

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION COMMISSION

Meeting

January 21, 2026

6:00 p.m.

School Board Conference Room

City Hall, 2nd Floor

PRESENT: Sabrina Burress
Ian Callahan
Mark Jeter, Vice Chair
AnhThu Nguyen, Chair
Belinda Osario Polgar
Natalie Slater
Jordan Zipser

ABSENT: Cecilia Carpenter
Charles Lawson

ALSO PRESENT: Alice Woods, Council Liaison
Leslie Beauregard, City Manager
Josh Knight, Engagement & Communications

AnhThu Nguyen called the meeting open at 6:02 p.m.

1. Approval of Minutes

Sabrina Burress moved to approve the minutes of the December 17, 2025 DEI Commission meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Mark Jeter and carried unanimously.

2. Subcommittee Report Outs

- a. Community Connections – Ian shared a conversation guide with the entire committee for feedback. Jordan stated that this would help the committee with what to say when out in public. Leslie reminded them to make sure staff know to update the DEI website once the language was agreed upon.
 - i. Youth Art Event/City Schools. Dr. Irizarry, Superintendent of City Schools, was very supportive and everyone was on board with the proposal. The date for this event would now be in the fall semester.
 - ii. Boards & Commissions Outreach – Community Connections will be reaching out to various city boards and commissions to have a meet and greet.
 - iii. Brief discussion ensued regarding a Mutual Aid Event in September.
- b. Data and Research – They briefly discussed the City Council presentation and that AnhThu would send a scaffold to John Venn and have him review and that they would be coming up with next steps and what could happen within available resources.

3. City Council Presentation

AnhThu shared her plan for the City Council presentation and asked for feedback from the Commission. Everyone was in agreement with what she had outlined.

4. Going ‘Round the Circle!

- AnhThu shared that she had a meeting with Anna Leavitt, the city’s new economic mobility specialist. They discussed data tracking, metrics, lived experiences, etc.
- Sabrina shared that MLK Day was successful. All of City Council was in attendance.
- PIT Count – counting those who are unhoused one day, each year in January, this year is planned for Jan. 28.
- Lunar New Year is Feb. 17 – Year of the Horse

5. Other Business

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:37 p.m.

Conversation Guide for DEI Work in the City Staunton

The landscape

Since 2023, according to the Movement Advancement Project (MAP), 23 states and counting have enacted anti-DEI laws, and nearly all states have introduced legislation of this kind. Such attacks aim to undermine “the public’s understanding of and support for DEI, as part of a broader attempt to severely limit how people and organizations across the country, including the government, can create a more inclusive and equitable environment for everyone.”¹

Accordingly, down to the municipal level, efforts to restrict or eliminate DEI initiatives have been widespread. However, the majority of Americans are supportive² of the underlying values of diversity, equity, inclusion in governments, schools, and work.

Core message

DEI understands differences, identifies gaps in access to resources, and encourages fairness. It fosters belonging because community members feel welcomed and prioritized.

Key messages

What is DEI and what does it do?

- DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) is a framework that can be used to evaluate community access to basic needs such as food, housing, jobs, and education.
- DEI is a tool that helps us listen to our neighbors, identify and bridge gaps in community well-being, and enrich the lives of all residents.

What does DEI mean for Staunton?

- DEI initiatives help create space for opportunity in Staunton by addressing inequitable social and racial outcomes in our city.
- As a Commission, our work aims to foster a rich sense of community where members feel seen, cared for, and free to express themselves, their identity, and culture without repercussions.

Community application

The following answers the question(s): how or what is the DEI Commission doing in Staunton?

¹ Movement Advancement Project, 2024. *Dismantling DEI: A Coordinated Attack on American Values*. <https://www.mapresearch.org/2024-dei-report>

² The Harris Poll. Aug 2023. “DE&I in Corporate America Topline Summary.” <https://blackeconomyalliance.org/app/uploads/2023/08/DEI-in-Corporate-America-Topline.pdf>

Currently, the DEI Commission is working on several initiatives:

- Reviewing City of Staunton's employee demographics and how they compare to resident demographics as well as HR hiring practices
- Offering DEI support to boards and commissions that serve the City of Staunton
- Collaborating with schools to host a youth art event
- Coordinating a mutual aid fair to serve the greater Staunton area

This slate of work accomplishes goals outlined initially in our 2023 report³, including:

- Promoting and modeling values of DEI for the community and the broader region to increase community engagement and foster a stronger sense of belonging
- Supporting community well-being with an enhanced focus on vulnerable residents. This includes:
 - Building community awareness of diverse lived experiences
 - Fostering collaboration and coordination between local programs and service providers

Glossary

Definitions are provided as a reference point in advance of conversations, but they should not be used as substitutes for the key messages above.

Diversity is the presence and acceptance of differences that may include race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, culture, citizenship, marital status, life and career paths, socioeconomic status, educational background, workplace position, language or dialect, (dis)ability, age, religious commitment, or political perspective.

Equity is different from equality. Equality provides the same resources, opportunities, and treatment for all people without accommodating their backgrounds or resources. Equity, on the other hand, provides everyone with the unique resources and opportunities they need to reach an equal outcome. Whereas equality means providing equal access to everyone regardless of the differences in need, equity means recognizing that not everyone starts from the same place, and thus adjustments are made to address this imbalance. Equity work is ongoing because new differences emerge, whereas equality remains the same because each individual is provided the same resources or access.

Inclusion is the outcome of a welcoming environment that incorporates diverse perspectives and equitable practices to ensure all people participate in decision-making. Diversity is not the same as inclusion: Diversity is the presence and acceptance of differences whereas inclusion is the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity to achieve a culture in which different people can come together to work, feel comfortable and confident to be themselves, and feel valued.

³ Read the full report via our Commission's website:

<https://www.ci.staunton.va.us/home/showpublisheddocument/11925/638377017311600000>