

Meeting Agenda
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission
Rita S. Wilson Council Chambers
City Hall, 116 W Beverley Street
October 25, 2023
6:00 p.m.

Call to Order

Proposed Agenda:

- 1. Background and Presentation of Preliminary Findings**
- 2. Public Hearing on Preliminary Findings and Recommendations in Areas Related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion***

Adjournment

*To participate in the Public Hearing via Zoom, visit www.staunton.va.us/equity. There is 3-minute time limit for anyone who wishes to speak, both in person and on Zoom.

Staunton Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission

Preliminary Public Hearing Report

October 25, 2023

Please note that this document represents a summary draft of preliminary findings and is not a final version. Updates will continue to be made leading up to the much more extensive final report as further data is analyzed and public comments are considered.

Introduction

The Staunton City Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Commission is composed of 14 City residents appointed in May 2022 with the initial charge of *objectively evaluating existing data, studies, and reports from available sources concerning social and racial equity in the City of Staunton that evaluate social determinants and inequitable outcomes within the City of Staunton*. The following report represents 17 months of the Commission's work and is designed to inform the public on the Commission's findings and recommendations. The purpose of presenting this report in a public hearing is to share information and preliminary findings, and to gather comments and feedback that may further inform the final report presented to City Council in December 2023.

Timeline

- **August/September 2021:** City Council motion adopted to establish an Equity and Diversity Commission and conduct a community survey regarding the framework and charge.
- **October 2021:** City receives \$25,000 grant through the VRSA Inclusion Project to help support Commission and hires Dr. Robin Stacia as a consultant to help support these efforts.
- **February 2022:** City Council resolution adopted to establish the Commission.
- **May 2022:** Equity and Diversity Commission appointed by City Council. The 14 members include:
 - Sabrina Burress, Chair; Lindsey Lennon, Vice Chair; Lou Boden; Joamarie Garcia; Mark Jeter; Vicki Keyser; Jake Krug; Beth Nelsen; AnhThu Nguyen; Nathaniel Riddle; Daniel Stuhlsatz; Jennifer Trippeer; Susan Venable; Zavia Willis
- **July 2022 - December 2022:** The Commission mapped out responsibilities, deliverables, and a project plan, including the creation of the Logistics and Planning, Community Connections, and Data and Research Subcommittees, with plans to create a Writing Subcommittee in summer 2023.
- **September 2022 - December 2022:** The Commission began to connect with community partners, collect data, and to gather existing data sources.
- **January 2023 - July 2023:** The Commission continued gathering multiple types of data and planned and hosted community listening sessions.
- **August 2023 - October 2023:** Data analysis began, and a draft report structure was finalized.
- **October 2023 - November 2023:** The Commission prepares for and conducts a public hearing.
- **December 2023:** The Commission presents a final report to City Council.

Process and Methods

The DEI Commission conducted a comprehensive collection of data sources related to social and racial equity within the City of Staunton. This included external reports from partner organizations, in-depth interviews, focus groups, community listening sessions, survey responses, and community events. Collectively this totaled 130 unique sources of data.

Framework

The Commission adopted the framework laid out by the National Equity Atlas (NEA), a widely used DEI framework, to organize its data analysis and conceptualize its final report. The analysis specifically focused on the equity indicators of demographics, economic vitality, readiness and well-being, and connectedness.

- Demographic data offers a “snapshot” of the make-up of our City.
- Economic vitality asks the question, *“What does the community offer to its citizens?”*
- Readiness and Well-Being asks the question, *“Do citizens have the experience, skills, and resources to thrive?”*
- Connectedness asks the question, *“Are citizens connected to their community and to economic opportunities?”*

Each piece of data was coded for the presence of the equity indicators and all related data was systematically content analyzed. The findings below present the primary issues identified through the data analysis process.

Key Research Findings

City of Staunton Demographics: Staunton has a population of 25,750 which is 82.4% White, 11.2% Black, 9.1% Hispanic, and a little over 7% other racial configurations. About a fifth of the population is under 18 years old, and another fifth is 65 years and older. 51.7% are female, 48.3% male. With a median household income of \$53,041, Staunton has a poverty rate of 12.4%. 88.8% of the community has a high school diploma, and almost a third have a Bachelor’s degree or higher (30.3%). In the past 20 years Staunton has become more diverse racially and the aging population is growing.

Economic Vitality: Staunton has much to offer in terms of job opportunities and has an unemployment rate equivalent to the state average. However, these opportunities are not equitably dispersed across demographics and neighborhoods, and median wages for Staunton fall well below the rest of the state. Those who are not experiencing the benefits of job opportunities faced significant barriers to obtaining economic vitality, including poverty, lack of transportation and access to employment centers, and the availability of jobs paying a livable wage. Business ownership is a viable alternative to wage labor but is often inhibited by regulations and lack of resources.

