



FAIRBANKS DIVERSITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
MAY 13, 2025, 5:30 – 7:00 P.M.
HELD VIA [ZOOM WEBINAR](#) AND AT
FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
800 CUSHMAN STREET, FAIRBANKS, ALASKA



The **Fairbanks Diversity Council (FDC)** met on the above date to conduct a Regular Meeting via Zoom Webinar and at the City Council Chambers, 800 Cushman Street, Fairbanks, Alaska. **Chair Juanita Webb** (Seat D) was physically present, and the following members were in attendance:

Members Present (In Person):

June Rogers, Seat C
Lonny Marney, City Council Member
Jake Merritt, HR Director

Members Present (Zoom):

Richard Basarab, Seat B
Marsha Oss, Seat E
Karen Blackburn, Seat I
Herb Butler, Seat J

Members Absent:

Vacant, Seat A
Dorothy Shockley, Seat F
Jonathan Bagwill, Seat G (excused)
Vacant, Seat H
Vacant, Seat K
David Pruhs, Mayor

Also Present:

D. Danyielle Snider, City Clerk

CALL TO ORDER (Reading of Mission Statement and Land Acknowledgement)

Chair Webb called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m. At the request of Chair Webb, the Land Acknowledgement was read by **J. Rogers**, and the FDC Mission Statement was read by **L. Marney**.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Webb led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

R. Basarab, seconded by **M. Oss**, moved to APPROVE the agenda.

Chair Webb called for a voice vote on the motion to APPROVE the agenda, and all members voted in favor.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

a) Regular Meeting Minutes of April 8, 2025

M. Oss, seconded by **J. Rogers**, moved to APPROVE the minutes.

Chair Webb called for a voice vote on the motion to APPROVE the minutes, and all members voted in favor.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS (Limited to 3 Minutes)

Chair Webb asked the citizen present if they wished to provide comments. The citizen, Geri Simon with Tanana Chiefs Conference, stated that she was attending on behalf of the Chief Chair who asked her to attend on his behalf.

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Chair Webb shared that Andrew Aquino, a former member of the FDC, recently passed away. She requested that the FDC hold a moment of silence in his honor. FDC members held a moment of silence.

J. Rogers spoke highly of A. Aquino and discussed how vibrant and energetic he was. **M. Oss** stated that she knew and worked with A. Aquino; she expressed sadness about his passing.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a) Human Library Update – Event Coordinators: Oss, Marney, Webb
Noel Wien Library, September 20, 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Members discussed room options at the library for holding the event, and **L. Marney** asked the Clerk to share photos he took of potential spaces. There was consensus to hold the Human Library event in the fireplace room and have several sessions. **L. Marney** stated that his contact there, Josh, appeared very excited about a human library.

Chair Webb described what a human library is. **M. Oss** stated that she already has several Native Elders and some young Native men in recovery on her list to contact to see if they would like to be books. She mentioned possibly inviting Lisa Jaeger to speak about the work she has done with Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) and villages. She commented that books should be diverse and reflective of the community.

H. Butler volunteered to be a book and added that he has not yet been contacted about a topic. **M. Oss** stated that H. Butler is on her list, but she has not contacted anyone yet. **M. Oss** indicated that each book would have about 45 minutes to talk, with 15 minutes for questions. **Chair Webb** suggested that the group decide on topics and times at the next meeting. She stated she would secure the room at the library. **M. Oss** mentioned others who she believes would make good books.

- b) Race Against Racism Update – Event Coordinators: Webb, Oss, Blackburn
JP Jones Community Center, May 31, 11 a.m.

Chair Webb stated that Andy Harrington was not available to attend the FDC meeting. She shared that she has secured funding to purchase the City event permit, and the Lions Club will allow use of their insurance policy for the event. She stated the FDC will have flyers and information at a table. She stated she has a scheduling conflict and will be at the event late. She requested volunteers from the membership and asked anyone interested to contact the Clerk.

H. Butler stated he would not be able to attend. **M. Oss**, **K. Blackburn**, and **R. Basarab** each indicated they would be able to attend. **Chair Webb** stated she could help set up then return later.

c) Diversity Activity Book

Chair Webb stated that the book is still in the works, and she believes it will turn out well.

d) Calendar of Events (informational only)

Chair Webb questioned the date of the Juneteenth event. **K. Blackburn** stated that the local celebration in the park is on June 14.

