and agree to disagree, so everyone can freely openly express their opinion without the fear of being criticized for their differences and beliefs.

### **Member Self-Introductions**

Member self-introductions were conducted.

Rita Baron was unable to attend.

Rabbi Barbara Block noted she was born and raised in Lancaster Pennsylvania. She further noted she moved to Minnesota at age 18 and has traveled to several places. She added she is a second career Rabbi. Rabbi Block noted before she became a Rabbi, she served in higher education for approximately 20 years and has a master's degree in Philosophy. She further noted her favorite dessert is locally grown fresh strawberries and favorite destination is a cabin located on the north shore of Lake Superior. She noted the following words best describe herself: inquisitive; not afraid to ask hard or difficult questions; and has perseverance. Rabbi Block expressed she would like the Initiative to help find ways to enhance equity and equality.

Pastor Chantha Chimm noted he was born in Cambodia and is the youngest of eight children of which several of his siblings died during a war in Cambodia. He further noted he and his family immigrated to the United States when he was 4 years old and grew up in Long Beach, California. Pastor Chimm noted he went to school and went into the ministry to help others. He further noted he has been a pastor for approximately 20 years and has done some missions work overseas. He added he came to Springfield in January 2020 and serves with a local church. He noted one of his favorite desserts is lemon ricotta cake and favorite destination is Lisbon, Portugal. He noted the following words best describe himself: love for God and others; avid learner; and live a life that is passionate and meaningful. Pastor Chimm expressed he would like the Initiative help engage others within the community regarding equity and equality.



Dr. Justin Clark was unable to attend.

Christian Lewis noted he is originally from Lincoln, Nebraska. He further noted he attended Columbia College and has been working in the banking industry for approximately 10 years. He noted his favorite destinations are San Diego, California, Colorado, and Table Rock Lake. He further noted his favorite dessert is cheesecake with strawberries. He added the following words best describe himself: too quiet; competitive; and a perfectionist. Mr. Lewis expressed his belief opinions do matter, and everyone should be able to express their views openly and honestly without criticism.

Christa Moss was unable to attend.

John Oke-Thomas noted he is originally from Nigeria and has lived several places. He further noted he has lived in Springfield approximately 37 years and owns a small architectural and construction company. He added he is a small and minority owned business advocate within the community and likes to help others succeed and prosper. He noted he is a local member of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce and is Co-Founder of Minorities in Business. Mr. Oke-Thomas further noted his favorite dessert is German chocolate and favorite destination is London, England. He added the following words best describe himself: music; curious about people; and a people watcher. Mr. Oke-Thomas expressed his belief more could be done to better listen to individuals about their concerns and thoughts on equity and equality. He further expressed his belief relationships need to be built to help foster an understanding that everyone has a voice and they should be able to respectfully express their thoughts and beliefs without criticism.

Co-Chair Neff noted Mr. Oke-Thomas is the incoming Chairman of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce.

Mike Powers noted he was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. He further noted he enjoys playing sports. He added he is President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Arc of the Ozarks, which employs over 1,300 employees. He noted he has been with the Arc of the Ozarks for approximately 29 years of which 8 years he has served as the President and CEO. He further noted inclusion, diversity, equity, and equality have been a part of the mission of the Arc of the Ozarks since 1964. Mr. Powers added his favorite dessert is key lime pie and favorite destination is Maui, Hawaii. He noted the following words best describe himself: detail oriented; competitive; and results oriented. He expressed his belief everything has become so politically driven that no one is listening to each other anymore unless they agree with you. Mr. Powers further expressed his belief a spirit of cooperation is needed to actively listen and engage one another in a respectful manner without criticizing or dismissing other beliefs or thoughts.

Francine Pratt noted she was born in France in a community near Paris. She further noted she is the Director of Prosper Springfield and Executive Director of the Missouri College Access Network. She added she is also Co-Owner of Pratt Consultants and part owner of the Queen City Soul Kitchen. Ms. Pratt noted her favorite dessert is chocolate mousse and favorite destination is Fiji. She further noted the following words best describe herself: creative; problem-solver; and caring. She expressed her belief the disparities in jobs, education, and opportunities for the sub-group population within the community needs to be addressed.



Bob Roberts noted he is a Co-Chair of the Have Faith Initiative in Springfield. He further noted he was born and raised near the Current River in a small town in Missouri and is one of nine children. He added he retired from the United States (U.S.) Postal Service in which he served in several locations within the country and was the postmaster at the Gene Taylor Post Office in Springfield where he retired several years ago. Mr. Roberts noted he played basketball against Bill Bradley, former U.S. Senator, who played for Princeton University. He further noted he is a member of the Mayor's Commission for Human Rights and Community Relations and serves on other community committees. He added his favorite destination is Jerusalem, Israel and favorite dessert is cherry cheese cream pie. Mr. noted the following words best describe himself: learn; engage; and sharing with others. Mr. Roberts expressed his belief engaging others who speak different languages within the community should be encouraged as an opportunity to learn about them, so they can serve and enjoy the community.

