

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION COMMISSION

Meeting

February 18, 2026

6:00 p.m.

School Board Conference Room

City Hall, 2nd Floor

PRESENT: Sabrina Burress (remote participant)
Ian Callahan
Cecilia Carpenter (remote participant)
Mark Jeter, Vice Chair
Charles Lawson
AnhThu Nguyen, Chair
Belinda Osario Polgar (remote participant)
Natalie Slater
Jordan Zipser

ABSENT: Leslie Beauregard, City Manager
Alice Woods, Council Liaison

ALSO PRESENT: Josh Knight, Engagement & Communications
Anna Leavitt, EMOSA

AnhThu called the meeting open at 6:07 p.m.

AnhThu stated “we received a request from Cecilia Carpenter to participate remotely in the February 18, 2026 DEI Commission meeting due to a personal matter that prevents her physical attendance at the meeting. I will now entertain a motion for her to participate.”

Mark moved to allow Cecilia to remotely participate in the February 18, 2026 DEI Commission meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

AnhThu asked Cecilia to state the location from which she was participating. Cecilia responded that she was in Staunton. AnhThu asked the commission and the audience if they could hear Cecilia. The response was affirmative.

AnhThu stated “we received a request from Belinda Polgar to participate remotely in the February 18, 2026 DEI Commission meeting due to a personal matter that prevents her physical attendance at the meeting. I will now entertain a motion for her to participate.”

Charles moved to allow Belinda to remotely participate in the February 18, 2026 DEI Commission meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

AnhThu asked Belinda to state the location from which she was participating. Belinda responded that she was in Staunton. AnhThu asked the commission and the audience if they could hear Belinda. The response was affirmative.

AnhThu stated “we received a request from Sabrina Burress to participate remotely in the February 18, 2026 DEI Commission meeting due to a personal matter that prevents her physical attendance at the meeting. I will now entertain a motion for her to participate.”

Natalie moved to allow Sabrina to remotely participate in the February 18, 2026 DEI Commission meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

AnhThu asked Sabrina to state the location from which she was participating. Sabrina responded that she was in Staunton. AnhThu asked the commission and the audience if they could hear Belinda. The response was affirmative.

1. Approval of Minutes

Jordan moved to approve the minutes of the January 21, 2026 DEI Commission meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Ian and carried unanimously.

Before moving on to Subcommittee report outs, AnhThu invited Anna Leavitt to introduce herself. Anna explained her new role with the city and how she thought the DEI commission could help gather lived experience and reach important parts of our community.

2. Subcommittee Report Outs

- a.** Community Connections – The commission is planning a “belonging event” for November 2026 in partnership with Staunton City Schools. They have met with the superintendent. Current priorities include securing a venue to display student artwork. No follow-up meeting has been scheduled yet. Final messaging regarding the Staunton DEI Commission conversation guide was sent to the commission for feedback. No edits were suggested and the final version will be distributed to the group. It defines DEI work within the specific landscape of Staunton and is intended to serve as a standardized source for interviews and public conversations. It was noted that the guide helped AnhThu focus her thoughts for the annual presentation to Council. At their next meeting the subcommittee will discuss how some of this might fit well on the city’s DEI webpage. Outreach to other city boards and commissions is planned for March. The subcommittee is considering a mutual aid event with a group like Project Grows, the Arrow Project, etc. There was significant discussion regarding the term “mutual aid,” and there was a suggestion to reframing the event as a “Community Support Fair” with a mutual aid component. The event aims to provide immediate resources (example: food pantry, clothing closet) alongside long-term support. The commission discussed tabling at upcoming local events, including the SRHA Community Health and Wellness Event on May 9 and the NAACP Mental Health Fair in July.
- b.** Data and Research – The subcommittee had positive meetings with City of Staunton Human Resources and gave feedback to the city on its onboarding materials. The commission is currently waiting for HR to complete its review of the scaffolding and feedback given before moving to the next phase. There has been some interest in more outward facing communication from this subcommittee. There was discussion that this could be possible with help from the Community Connections subcommittee.

3. Debrief – January City Council Update

The recent presentation received positive feedback, though some community members expressed disappointment at the long interval between updates. To increase transparency without increasing the workload, the commission discussed using the *Community Connections* newsletter for mid-year updates and directing interested members of the public to the DEI webpage and the meeting minutes. Members discussed the need for more intentional, small steps to build relationships with City Council, such as having a representative attend council meetings more regularly to view issues through a DEI lens.

Concerns were raised regarding ICE activity in neighboring Harrisonburg and Waynesboro. The commission discussed the lack of trust between undocumented residents and law enforcement. The Community Connections subcommittee discussed exploring the possibility of a community survey or listening session to gather feedback on safety and policing, which would then be reported back to the police chief.

AnhThu met with Daphne Cox, an advocate for the deaf community. A comprehensive plan update stakeholder meeting is scheduled for the evening of **March 4 at the Staunton Public Library**, and the DEI commission has been requested to attend.

4. Going ‘Round the Circle!

- Staunton Black Business Collective: Black Business Bingo is Live
- Project Grows Annual Gala (Hotel 24 South) – Feb. 28
- Mary Baldwin Black Business Fair – Feb. 28, 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.
 - <https://events.marybaldwin.edu/event/black-business-fair>
- NAACP 1st Annual Youth Scholarship Applications open March 1st please email naacpstauntonpresident@gmail.com for information on how youth can apply.
- Save the Date: The Sarah Collins Rudolph Story - April 11, Staunton High School tickets: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-5th-little-girl-tickets-1981883185960?aff=oddttdcreator>
- NAACP Unity Prayer Breakfast – April 25. \$40 single, \$325 Table
- NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet – Oct 17
- [Staunton-Augusta County African American Research Society](#)
 - Fundraiser <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1LkFAiFSfq/>
- Mary Baldwin University BHM events: <https://marybaldwin.edu/news-and-events/>
- The Shenandoah Valley Juneteenth Organization and The Augusta County Historical Society will be hosting a poignant and powerful event that reminds us both of the horrifying costs of hate and the power of resilience.

5. Other Business

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:08 p.m.