



Commission for Diversity & Inclusion

Culture and Arts Working Committee

ACTION LETTER

Monday, December 20, 2021

Call to Order

Chairperson Martin called the December 20, 2021 Culture and Arts Working Committee meeting to order at 8:07 p.m.

Roll Call

Members Present

Chairperson Ben Martin
Commissioner Rachel Courtney
Commissioner Lorenzo Harrison
Commissioner Bryce Presley (8:09pm)

Staff

Glenda Masters-Cultural Arts Manager
Lisa Azimi

Others present

Shawna Pena-Downing	Actress/Performer
Randy McCall and Jackie	Visual Artist
Erica Wilson	Musician

1. Approval of the Agenda

A motion was made by Commissioner Courtney, seconded by Commissioner Harrison, to approve the agenda. Approved by a 3-0 vote.

2. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

3. Approval of the November 8, 2021

A motion was made by Commissioner Harrison, seconded by Commissioner Courtney, to approve the November 8, 2021 action letter. Approved by a 4-0 vote.

4. Introductions and Information gathering from guests representing the Arts from the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Commissioners and guests introduced themselves and gave a brief background to the group. The following questions were discussed and key points were addressed.

Questions for discussion:

- **How is the city of Lee's Summit viewed by the Arts community of the Kansas City metropolitan area? Are issues of diversity and inclusion a part of these views?**

- What, if any, barriers do you perceive in being able to work in this community in general, or with individuals or arts organizations within Lee's Summit. What barriers, if any, are there which prevent Lee's Summit residents from fully enjoying the diversity of Arts and Culture offerings in the metropolitan area.
- What suggestions would you make to help our Commission on Diversity and Inclusion be an effective influence on Culture and Arts in Lee's Summit, and by extension the Kansas City metropolitan area?

5. Roundtable

Commissioner Courtney added the need to make things available and accessible, both financially and physically. Her big takeaway is finding our brand. People accept the diversity in the arts almost before they're willing to accept it in anything else.

Adjournment: 9:26 p.m.



Commission for Diversity & Inclusion

Culture and Arts Working Committee

*Committee Report to the Commission
(December 20, 2021)*

Committee Members

Ben Martin, Chair
Rachel Courtney, Member
Lorenzo Harrison, Member
Claudia Meyer, Member
Bryce Presley, Member

(December 20, 2021 via Zoom at 8:00 p.m.)

Attendance at Committee Meeting

**Ben Martin, Chair
Rachel Courtney
Lorenzo Harrison
Bryce Presley**

Narrative

The committee invited guest artists from both within and outside Lee's Summit to join us for discussion this evening. Those who attended were—

Shawna Pena-Downing	Actress/Performer
Randy McCall and Jackie	Visual Artist
Erica Wilson	Musician
Glenda Masters	Cultural Arts Manager-City staff

No public comment was received or heard at this meeting.

Meeting Focus

Our guests introduced themselves and gave brief background about themselves.

Erica Wilson-sings with the Afrobeat band Bantaba, performing throughout the Kansas City area. Teaches yoga and is a part time Assistant Montessori teacher.

Shawna Pena-Downing-Teaches performance arts and drama courses with a few companies in Kansas City. She is the Career Services Coordinator at Avila University helping students find their way after education. Her experience in theater led her to the current position in the arts and various capacities as a performer and teacher.

Commission for Diversity & Inclusion

Randy and Jackie McCall—Randy is an artist, playwright and writer. Jackie is a pastor at St. James United Methodist Church. She used to manage a gospel play and is on the Allies for Racial Justice in KC which is a partnership with Church of Resurrection and St James.

The committee had decided upon a set of questions to begin to guide the discussion. They were.

Questions for discussion:

- **How is the city of Lee's Summit viewed by the Arts community of the Kansas City metropolitan area? Are issues of diversity and inclusion a part of these views?**
- **What, if any, barriers do you perceive in being able to work in this community in general, or with individuals or arts organizations within Lee's Summit. What barriers, if any, are there which prevent Lee's Summit residents from fully enjoying the diversity of Arts and Culture offerings in the metropolitan area.**
- **What suggestions would you make to help our Commission on Diversity and Inclusion be an effective influence on Culture and Arts in Lee's Summit, and by extension the Kansas City metropolitan area?**

Several key points were raised during the discussion. They were

1. If the city is serious about recognizing diversity perhaps that needs to be apparent in official displays. Nowhere in the holiday display were there references to kwanzaa. It is a small gesture but one that would help many people see themselves as part of the community.

2. There are perceptual barriers that keep some performers from feeling welcome in Lee's Summit. The information that was shared with the committee went like this—One of the panelists has never gigged in Lee's Summit. She consulted friends before the meeting and found that the perception is that the further out of the Kansas City center you go the more likely it is you have to know someone and maybe even pay them to play. Commissioner Courtney shared an incident that was illustrative of a part of the problem. She was at a local restaurant that had a live band. She mentioned Ms. Wilson's Afrofusion band to the manager, who wrote it down, but then walked away and appeared to drop it in the trash.

3. The perceptual barrier works in other ways as well. Ms. Pena-Downing talked about a number of music and arts festivals that celebrate diverse contributions of various cultures. But those performers and artists are not even aware of any kind of arts scene in Lee's Summit. In some ways, the city, both public and private interests, needs to reach out to these artists to let them know of opportunities like the Legacy Amphitheatre, Downtown Days, etc.

4. The McCalls, who have only recently moved to Lee's Summit from St. Louis were actually surprised by the level of diversity that exists in Lee's Summit, but noted that the city really is not publicizing that. Can branding and outreach be created to address that? They, like many other families of color, like the city and want to make this their permanent home. Making the city more reflective of their culture will help them feel like they belong.

5. A number of other barriers were also discussed. Housing is expensive, Transportation to other parts of the metro requires you to drive your own vehicles. And perception plays a role here, too. Lee's Summit has not established itself as a place to go to for a wide range of experiences. Can we find a niche in the overall culture of metropolitan KC?

6. There was a lot of discussion about the youth and what they may or may not be receiving through the schools. Overall, there seemed to be general satisfaction with diversity of arts offerings, but what about opportunities for students to experience a wide variety of art forms outside of school. Currently, if a young person wants to experience that variety, they must leave Lee's Summit to visit other parts of the metro.

Recommendations to the Commission based on the conversations in committee

1. Explore how businesses can incorporate more varied art and performance in their yearly schedule.
2. Investigate ways for the city to be more inclusive when presenting a public image in displays or promotional materials.
3. Arts and culture still have the potential to be a leader in this work. A diverse cultural scene can be the vanguard for creating more acceptance of diversity in the community as a whole.

Commission actions needed

None at this time. The committee will meet again this month on January 10th (if we return to our consistent date schedule). We plan to use this meeting to reflect on the comments we have heard so far and to plan our next steps.

Respectfully submitted,

Ben Martin, Chair
Culture and Arts Subcommittee