Robin Robeson noted she was born in Jacksonville, Florida and has lived in numerous parts of the world due to her family serving in the military. She further noted she has lived in Springfield for approximately 27 years, which is the longest she has resided in a community. She noted she works for Guaranty Bank as a Chief Operating Officer. She added she enjoys numerous desserts, but one of her favorites is ice cream. Ms. Robeson noted her favorite destination is New Zealand. She further noted the following words best describe herself: curious; strategic; and passionate. She expressed her opinion too many younger people who are graduating from the local colleges and universities are moving away and are not staying to reside within the community. Ms. Roberson further expressed her opinion the community needs to be more inclusive and diversified to attract and hold younger professionals to stay within the community after graduation.

Co-Chair Neff noted Ms. Robeson served as the Past Chair of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce.

Jeff Schrag noted he was born in McPherson, Kansas, and has resided in Springfield since 1995. He further noted he owns the Daily Events News and owns-operates many other business ventures within the community, such as Mother's Brewing Company. He added a couple of his favorite desserts is a cheese course or chocolate with red fruit. Mr. Schrag noted he is not a traveler, but his wife enjoys traveling, so a favorite destination is always the next place to go see and explore. He further noted the following words best describe himself: fun; friendly; and emotional. He expressed his opinion he would like Springfield to become a progressive community for all individuals.

Jeanne Skahan noted she is the Principal at Springfield Catholic High School and has worked at Springfield Catholic for approximately 9 years. She further noted she grew up outside Chicago, Illinois, and Chicago is one of her favorite destinations. She added she has lived in several different communities, such as Atchison, Kansas. Ms. Skahan noted she has lived in Springfield since approximately 1994 and enjoys being in education. She further noted her favorite dessert is Andy's Frozen Custard. She added she also enjoys traveling to visit her three children, which are in other states. She noted the following words best describe herself: loves seeing and being with people; listener; and problem solver. Ms. Skahan expressed her opinion she would like students who are leaving high school to be acceptant of other ideas and beliefs without fear of criticism and exclusion.

Carol Taylor was unable to attend.



Dr. Shurita Thomas-Tate noted she is originally from Portland, Oregon, and has lived several different places for her education. She further noted she teaches at Missouri State University within the Department of Communication Science Disorders. She added she is a people watcher and enjoys learning about people of different cultures, as well as enjoys reading books. Dr. Thomas-Tate noted she is founder of a local non-profit entitled Ujima Literacy Program, which promotes literacy education for children and families. She further noted she has resided in Springfield for approximately 10 years. She added one of her favorite destinations is the mountains in Portland, Oregon, but would like to visit Hawaii someday. Dr. Thomas-Tate noted the following words best describe herself: persistent; curious; and friendly. She expressed her opinion she would like to see fewer disparities for subgroups in Springfield, as well as fewer barriers for access to opportunities for subgroups.

Mayor McClure once again expressed his appreciation to everyone for their dedicated service by serving on the Initiative. He noted he is a native of Springfield for five generations. He further noted he received his education either within Springfield or Columbia, Missouri and served in the military. Mayor McClure added he has served in many job capacities during his life, such as with the Missouri Senate Appropriations Committee, Missouri Department of Economic Development, Missouri Public Service Commission, City Utilities of Springfield, and Missouri State University. He noted his favorite dessert is ice cream with chocolate syrup and favorite destination is Washington, D.C. He further noted the following words best describe himself: enjoys reading; enjoys listening and playing music; and enjoys being involved in public policy discussions to help improve and make the community better. Mayor McClure expressed his belief many issues that are arising seem to be overshadowing the good occurring within the community. He further expressed his opinion the community needs to become more accepting of others and recognize others who have different beliefs or thoughts without criticism. Mayor McClure expressed his opinion the issue of civility is important and should be highly encouraged within the community.

### **Review of Charge**

Co-Chair Neff noted per Resolution 10560 (*Exhibit A*) the Initiative is charged with developing guiding principles to improve equitable access to opportunities in our community, recognizing the inherent dignity, value and worth of each individual. He further noted the Initiative will complete its work considering the five pillars of change: Dialogue and Understanding; Cultural Consciousness; Advocacy and Partnerships; Structural and Systemic Barriers; and Personal and Organizational Accountability.

Some of the Initiative members expressed their opinions and beliefs about their charge.

