



Memorandum

Date: 9/5/2023
From: Mayor Kristine Lott
To: Winooski City Council
Subject: Update on priorities from the Equity Audit

The City of Winooski and the Winooski School District contracted with [Opportunity Consulting](#) to conduct an equity audit, explore areas where experiences in the City and WSD are inequitable, and find the opportunities to adopt equity-focused policies and practices to address these inequities. Opportunity Consulting presented its official findings to Winooski City Council on Monday, April 18, 2022. The purpose of this memo is to provide an update on City progress against priorities from the report. This is the second update, building on [the update shared](#) at the City Council meeting of October 17, 2022. Visit <https://www.winooskivt.gov/1515/Equity-Initiatives> to view the full report.

The report identified 4 recommendations each for both the City and the School. Updates on the City specific recommendations are below:

- **Recommendation 8: Development of Affordable Housing through Research and Action Planning:**
 - Funded and hired a Housing Initiative Director to research, develop, and help implement initiatives that support these needs.
 - Adopted changes to our land use regulations to incentivize priority housing: 3 bedroom and larger units, accessory dwelling units to create new housing, and units priced for 80-120% area median income.
 - Currently working to update ordinance for enforcement of housing quality.
 - The Council also adopted an [Equity Assessment Worksheet](#) Analyze budget items, programs, policies, or strategies and priorities to determine potential impacts on protected classes both positive and negative, intentional, and unintentional. This tool has been used in the annual Strategic Prioritization process and to evaluate specific policies that have come forward to Council this year.
 - The City's FY24 budget added funding to maintain the hours of our Children & Family Program Manager that were previously grant funded, continuing the expanded access to year-round childcare for working families through our Thrive afterschool and summer camps. While this is not a housing specific program or policy, it is a program that supports affordability.
 - For housing updates and resources for residents, visit: www.winooskivt.gov/1542/Housing-Resources-and-Initiatives.
- **Recommendation 9: Educate and Train Landlords and Renters:**
 - The Mayor facilitates a monthly meeting of area housing and service providers which has led to collaboration between the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO), UVM Health, Winooski Housing Authority (WHA), and the Winooski School District to deliver tenant training via the school and WHA properties. The group is working to develop this expertise within community members for ongoing support.
 - The Mayor is also in conversation with regional organizations about additional education and training opportunities for both tenants and landlords, though these discussions have been slowed down as many organizations' capacity has been

dedicated to supporting the wind down of the State motel housing program this summer.

- **Recommendation 10: Change Advertising and Recruitment Practices to Ones that Are More Effective at Diversifying the Workforce:**
 - The City Manager provided an [equity update](#) on the ongoing work of staff during the [January 3 City Council meeting](#), including efforts such as trainings and orientations to increase understanding among some departments for diversity, equity and inclusion work and an individualized Intercultural Development Inventory report as part of the Vermont Office of Racial Equity's IDEAL program. The City Manager will provide new updates in the September [strategic vision All Areas update](#).
- **Recommendation 11: Develop Strategies to Increase Civic Participation among BIPOC Residents:**
 - The City Council codified a [community access and engagement process](#) identifying 30 community groups to establish regular engagement opportunities with. This has included engagement meetings with BIPOC groups such as the Congolese Association and Winooski Mosque. A full update on community engagement meetings from March-June 2023 was shared at the [July 17 City Council meeting](#).
 - The City has funded and arranged for translated ballots and interpreter services in local elections, as well as providing voting guidance to New Americans.
 - The City allocated specific funding in the FY24 budget to develop a pilot program for direct engagement with residents from underrepresented groups and dedicated funding for translation and interpretation to resource a language access plan.
 - The budget also added funding to maintain the hours of a Youth Interventionist position, Community Services Admin & Outreach Coordinator, and Recreation Assistant, that were previously grant funded to add capacity to engage directly with community members creating more connection to the City, as well as provide hands on support with paper program sign ups, language access, and targeted outreach to increase participation of underserved residents. This was an \$187,277.04 investment.
 - The [Inclusion & Belonging Commission](#) continues to serve as an advisory group for the City Council with a focus on equitable policies and best practices for inclusion. The commission is currently running a stipend pilot to see how this might support further participation in municipal government from underrepresented groups. It also provided feedback on the Equity Assessment Worksheet mentioned above. Members of the commission serve as ambassadors to other commissions, providing additional insight into recommendations coming from those commissions.
 - The Winooski City Council completed a two-part training on Cultivating Tenants of Equity & Inclusion led by EJH Futures Inc. to develop their own understanding and behaviors to create a more inclusive environment as they engage community members. A [reflection memo](#) was shared at the January 3 Council meeting.

The report also identified 3 shared recommendations for the City and the School. Updates from the City perspective on the shared recommendations are below. The School likely has made additional progress and efforts not fully represented here. This update will be shared with School Board members ahead of the joint City Council and School Board meeting scheduled for October 11.

- **Recommendation 5: Strengthen WSD and City Collaboration and Include the WSD Superintendent as a Member of the City Leadership:**
 - Annual joint meeting of both boards and a Memorandum of Understanding for shared operational services.
 - A weekly touchpoint between the City Manager and Superintendent, and a quarterly meeting that also includes the School Board President and the Mayor.
 - Members of City and School leadership teams serving on each other's important bodies (ex. WSD Capital Project Team, Winooski Housing Commission, etc.)
 - Partnership on annual Town Meeting Day community budget presentation and the monthly Winooski Community Newsletter.

- Mayor's monthly Housing Roundtable includes WSD staff to collaborate on housing issues in Winooski and for families in the school district.
- WSD and City leadership have collaborated on multiple community engagement events and are looking forward to an upcoming community event focused on the Equity Audit findings.
- **Recommendation 6: Expand the School Liaison Program from WSD to the City:**
 - In 2021, WSD invested additional funds into the [FY22 budget](#) to expand all cultural liaison positions to full year. The district has since added additional liaison positions and leveraged federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to support the program.
 - The City continues to work with WSD liaisons through a stipend agreement for ad hoc support. This approach has allowed us to conduct listening sessions with Nepali, Arabic, and Swahili speaking residents and distribute a translated survey related to use of Federal COVID relief grant funds under the American Rescue Plan Act ([ARPA](#)), as well as info sessions with multilingual groups hosted at Winooski School District including Nepali, Somali & Mai Mai, and Swahili & French. Conversation between City and School leadership on the program is ongoing.
- **Recommendation 7: Provide Transportation by Increasing Drivers' Pay:**
 - The Winooski School District successfully created a year-round school bussing program through direct community engagement and creation of full-time jobs for bus drivers. Read more: <https://vtdigger.org/2022/12/29/with-bus-drivers-in-short-supply-winooskis-immigrant-parents-take-the-wheel/>.
 - The City continues to fund public transportation through an annual assessment from Green Mountain Transit (GMT) for the regional bus service and Special Services Transportation (SSTA) to provide service to residents for a total of \$227,889 for FY24, and is engaged in ongoing discussions with GMT and regional leaders about how to improve service to residents related to cost, frequency, and route options.

Signed,

Kristine Lott, Mayor