



## Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

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### Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Board of Library Trustees

Date: 2023-12-11

Time: 7:00 PM

Building: Reading Public Library

Location: Community Room

Address: 64 Middlesex Avenue

Session: Open Session

Purpose: General Meeting

Version: Final

### Attendees: **Members - Present:**

Patrick Egan, Chair; Monette Verrier, Vice-Chair; Andrew Grimes, Secretary; Cherrie Dubois; Cappy Popp, Monique Pillow-Gnanaratnam

### **Members - Not Present:**

### **Others Present:**

Amy Lannon, Director; Michelle Filleul, Assistant Director; Meaghan Clemente, Administrative Assistant; Andrea Fiorillo, Public Services Division Head; Albert Pless Jr., Director of Equity and Social Justice; Joseph McDonagh, Financial Committee Liaison to Reading Public Library; Andrew Gregory, Resident (remote)

**Minutes Respectfully Submitted By:** Andrew Grimes, Secretary

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### Topics of Discussion:

#### I. Call to Order at 7:00 p.m.

#### II. Public Comment

No public comments were made in person or remotely.

#### III. Winter Programming Update

Public Services Division Head Andrea Fiorillo presented a winter update on Library programming scheduled for December through February. One hundred five programs for children are planned, including expanded daily storytimes Monday through Thursday that are limited to 20 registrants, allowing for a calmer early literacy learning environment where librarians, caretakers, and children can form closer bonds. Ms. Fiorillo noted there are still two drop-in storytime programs on Fridays and Saturdays.

RPL will offer nineteen teen programs this winter, including the popular Exam Cram Midterm Study Session event and collaborations with Creative Arts. Library Associate Alissa Landau will host a Mah-Jongg for Beginners series for adults. Other offerings include Star Wars Trivia, Giant-Sized Family Games, and Title Town events featuring sports-themed play and stories. The Library is planning an after-hours Mini-Golf program on Friday, February 23. Other exciting learning opportunities include programs such as a Veterans' Resume Workshop and lectures on Gene Editing as Medicine, the 250<sup>th</sup>

Anniversary of the Boston Tea Party, and "Identity and Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary America."

Special programs include a Teen Quilting Project Series will allow each teen to create a portion of a quilt displayed in the Teen Space and a new "Sleuths on the Loose Cozy Mystery" Subscription Service that will provide registrants access to a new mystery book on the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month, January through June.

Ms. Fiorillo noted the BeTween Time weekly drop-in series for tweens in grades four through seven has grown weekly as young patrons bring friends to enjoy activities in the developing Tween space.

Additionally, there are now two health resource kiosks in the Health Nook providing access to quality health and wellness websites with trusted resources.

Programming centers on the "Your Place is Here" theme, emphasizing library gatherings and bringing people back together after the isolating times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to its regular quarterly concert series, the Library is partnering with Creative Arts for a Sunday Concert Series. Three events will showcase the musical talents of different Creative Arts instructors and feature piano, voice, and world instruments. Audience members can engage and connect with performers, ask questions, and enjoy refreshments.

RPL is also partnering with the Pleasant Street Center to offer a Memory Café series, designed as a safe place for those with dementia and their caregivers to relax and connect while engaging in sensory activities.

The English Conversation Group finished its first series in December and plans to return in 2024. Members of the group speak approximately nine to ten distinct languages.

Ms. Verrier inquired about the Winter Warmers program. Ms. Fiorillo explained that, unfortunately, Winter Warmers will not take place due to concerns about large gatherings during the winter months since the pandemic. However, the similar Summer Sizzlers event will kick off summer reading during the warmer weather, when more people can confidently gather.

#### **IV. Director of Equity Introduction and Presentation**

Albert Pless introduced himself as the new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Director for the Town of Reading. Mr. Pless lives in Winchester and has enjoyed coaching his three children in various sports and activities. Mr. Pless has a public health background focusing on community-based programs and addressing health and racial inequities. Mr. Pless previously served as the inaugural DEI Director in Andover, Massachusetts.

Mr. Pless is a member of the Massachusetts DEI Coalition and will host their regional meeting in Reading at the Library on Friday, December 15. Approximately 36 nearby municipalities in eastern Massachusetts are involved with the DEI Coalition, including Medford, Malden, Andover, Arlington, Lexington, and Revere.

