

**CITY OF MASON
REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
MINUTES OF JULY 20 2020**

Mayor Whipple called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers at 201 W. Ash Street, Mason, Michigan (Via Zoom Teleconference). Brown led the Pledge of Allegiance and offered the invocation.

Present: Councilmembers: Brown, Droscha, Ferris, Madden, Schaffer, Vogel, Whipple
Absent: None
Also present: Deborah S. Stuart, City Manager, Sarah J. Jarvis, City Clerk, Michelle Pietsch, Finance Director

PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul Kato, 712 Pine Meadow Road, Williamston, MI 48894

Proposal for Mason City Council Action Based on Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

The purpose of the proposal is to recommend tangible actions the Mason City Council can take to demonstrate their commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion for all Mason community members, including, but not limited to: residents, employees, business owners and visitors. This in no way is a complete document but rather is a framework from which to begin the process of healing.

“Diversity and inclusion”, along with “implicit bias” have become buzzwords as Americans grapple with how to address systemic racism across the United States. For many Black people, diversity and inclusion initiatives offers represent empty promises. These initiatives offer a chance to check a box and move on from a systemic issue - they are the “thoughts and prayers” reaction to racism. While it seems like the right thing to say/do, diversity and inclusion efforts often fail to address systemic issues, historic wrongs and tangible ways communities can make amends and create meaningful, lasting change. For example: completing a single instance of implicit bias training does not “fix” the problem of implicit bias. Understanding the systemic factors that create these biases and implementing a plan that challenges the status quo and holds those in power accountable is more important than an isolated training event.

The Council’s commitment to diversity and inclusion reflects the need for both within the Mason community. How did this need arise? How long has it existed? Why is it important to address it now?

A combination of systemic racism and a history of white supremacy have caused the need for improved diversity and inclusion culture. Currently, people of color (POC) may face police profiling, racism in places of work, worship, housing or education along with micro aggressions (e.g. being followed in a store, exposure to symbols of hate or terror like the Confederate flag, etc.). While white supremacy can be seen throughout local history in actions like the lynching of Black people, systemic racism more often goes unnoticed because it is the default social setting for the majority group. In other words: Mason is 88% white. Systemic racism aids in the comfortability of that 88%, with little to no consideration to the remaining 12% - many of whom are POC.

These are not new problems, but the commitment to addressing them is new. It is important to hear and listen to voices of POC when evaluating ways to demonstrate through action a verbalized commitment to diversity and inclusion.

My recommendation is that the City of Mason provide reparations in an effort to confront our community’s past. Reparations are defined as “the making of amends for a wrong one has done, by paying money to or otherwise helping those who have been wronged. Many people often think of the extension of monetary or property benefits (e.g. reparations of 40 acres and a mule during the Reconstruction era) when they hear the term “reparations. The

reparations recommended in this proposal are not primarily based, but rather centered in helping those who have been wronged, with the goal of creating a community where people of all races, religions and creeds are welcome.

Reparations could take the form of any of the following:

- A. Education (Coordination and working together with School Board):
 - 1. The creation of a scholarship fund to benefit students of color who matriculate through the Mason School District.
 - 2. Support for zero tolerance policy for racism within the school district (no symbols with a history of racial terror like Nazi or Confederate symbols would be allowed; no tolerance for racial slurs or intimidation based on race)
 - 3. Tutoring and mentoring programs created for students of color with an emphasis on either higher education or career training.

- B. Acknowledgement of Contributions Furthering the Diversity of the City of Mason
 - 1. Highlight contributions or current and historic POC within the Mason community.
 - 2. Recognize the contributions or community members (of any race or background) who have helped foster a diverse and inclusive environment within the Mason Community. Students and community members could nominate recipients in different categories.
 - 3. Hold annual multicultural appreciation event to highlight the richness of the many cultures in and around Mason, celebrating other cultures through food, dance and other traditions.

- C. Civics
 - 1. Ongoing implicit bias training for all civic leaders and public service employees.
 - 2. No qualified immunity for civil servants.
 - 3. Review of hiring and training processes consulting POC as well as professionals specializing in diversity and inclusion culture change.

Changing the culture of a community is a long and difficult road but taking even a single step toward tangible change is progress. Inviting the community to participate in the Council’s conversations related to future diversity initiatives is strongly recommended.

CONSENT CALENDAR

MOTION by Brown, second by Schaffer,
to approve the Consent Calendar as presented.

- A. Minutes:
 - 1. Approve Minutes of Regular Council Meeting July 6, 2020
- B. Correspondence:
 - 1. Receipt of City Attorney’s Report Dated July 16, 2020
- C. Financials:
 - 1. Approve Bills in the Amount of \$670,565.85
 - 2. Receipt of Monthly Revenue and Expenditure Report for Period Ending June 30, 2020
 - 3. Receipt of Quarterly Investment Report for Period Ending June 30, 2020
 - 4. Authorize Contract with CEC Controls Company, Inc. to replace three magnetic flow meters at the Water Treatment Plant in the amount of \$45,240
 - 5. Approve Purchase of a Precinct Tabulator from Dominion Voting Systems, though Election Source, in an Amount not to Exceed \$5,675

MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Authorize Change Order to the 2020 Local Streets Contract with Rieth-Riley Construction Company, Inc. for Henderson Street Project (CIP 2019-S5) in the amount of \$54,788.05

MOTION by Brown, second by Droscha,
to Authorize Change Order to the 2020 Local Streets Contract with Rieth-Riley Construction Company, Inc. for Henderson Street Project (CIP 2019-S5) in the amount of \$54,788.05

Yes (6) Brown, Droscha, Ferris, Madden, Vogel, Whipple
No (1) Schaffer
Absent (0)

MOTION APPROVED

- B. Authorize Change Order to the 2020 Local Streets Contract with Rieth-Riley Construction Company, Inc. for the W. Columbia/W. Sycamore Alley Project in the Amount of \$39,340

MOTION by Vogel, second by Madden,
to Authorize Change Order to the 2020 Local Streets Contract with Rieth-Riley Construction Company, Inc. for W. Columbia/W. Sycamore Alley Project in the Amount of \$39,340

Yes (6) Brown, Droscha, Ferris, Madden, Vogel, Whipple
No (1) Schaffer
Absent (0)

MOTION APPROVED

COUNCILMEMBER REPORTS

- Councilmember Report by Mayor Russell W. Whipple

I want to address the comments I made at the last city council meeting regarding council member Vogel's idea that the council receive implicit bias training as well as the broader issue of racial bias within the City of Mason.

First, with regard to my previous comments: My intent was to convey my thoughts on the specific suggestion that the city council needed training regarding implicit bias. Every reference I made to the City of Mason or the city council was intended to apply to the city government and council only. As I noted in my comments, I am aware there is a problem with racial bias among some people in the city. I simply have not seen or been made aware of any such problem existing with the council or with any council members.

I have been made aware that my comments were taken by some as insensitive or dismissive or naïve. Although I believe such conclusions are the result of misinterpreting my comments, I fully accept that the primary responsibility for such misinterpretation lies with me. I chose the words and the context. It is my responsibility to ensure I am communicating my thoughts clearly.

I apologize for any uncomfortable emotions I may have caused by how I presented my opinion. I subscribe to the sentiments conveyed in the resolution regarding inclusion passed unanimously by city council during the last meeting. Unfortunately, my comments failed to sufficiently demonstrate my commitment to those sentiments. Again, for this, I apologize.

On the broader issue of racial bias in the City of Mason: One positive result of my comments during the last council meeting has been the discussions spawned with others about racial bias. I was told more than once that there exists among some the perception that the City of Mason is not generally welcoming to people of color as a place to live.

Although I have no first-hand knowledge of such a perception, I respect and take seriously the people who conveyed the information to me. It sickens and saddens me to think such a perception may exist. And I am extremely confident that the possible existence of such a perception is just as distasteful for all members of the city council, the city leadership team, and I believe the vast majority of city residents as it is for me.

Even the potential existence of a perception that the City of Mason is racially non-inclusive should cause us all to be concerned. In that regard, I believe the city should examine what might lead to such a perception. I request that the next city council agenda include a discussion of what measures the city can explore to evaluate the extent to which the city is perceived as unwelcoming and, if found necessary, what possible actions the city council and city staff might pursue to eliminate such a perception.

I believe we are all aware that the issue of racial bias is a complicated one. A council discussion will be only a first step. Improving, let alone resolving, the situation, even for just the City of Mason, will require diligence, courage and a long-term view. It will also require all of us, regardless of race, to talk to each other honestly, respectfully, and with a focus on understanding and reconciliation.

There are numerous questions to consider from all sides. We can reach consensus only if we come to grips with the fact that we all carry biases and that some biases can be perceived as exclusionary. My recent conversations have shown me that if we address such exclusionary bias constructively and with an eye toward reaching a common understanding, there is nothing that can stop us.

To that end, I ask all council members, and all residents of the City of Mason, to join me in addressing the issue of racial bias with a loving, humble heart and an open mind.

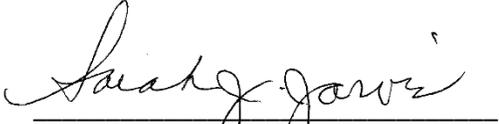
- Droscha reported that the Planning Commission will be meeting via Zoom on August 11, at 6:30 p.m.
- Vogel reported that the July Historical District Commission meeting was cancelled.
- Ferris noted that the Farmer's Market started this last weekend and Lee Austin Park and was received well.
- Ferris noted that there is no Tree Commission meeting scheduled at this time.

MANAGERS REPORT (07/02/2020)

Stuart noted appreciation for all who purchased gift cards for businesses in the DDA this last round and that they are all sold out and that the cards should be mailed out in the next week or two. Stuart acknowledged Finance Director Michelle Pietsch for her hard work in getting together the information to submit for reimbursement for hazard pay and payroll reimbursement to the State in such a quick turn round time. Stuart acknowledged City Clerk Sarah Jarvis for her work on getting ready for the August election. Stuart reminded everyone that per the Governor's Executive Order it is not mandatory to wear a mask in the voting location for purposes of voting. However, we will be working to making the polling place as safe as possible by sanitizing surfaces and providing masks to anyone who wishes to wear one.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:01 p.m.



Sarah J. Jarvis, City Clerk