

Equity and Empowerment Advisory Board  
City of Roanoke, Virginia  
MINUTES (Virtual Meeting)  
June 3, 2021

I. **CALL TO ORDER - ROLL CALL**

Rabbi Kathy Cohen called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. Angela O'Brien called the roll.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councilmember Bill Bestpitch, Rabbi Kathy Cohen, Patice Holland, Rev. Bill Lee, Angela Penn, Jerel Rhodes, Dr. Elda Stanco Downey, Peter Wonson

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Vice Mayor Trish White-Boyd

**OTHERS PRESENT:** City Manager Bob Cowell, City Attorney Tim Spencer, Chief Strategy Officer Angela O'Brien, Community Engagement Manager Tiffany Bradbury, Robyn Mitchell, Rachel Ruhlen

II. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM APRIL 1, 2021, MEETING**

Rev. Bill Lee moved approval of the minutes from the April 1, 2021, meeting; seconded by Jerel Rhodes and approved unanimously.

III. **NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Committee Reports**

**a. Trust:** Chair Patice Holland reported that the committee met on June 1 and heard from two speakers. Keith Holland explained the CDGB/HUD grants process, including numerous documents required. After a period of questions and answers, Mr. Holland agreed to return to future committee meetings as requested. Stephen Niamke described the research of two VT professors on policing statistics. Ms. Holland stated that the committee was reviewing how the grants process is communicated to citizens. More details of the meeting will be available when the minutes are completed.

**b. Neighborhood Choice:** Chair Angela Penn reported that the committee met on May 11 and would meet again on June 8. Chris Chittum and Tim Spencer explained zoning as related to neighborhood choice during the May meeting. The committee is exploring the need to change policies that allow only one type of housing in a zoning district. They are reviewing the process for amending the zoning ordinance, especially related to compliance with the Fair Housing and Americans with Disabilities Acts. The committee also is discussing greenlining and the development of resources to increase home ownership. The committee received a question on real estate valuation from a citizen and will ask someone from the Real Estate Valuation office to attend their next meeting.

**c. Service Delivery:** Chair Rev. Bill Lee stated that the committee was tasked with reviewing the City's website to determine how well it provides information on the processes for accessing various City services; the meeting minutes will reflect the concerns that were identified. He asked that members of other committees also review the website, which currently is being updated. The committee raised the possibility of a phone app on City services. Rev. Lee said that the committee would be reviewing each policy to avoid reinventing what has been done and to look for what is needed.

**d. Break the Cycle of Poverty:** Chair Robyn Mitchell reported that the committee was reviewing the priorities and policies in City Plan 2040 to develop its work plan. She stated that each policy would require some "heavy lifting" and will require both citizen input and staff assistance. The committee may change its meeting schedule and is open to having community members join their meetings.

**e. Inclusive Culture:** [out of sequence] Rachel Ruhlen joined the EEAB meeting later and stated that Tiffany Bradbury had spoken at the committee's last meeting. She said that they are still in the information-gathering phase and taking time to identify gaps.

#### **B. Inclusive Culture Subcommittee Resignation**

In the absence of Chair Rachel Ruhlen, Angela O'Brien reported that Lori Baker-Lloyd had resigned from the committee and the EEAB will need to appoint a replacement.

#### **C. Survey Results of Renaming Lee Plaza and Recommendation**

Angela O'Brien reported that the survey elicited 1955 responses; Henrietta Lacks was the preference of 793 responders, 628 of whom listed City zip codes, and 693 preferred Star City, 602 of whom listed City zip codes. Rev. Lee cautioned against adding to any negativity. He said that, due to the traction that Henrietta Lacks has across the country, the City should consider something larger to recognize her. Jerel Rhodes asked what more the EEAB would do with the results. Rabbi Cohen replied that the EEAB would make a recommendation for a new name to city council. She stated that she agreed with Rev. Lee and asked whether the EEAB wanted its first action to be decided on a split vote. She said that a big push in favor of Henrietta Lacks had come from outside the City and that taking sufficient time for a decision was a good thing. She noted that the combined preferences for Star City and Freedom were larger than the responses in favor of any individual's name.

Bill Bestpitch said that Henrietta Lacks had live a few blocks north of the intersection of Patterson Ave. and 12th St. SW during part of her childhood, and he suggested that the high traffic volume would make that corner a very prominent location for a historical marker honoring her. He stated that a name like Freedom Plaza was more consistent with the presence of the Roanoke Valley Memorial tablets at the Second Street end of the plaza. Ms. Holland noted a great opportunity for a public/private partnership to honor Henrietta Lacks, perhaps in the Riverside Centre area. She also stated that the numbers in the survey results speak for themselves and wondered whether the EEAB

should include the numbers in its recommendation to city council. Peter Wonson asked what latitude the EEAB had to ignore the survey results.

Bob Cowell stated that the council wants a recommendation, and the latitude and timing were up to the EEAB. Rabbi Cohen said that the suggestion of the Riverside area was brilliant. She noted that the survey results may indicated strong support for recognizing Henrietta Lacks, but not necessarily at the plaza. Dr. Stanco Downey suggested that the purpose of the survey was to gather feedback, not to quantify the highest number of responses as the deciding factor. Rev. Lee asked whether the discussions of the EEAB must be in public, and Tim Spencer replied that it is required under the Code of Virginia and is the best process for local government. Councilmember Bestpitch said that it would be a mistake to make any decision in the absence of Vice Mayor White-Boyd Rabbi Cohen agreed, and the matter was tabled until the next EEAB meeting.

[Rachel Ruhlen joined the meeting at this point with the comments included above.]

#### **D. Public Hearing**

Ms. Powell informed the EEAB that she did not have access to the technology equipment to vote in the survey, and she thought many people had been left out. Councilmember Bestpitch asked what her recommendation would be, and she replied that she thought it should be a name that would not offend anyone, and Freedom Plaza would be a good choice.

Angela O'Brien reported that she had received two other comments from citizens, one in favor of Freedom Plaza and one for Friendship Plaza. She said that she would forward an email from Barbara Duerk to the EEAB members addressing several issues not related to the renaming of the plaza.

#### **IV. REPORTS FROM BOARD MEMBERS**

No board members had additional reports for this meeting.

#### **V. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEXT MEETING**

Rabbi Cohen noted that the next meeting is scheduled for July 1 at 6:30 p.m. Mr. Cowell stated that it likely would be held in person with more details to come.

#### **VI. ADJOURNMENT**

Rabbi Cohen adjourned the meeting at 7:22 p.m.

---

Rabbi Kathy Cohen  
Vice Chair

---

Councilmember William D. Bestpitch  
Secretary