Mr. Pless acknowledged that there is a learning curve to understanding the DEI dynamics and functionality of municipal governments. There are many community expectations. He noted the importance of wellness, self-care, boundaries, regular supervisory support, and check-ins, which are critical to avoid burnout. Mr. Pless reported he is the only one of his colleagues based in the library and appreciates the support and accessibility to the public that the space provides.

Mr. Pless believes DEI positions should be at the leadership level in title and practice. Widespread staff and committee support are essential for success both internally and externally. It is also crucial for the town to make financial investment to DEI in the form of a dedicated and functional budget.

Equity assessments and community equity audits are critical for capturing data from the local community and the workforce. The data will drive informed and sustainable decisions that provide value to the community. Mr. Pless is excited to be a part of this process in Reading. However, Mr. Pless also stressed the importance of additional, specialized DEI work for local schools.

Mr. Pless provided an overview of specific and shared DEI responsibilities among different municipalities, noting it is important to update language and practices in internal policies and procedures to promote inclusivity and accessibility in critical functions such as evaluation, contracts, procurement, hiring, training, strategic planning, and more. Each department must leverage its operational strengths to promote a collaborative and welcoming environment for the whole community. Internal leadership decisions should be data-informed and driven. All Reading cultures should be acknowledged and celebrated through collaborative partnerships.

Mr. Pless explained that the DEI community survey closed several weeks ago and focus group meetings should wrap up this week. Consultants will analyze and summarize data over the next few weeks. Mr. Pless has been busy meeting and networking with various community members over coffee and recently attended the Community Menorah Lighting. He is looking forward to meeting more people and developing an understanding of their interests and priorities.

#### **V. Policy Changes & Vote: Borrowing Policy, Fines & Fees Policy**

Ms. Lannon reviewed the revised Borrowing Policy featuring changes discussed at the November meeting. These changes include eliminating checkout limits on CDs and DVDs and no longer requiring a signed equipment agreement for the Library of Things collection. These changes help reduce barriers to access for patrons. Mr. Egan noted that "In-Library Use Equipment" should be italicized in the Special Collections section. There were no changes to the Fines & Fees Policy.

*Motion: To adopt the Borrowing Policy as presented. (Grimes / Dubois)*

*Vote: Approved 6-0*

#### **VI. Financial Report**

Ms. Lannon reviewed the FY25 Level 1 Budget and will present it to the Select Board on December 12. A detailed review of the expected calendar of pay raises, pay periods, and schedules with the Town Accountant resulted in a \$2,550 salary budget reduction

from the amount presented at the November meeting. Mr. McDonagh questioned variances in FY25 Collection Services and Public Services salaries compared to FY24. Ms. Lannon explained that this budgetary change does not reflect any additions or cuts but is due to the transferring of a position from the Collection Services Division into the Public Services Division.

The Library received several donations in memory of Barbara Boviard. Trust earnings are down slightly. Ms. Lannon clarified that the Commissioners of Trust Funds Board manages the trusts in collaboration with Town Treasurer Diane Morabito.

The Library will also receive the first of two state aid payments. This first payment is \$29,077.29, usually one-half of the total award. Based on the first payment, the RPL can expect to receive \$58,000 in State Aid for FY24. This amount represents an increase of about \$10,000 since FY23. The FY24 funds received will be used for planning future FY25 projects. The North of Boston Library Exchange (NOBLE) consortia is also expected to receive state aid funds, which will help benefit the Library.

## **VII. Director's Report**

### **a. Programs, Collections and Services**

Ms. Lannon shared a snapshot of November usage statistics. Software on the exterior pickup lockers has recently been updated. However, the lockers are currently out of commission until a part needed to repair the scanner arrives. Supply chain issues have caused delays, but the Library hopes the lockers will be usable again soon.

A variety of solid programming offerings for all ages has increased library visitors. Circulation is generally highest during the summer and typically drops off slightly in the fall and winter, with a seasonal increase in the spring. OverDrive circulation demonstrates that patrons are reading and listening to materials electronically.

The Tween Space mural is underway and expected to be completed by January 1. Illustrator James Weinberg is working to extend the mural onto the ceiling and sides of the wall. Young patrons have enjoyed positively interacting with the artist. So far, a time-lapse video of progress on the mural has been posted to the Library's social media accounts. The Library is waiting to hear back from a new furniture designer through WB Mason specializing in stock and semi-custom furniture for the space. The vendor is on the state bid list and is aware of the budget for the project.