Readiness and Well-Being: Mental health is an area of top concern for the City and region, as rates of poor mental health are higher in Staunton and in the region. Every local health needs

assessment conducted in the area specifically cites access to health and other services as a significant need and priority for the Staunton community. Lack of awareness of available resources and services is tied to a lack of communication, education, and promotion of existing services. Access to care, social class, race, criminal background, stigma, and age are all cited as social barriers to mental health care. Additionally, volatility in health insurance availability and coverage, increasing out-of-pocket costs and shortages of healthcare providers are also areas of concern.

The physical health of residents indicates a lack of physical activity, healthy diets, and opportunities for positive engagement, especially for youth. Access to childcare is also frequently cited as a factor inhibiting employment and economic security, and, in turn, overall well-being for families. Affordability of childcare services and staffing are key areas of concern.

There was also general concern for equity of educational achievement in our public schools. Recent data show that, while we have yet to achieve racial parity, all racial groups have achieved significant, continuous gains in academic achievement in all our schools since COVID. In addition, the public schools have established a robust DEI program across the Division to promote equity in instruction and staffing.

Connectedness: Lack of connection and access to diverse and inclusive engagement opportunities (economic, social, and political) were reported to have a negative impact on community members' wellness, sense of belonging, and perception of community. Community engagement was a recurrent theme in many community stakeholder and key informant interviews.

Finally, affordable housing represents the most significant area of concern based on local data and community dialogues. Homelessness and housing cost burden are directly affected by social factors like poverty, race, disability, neighborhood, age, and criminal background, and correlate with access to health care and other services.

Preliminary Recommendations

One recommendation that was consistent across all indicators and a majority of community conversations was ***the need to continue the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commission and to hire or appoint a DEI officer as an official part of City staff.*** This overarching recommendation is also reflected in and required to address many of the remaining recommendations.

Economic Vitality

A. Poverty and Unemployment

1. Expand the transportation services that are designed to specifically address and account for City of Staunton's diverse community members in order to increase employment and economic opportunities.
2. Follow similar recommendations listed in the Virginia Department of Health, Virginia Health Equity Report, 2012 regarding affordability of transportation and housing.
 - a. Ensure equitable access to multiple transit options.
 - b. It is critical to refocus growth around public transportation and existing development so that all residents can participate in the local economy, while protecting current residents from the potential for displacement. Transportation opportunities should link all communities with major employment centers.
3. Follow similar recommendations listed in the 2021 CAPSAW Needs Assessment Report regarding ensuring sufficient access to public transit systems such as BRITE bus.
 - a. Examine route design to ensure proper connection to employment areas, hospital and service providers and grocery centers.
 - b. Expansion of service hours to include Sunday and evening hours.
 - c. Explore and invest in micro-transit opportunities that offer on-demand availability for vulnerable populations, or those living in areas not serviced by current transit routes.

B. Employment, Jobs & Wealth

1. The City government should review hiring practices, procedure(s) and explore recruitment strategies to attract minority applicants.
2. Expand industry and small businesses that will increase opportunities throughout the City.

C. Business Ownership & Income/Wages

1. The City government should develop and maintain a list of minority owned businesses within the City.
3. The City government to consider specific resource allocations for minority owned businesses.
4. Deepen the partnership with the regional small business development office to provide education, resources and guidance to the City's small businesses and aspiring businesses.

Readiness & Well-Being

D. Youth and Families

1. Conduct or participate in a needs assessment on childcare to have a full understanding of the current childcare needs of City community members, including affordability of care, living wages for providers, and access to benefits.
2. Create opportunities and sufficient infrastructure for safe cycling and walking to jobs, businesses, and grocery stores.
3. Encourage mentoring opportunities (especially with MBU) and opportunities for youth.

E. Mental Health and Health Related Services

1. Develop policies and programs that consider and address the multiple factors related to health access, physical health, and mental health outcomes in our community (income, children and childcare, race, crime, stigma, age, transportation, and housing insecurity).
2. Foster collaboration and coordination between local programs and service providers, including developing an understanding of how the City can support the work of these programs.
3. Build community awareness and education surrounding issues related to health, what health services are available, and how to access those health services.

F. Educational Achievement and Schools

1. Identify ways to partner with Staunton City Schools (SCS) to support the City's children and families.

Connectedness

G. Access to and Knowledge of Services

1. Assess and better understand how to improve 2-1-1's performance, and community access and utilization.
2. Address inclusive communication gaps related to the need for inclusive language access and technology needs.
3. Leverage existing outreach networks, including community health workers and outreach events already conducted by community agencies.

H. Community Engagement

1. Build community awareness of diverse lived experiences of Staunton residents and community needs.
2. Engage community members with lived experience and community stakeholders and agencies with subject matter expertise to build and maintain trust.

I. Affordable Housing

1. Evaluate the City of Staunton's Comprehensive Plan 2018-2040 to ensure the actions are people focused and directly address the social factors highlighted within this report.
2. Support a collaboration of local organizations to address housing issues within Staunton.
3. Review local codes and ordinances that can assist in the creation and maintenance of affordable, safe housing for residents.
4. Continue to support the efforts to revitalize Uniontown and the West End.