Co-Chair Duran expressed her belief the above forementioned pillars will be important for utilizing during their discussions. She further expressed her belief some possible changes may be implemented quickly, while other changes may take more time. She added actively listening one another will need to be a priority to make a positive difference, which will help create a framework to further proceed with the Initiative's charge for the community. Co-Chair Duran suggested maybe utilizing a modified version of a community listening tour for individuals to submit their stories to the Initiative for review for a possible tangible and positive community change maybe a good start. She noted there are a variety of members serving who are also representing various entities and organizations who may be able to implement organizational changes within their own business or entity for equity and equality. She expressed her opinion a mayoral award for the best peacemaker could be established, in which schools, businesses, and organizations, could nominated and vote, creating a positive reinforcement to encourage others.



Co-Chair Duran noted there are discussions within the community about possibly creating a multi-cultural center for individuals to utilize as a one stop shop for information. She expressed her belief a multi-cultural center would be a welcoming place for individuals and visitors to obtain information for assisting them within the community.

Co-Chair Neff expressed his belief every Initiative member's input is important and needed for discussions. He noted his experience is from a business standpoint as well as a personal one regarding equity and equality. He further expressed his belief the community does need to be more welcoming and accepting of individuals with different beliefs and thoughts without criticism from others. Co-Chair Neff expressed his opinion if the community does not move forward with equity and equality, the community will not grow and prosper economically.

Rabbi Block expressed her belief a series of theater plays or films, which highlight various cultural groups, could be conducted for diversity during an arts festival event for the community to enjoy.

Mr. Schrag expressed he would like information compiled on cities that are successfully implementing equity and equality for diversity within their communities, which the Initiative could review for possible consideration and implementation.

Co-Chair Duran noted a group of local individuals began a Culture Fest in 2019, but due to COVID-19 was unable to conduct one last year. She further noted the idea of a Culture Fest was based upon St. Louis had implemented to help promote normalizing diversity within their community. She added normalizing diversity within the community would possibly help retain students and individuals to stay here.

Ms. Robeson expressed her agreement with Mr. Schrag. She noted the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce has conducted past leadership visits except last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic to other communities and have discussed their best practices about various topics, such as conducting courageous conversations about community issues.

Ms. Scott noted a "Tough Talks" meeting was virtually held today, and virtual conversations have been occurring with community leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as discussing anti-racism. She further noted the next meeting topic for Tough Talks will be about affordable housing. She added the National League of Cities has compiled information about the issue of equity and equality, which maybe helpful for the Initiative to review. Ms. Scott noted she would research and compile information for the Initiative to review in the future. She further noted there is an inclusive excellence model for academics and educators, which has been adopted by Missouri State University, may also be good information for their review.

Dr. Thomas-Tate noted the inclusive excellence model is transferable and should be reviewed for information for the Initiative to review for possible consideration.

Ms. Scott suggested inviting Wes Pratt to speak about the inclusive excellence model at a future Initiative meeting. She noted the local community seems to enjoy events and festivals. She further noted implementing more cultural events and festivals for the community to participate and enjoy is good.

Co-Chair Duran noted she has viewed some of the Tough Talks discussions. She expressed her belief more engagement from younger individuals, such as high schoolers, is needed for those discussions.



Mr. Oke-Thomas expressed his belief topics or areas should be first identified to build a foundation on what the Initiative wants to accomplish before proceeding further. He further expressed his belief the Initiative needs to recognize the limitations in Springfield and realize a tailored approach will be needed so we can begin to build block by block to help make a difference one step at a time. He expressed he does not want to lose the community in the process of any possible changes the Initiative may decide to consider. He reiterated a foundation should be created first, then identify what is achievable, and set out goals to make possible changes a reality within the community.

Co-Chair Neff thanked everyone for their input.

### **Discussion of Upcoming Meetings**

Co-Chair Neff noted the meetings of the Initiative will be held on the first Tuesday of every month from 5:30-7:30 p.m. He asked members to please mark their calendars accordingly.

Ms. Scott noted City staff will e-mail out a ZOOM invitation link for upcoming electronic meetings to the members. She reiterated various materials are available on the City's website for the members to view, which is <https://www.springfieldmo.gov/5443/Mayors-Initiative-on-Equity-and-Equality>.

Co-Chair Neff expressed his belief he would like everyone to stay focused and to please bring their ideas for discussion at the next upcoming meeting. He further expressed he would like the members to begin thinking about how they can encourage more individuals to become involved in discussions pertaining to equity and equality within the community.

### **Adjourn**

Co-Chair Neff and Co-Chair Duran thanked everyone for their attendance.

With no further business coming before the Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality, Ms. Robeson moved to Adjourn. Rabbi Block seconded the motion, and it was approved by the following vote. Ayes: Block, Chimm, Lewis, Oke-Thomas, Powers, Pratt, Roberts, Robeson, Schrag, Skahan, Thomas-Tate, Neff and Duran. Nays: None. Absent: Baron, Clark, Moss, and Taylor. Abstain: None. The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:30 p.m.

**Clerk's Note:** A members listing for the Initiative is also available. *(Please see Exhibit D)*

Completed by Anita Baker  
Approved on May 4, 2021