Despite November holiday closures for Veterans' Day and Thanksgiving, there were sixty-one Library programs in November. The Winter Brochure, showcasing programming for December through February, is available online. Print copies with a QR code are available upon request.

Recent Special Guest Storytimes have featured Public Safety Clinician Taunya Jarzyniecki, Community Service Officer Kristen O'Shaughnessy, and Cooper the Comfort Dog. The Children's Room team noticed many positive intergenerational moments at the light table STEM station in the Children's Room. Including talking points for adults at the stations has enhanced the experience for everyone, especially older adults with young children.

**b. Personnel**

Reference Librarian Rebecca Bailey will celebrate her sixth work anniversary in December. Aymon Langlois will begin work as a part-time, temporary support clerk for the Office of Equity and Social Justice on Monday, December 18. Mr. Langlois is a Reading resident, former library volunteer, and graduate of Reading Memorial High School and Skidmore College. He is passionate about disability advocacy and education and hopes to develop a series of workshops in collaboration with Mr. Pless. This position is a trial run for a more formal internship program, which the RPL hopes to launch in FY25.

**c. Professional Development**

Ms. Lannon reviewed a list of selected professional development activities recently completed by library staff.

**VIII. Approval of November 14, 2023, Meeting Minutes**

*Motion: To approve the minutes of the November 14, 2023, Trustee Meeting as written. (Popp / Pillow-Gnanaratnam)*

*Vote: Approved 6-0*

**IX. Future Agenda Items**

Mr. Egan noted a recent Select Board meeting on Tuesday, December 5, where Coalition of Us (CATO) group members proposed potentially forming the Bill Russell Ad-Hoc Commemoration Establishment Committee (BRACE). If approved, this Ad-Hoc Committee may feature a Board of Library Trustees designee. However, additional information is needed.

The Local Town of Reading and the Presidential Primary Elections will occur on March 5, 2024. Two positions on the Board of Library Trustees will be open. Ms. Pillow-Gnanaratnam will not be running for re-election. Ms. Lannon thanked Ms. Pillow-Gnanaratnam for her service and noted that her last meeting will be in February 2024.

Adjournment: 7:53 p.m.

*Motion: To Adjourn 7:53 p.m. (Verrier / Popp)*

*Vote: Approved 6-0*

Respectfully Submitted,



Andrew Grimes, Secretary



WINTER QUARTER 2024

PUBLIC  
SERVICES  
PROGRAMS

**AT A GLANCE: DECEMBER THRU FEBRUARY**

**CHILDRENS**

**105 PROGRAMS**

**STORYTIMES MONDAY  
-SATURDAY**

**TEENS**

**19 PROGRAMS**

**EXAM CRAM &  
CREATIVE ARTS**

**ADULTS**

**75 PROGRAMS**

**MINDFULNESS &  
MAHJONG  
SERIES**

# HIGHLIGHTS

## FUN AND GAMES:

- Star Wars Trivia
- Mah Jongg for Beginners
- Giant Sized Family Games
- Title Town (sports themed play and stories)
- Mini Golf for all ages

## ARTS AND CRAFTS:

- Concert Series
- Spark Spots: (Family Arts drop in)
- Dribble Drabble (Stories, Painting, Dance, & Music)
- Teen Quilting Project Series (will be hung in the teen room)

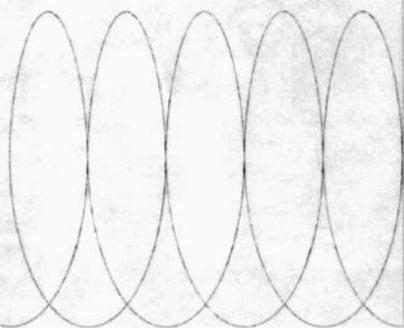
## LEARNING:

- Veterans' Resume Workshop
- Gene Editing as Medicine
- Wildlife Rescue
- Dr. Bill Fowler Presents: The 250th Anniversary of the Boston Tea Party
- Identity and Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary America

## BOOKISH:

- Children's Author and Illustrator E.B. Goodale
- Best in Romance 2023 Review
- Exam Cram: Midterm Study Sessions
- Sleuths on The Loose Cozy Mystery Subscription Service

# New & Renewed



- ① In Between Time and the soon to be opened Tween Spot
- ② Health Nook is fully functional with the addition of health resource kiosks
- ③ What's the Big Idea: Your Place is Here
- ④ Creative Arts Sunday Concert Series
- ⑤ Return of Memory Cafe & English Conversation Group

QUESTIONS?