Chair Webb mentioned that the Midnight Sun Intertribal Powwow is coming up. **M. Oss** volunteered to help represent the FDC at the Powwow in July. **H. Butler** stated he would be willing to help also, pending his current health issue.

***Chair Webb** called for a brief recess at 6:03 p.m. due to an urgent phone call. The meeting resumed at 6:06 p.m.*

M. Oss spoke in support of getting paperwork submitted early to ensure the FDC could be represented at TCC, Doyon, and Fairbanks Native Association (FNA) events.

NEW BUSINESS

a) Pledge of Mutual Respect

H. Butler stated that he requested the item be included on the agenda for informational purposes. He stated that it is an interesting thing to read.

FDC MEMBERS' COMMENTS

Chair Webb stated that **H. Butler** left the City Clerk a voicemail requesting that Mayor Pruhs be invited to the FDC meeting to discuss what happened after the Mayor's recent social media post. She stated she directed the Clerk not to invite Mayor Pruhs but first give the FDC an opportunity to discuss and decide whether it was an issue the group wished to address in the future.

H. Butler shared that he invites many people to FDC meetings. He questioned whether the Mayor would be interested in speaking with the FDC about the recent social media incident. He stated that he understands what occurred and that he believed it was good that the Mayor submitted an apology to the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner.

Chair Webb asked **L. Marney** to provide an overview of what occurred at the City Council meeting. **L. Marney** stated that there was about two hours of citizens comments, which is normally limited to 30 minutes overall. He stated that the City Council heard everyone out, although the Council had nothing to do with the social media post. He reported that Mayor Pruhs was a gentleman at the meeting and took all the criticism that was given. He shared that there typically

are not that many attendees at City Council meetings – especially not so many unhappy people. **L. Marney** commented that, evidently, the open dialogue between the Fairbanks Police Department (FPD) and the local Native organizations has gone away. He indicated that when conversations break down, issues pop up. He expressed hope that the incident will rekindle communications between the City and the Native community, and he shared that he has requested to be a part of the conversation. He stated he believes the conversation should start with the Mayor and TCC.

M. Oss stated she was notified about the social media post and attended the City Council meeting online. She indicated she decided not to comment about the issue because she works for the City, and the Mayor is her boss. She stated she was flabbergasted and unhappy with what she read, and much of those feelings came from the fact that 75-80% of her reentry clients are Indigenous people and people who have families in the village. She stated that people from the remote areas have to come into the Fairbanks community for supplies. **M. Oss** shared that she was not happy with the post but was trapped between a rock and a hard place, because speaking up may have jeopardized her livelihood. She stated that while she was watching the Council meeting online, she was watching the Mayor's body language, and there were times she was unhappy with what she saw as he was listening to people. **M. Oss** stated she partners with FNA and TCC, as she works to help cover the needs of Indigenous clients. She shared that she had a conversation with Chair Webb and City Chief of Staff Sanders about it, and she questioned whether she could continue as an FDC member if the Mayor is not going to be present and if they cannot speak honestly with him without retaliation. She stated she was embarrassed and deeply hurt by what was said in the post, and she would like to ask the Mayor if he has anyone proofread his writing. She indicated she is committed to follow through with the FDC events she has committed to. She stated she is not the kind of person who can just be silent and move on. She shared that she has lived in remote areas and that she was once homeless and incarcerated and that the incident hit her hard.

H. Butler stated that door has been opened, so he will take the opportunity to comment. He thanked M. Oss for her comments and stated his heart is with her. He stated that for the past 50 years at least – especially in the pipeline days when there were massive amounts of people entering Alaska – there has been an ongoing negative interaction between Natives and non-Natives. He added that the development of the military bases has exacerbated the issue because of the added transient-type population. He shared that, unfortunately, the Mayor is not present to hear the discussion.

K. Blackburn empathized with M. Oss and stated that, because of her position in the community, she chose to remain silent about the social media post. She stated she was offended by the comment because of the community she works with, and it made her feel as though Fairbanks views certain people as a burden when they are simply people who need help, grace, and mercy. She stated that she received some calls and messages about the issue, but she did not make a statement.