# Albert Pless, Town of Reading, DEI Director



## About me

### Personally

Winchester

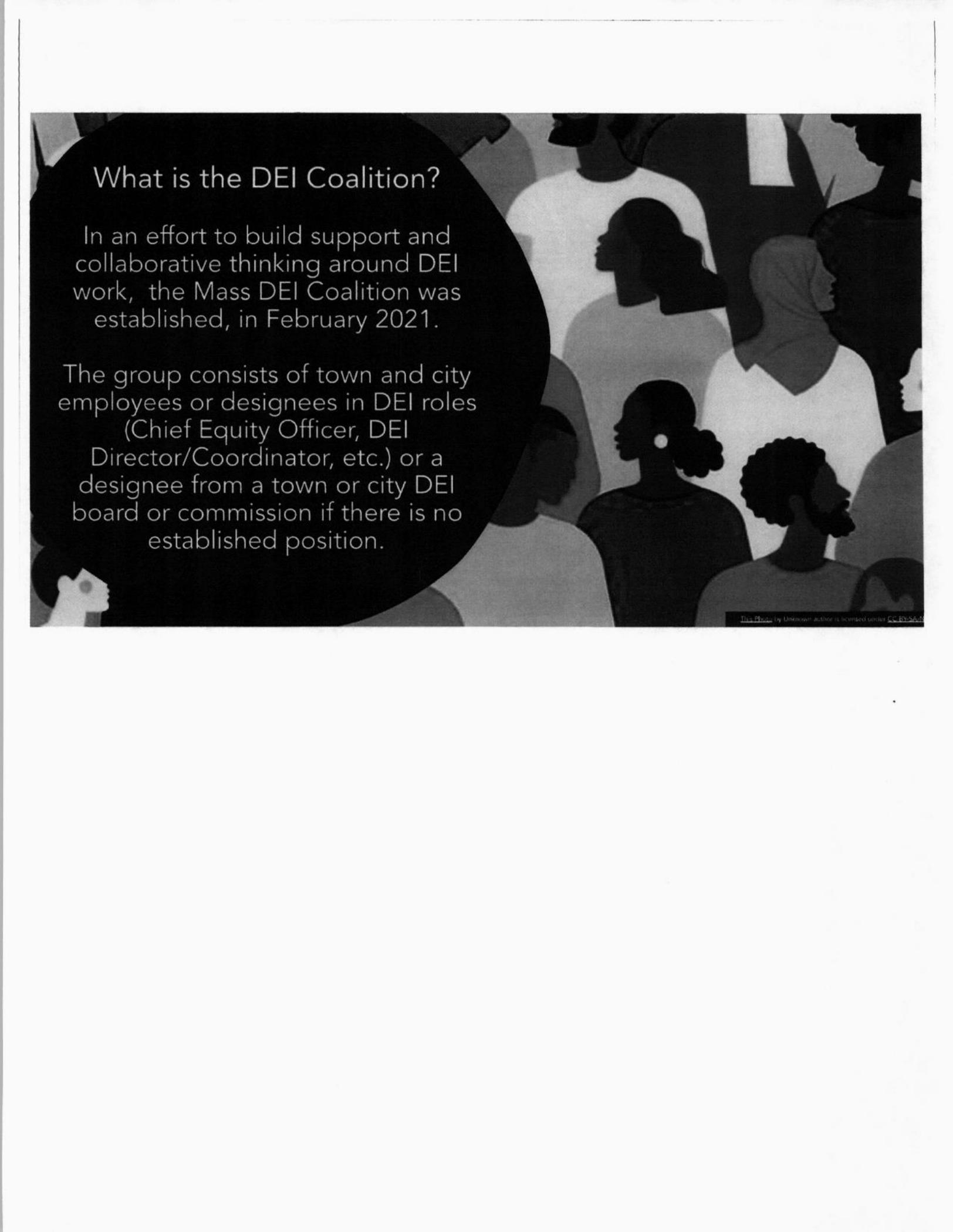
Coach

Steelers Fan

### Professionally

Public Health

Community Organizer



## What is the DEI Coalition?

In an effort to build support and collaborative thinking around DEI work, the Mass DEI Coalition was established, in February 2021.

The group consists of town and city employees or designees in DEI roles (Chief Equity Officer, DEI Director/Coordinator, etc.) or a designee from a town or city DEI board or commission if there is no established position.

## Which municipalities are involved?

Amherst	Andover	Arlington
Beverly	Boston	Brookline
Cambridge	Chelsea	Danvers
Everett	Framingham	Holbrook
Lexington	Lynn	Malden
Medford	Methuen	Nantucket
Needham	Newburyport	Newton
Northborough	Provincetown	Randolph
Reading	Revere	Salem
Sharon	Somerville	South Hadley
Springfield	Uxbridge	Westborough
Westwood	Winthrop	Worcester



# Lessons Learned



## CHALLENGES

- Huge learning curve - municipal government and how it functions
- Too many expectations at once, and unrealistic to meet!
- Emotionally demanding and draining work:
  - High burnout rate
  - Wellness & self-care are critical
  - Supervision support/ check ins

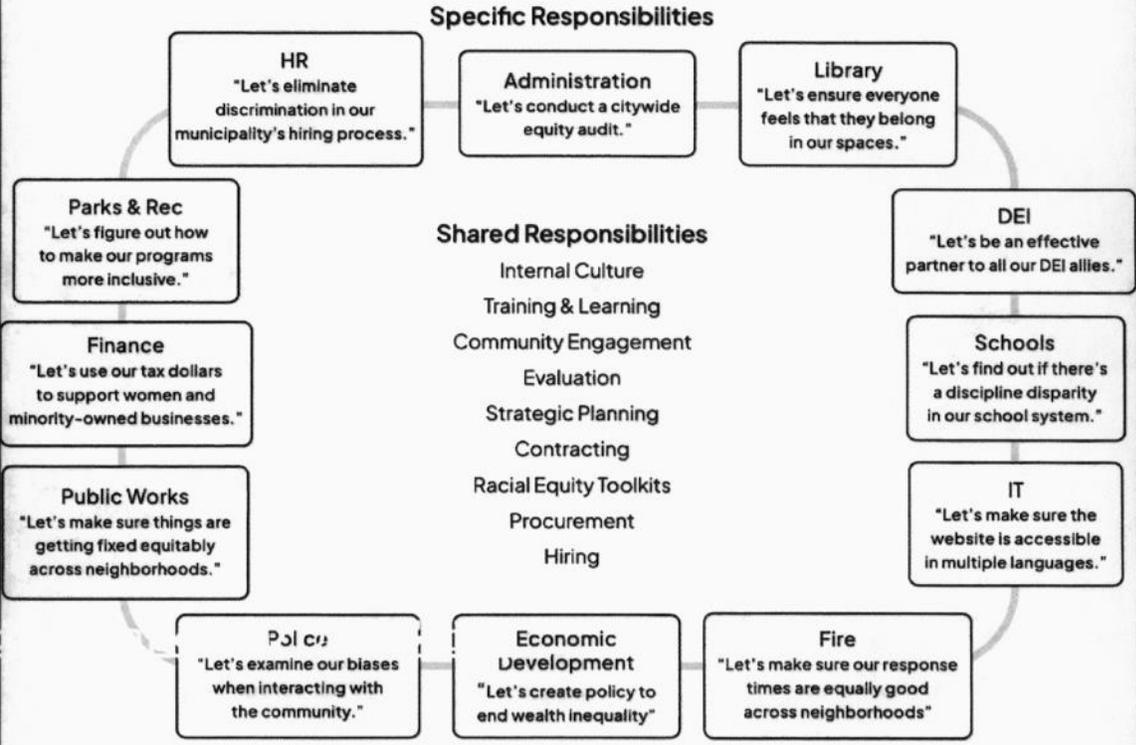
## Lessons Learned

### EMERGING BEST PRACTICES

- DEI positions need to be at the leadership level and not just in title but in practice
- Needs to be internal facing and external facing with staff/committee support
- Financial investment - need to have a budget
- Common practice – starting with an equity assessment or community equity audit
- Seems to start with a task force -> committee -> hiring 1 person -> hiring Department
- Schools & Municipalities need their own DEI



How can you incorporate DEI values into the responsibilities you share with other departments?  
What are your department's specific responsibilities?



<http://>

# Our work in Reading

## Internal work

- Looking at our Policies and Practices
- Building Leadership
- Being Data informed and driven

## External work

- Acknowledging and celebrating all cultures in Reading through partnership and collaboration
- *DEI Assessment*
- *Employment Engagement survey*

# Discussion/Comments