R. Basarab shared that he has a different perspective. He stated that he saw the incident unfold on Facebook, and it began with a post by someone else. He shared that the post that the Mayor was responding to was from an outsider person who posted photos of a fake toilet, garbage in the Golden Heart Plaza (GHP), and people around the fountain. He referred to the person as a “clown railing against our community.” **R. Basarab** stated that he read the Mayor's post to be defensive of the Fairbanks community and of Fairbanksans. He shared that his reaction was that someone

not from Fairbanks was creating a false perspective of the Fairbanks community. He added that if the person was from Fairbanks, they should be ashamed of themselves.

J. Rogers stated that she is tired of the comments about the GHP, and this is not the first time there has been discussion on the topic. She stated she was grateful for the discussion, which is ongoing and complex. She spoke about people being considerate of each other and the responsibility of community members to one another. She referred to the Fairbanks community as a family and discussed how closely connected people in the community are. She stated it is outrageous that there is a need to have these types of conversations and she is discouraged by that.

Chair Webb questioned what could be done to make a change. **J. Rogers** spoke about an event she began in the GHP called "Pizza with Police" and she stated that L. Marney has participated each year. She stated she wished that there were more opportunities to gather in the GHP. She stated that while she was not a part of the City Council's discussion, she is still interested in seeing Fairbanks thrive. She spoke highly of M. Oss and stated she has great respect for her.

M. Oss stated she thinks it is very telling that the Mayor does not attend FDC meetings, which is disappointing to her. She stated if he did attend, he would get feedback on how to communicate better. **H. Butler** agreed.

Guest G. Simon shared TCC's perspective that it would be wonderful if the FDC took its role as a convener and facilitator seriously to bring the groups together. She indicated that action by the FDC would light a fire in people. She stated she has lived in Fairbanks for 49 years, and she discussed her background, including her education and professional experience. She spoke about the great economic benefit that Native organizations bring to Fairbanks and about how many people are employed by TCC. G. Simon went on to state that the Mayor's post was a slap in the face, and his "almost" apology was even worse. She indicated that overcoming that kind of environment will be a challenge, and it will take a long time for people to come together. She stated that the FDC should lead those meetings and bring all the parties to the table to try to get to a place of mutual respect. She questioned the purpose of the FDC if it cannot do that. She shared that when the Borough Mayor was elected, he reached out to TCC to see how they could work together, which did a lot to open that relationship. She stated that Fairbanks needs to be better for everyone.

Chair Webb asked G. Simon if she would be willing to work with the FDC if the FDC agrees that is the direction it wants to go. G. Simon replied affirmatively. **L. Marney** expressed hope that the situation would start a conversation. The consensus of the FDC was to work in that direction.

H. Butler thanked G. Simon for comments and J. Rogers for sharing her wisdom.

J. Rogers expressed thanks for the opportunity to have a place to voice comments.

R. Basarab and **K. Blackburn** each indicated they had no comments.

H. Butler informed everyone that he has cervical vertigo, which causes instant and radical dizziness. He stated that while he is working with his doctor to resolve the issue, he will likely be

stuck at home. He stated that when he recently raised the question of whether the FDC was interested in national politics, he was advised that it is not supposed to be according to City ordinance. He suggested, however, that the FDC can draft amendments to the ordinance and offer them to the City Council for approval. He stated that the FDC can and will outlive all politicians.

M. Oss stated she feels emotionally torn. She shared that she has applied for a job at a different agency, and she will go to parttime with the City if she gets the job. She stated serving on the FDC at that point will be a conflict of interest. She thanked G. Simon for attending the meeting. She concluded by saying that her heart is broken, and while she is typically a warrior, she feels trapped and fearful of speaking up. She indicated that it has been a rough week.

Chair Webb expressed appreciation for the meeting's discussion.

J. Rogers called out H. Butler's comments about out-surviving politicians. She stated that politicians are another diverse group. She stated she served on the City Council without participating in political disarray.

Chair Webb asked everyone to keep A. Aquino's family in their thoughts and prayers.

M. Oss acknowledged that the meeting was being recorded and that she chose to speak on the record.

MEETING DATES


- a) Next Regular Meeting Date, June 10, 2025

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Webb declared the meeting adjourned at 7:08 p.m.

for 

Juanita Webb, Chair



D. Danyielle Snider, MMC, City Clerk

Transcribed by: DS