

June 24, 2022

Dear Councilor Brown,

I am writing regarding my concern over a lack of diversity on appointed commissions and committees within the City of Concord. I hope that some recent (and some less recent) experiences of me and my family can shed light on this issue and why I believe it is important to address.

As a student at Concord High School my wife was told by a local attorney that the only reason she was admitted to a selective college was because she was brown (completely ignoring, apparently, the fact that she was salutatorian and honor society president). I could go on about other ignorant comments or experiences that have occurred over the years, but I raise this one event to simply provide some context. I would ask you to take a moment to consider the circumstances that would lead to this comment being made, how often you think things like this occur, and how you think this sort of thing might affect young people in our community.

The City of Concord has published a purported equity and diversity policy, but at least as far as appointed commissions and committees go there appears to be no actual action being taken around this policy. This is misleading and counterproductive and is at best lazy and at worst a manifestation of the legacy of past practices and systemic issues that maintain the status quo for those in power. In engaging with the Conservation Commission recently it came to light that two members have been on this commission for twenty years. When I asked about racial, ethnic and occupational diversity on this commission I was told that the city didn't track that sort of information. But it is clear that there is very little diversity - and no wonder when there are no term limits and members are reappointed over and over again for two decades. However, our community has changed a great deal in the last twenty years - it was recently reported that one in five students at Concord High School are non-white. To those that serve on appointed commissions, and to those that appoint them, I would ask: If these students were to question why almost every city commission has no brown or black people on it, what would your response be?

It is a common refrain that New Hampshire is just a very white state, or that in a small town like Concord diversity doesn't exist. These notions are nonsense and are partially fueled by implicit biases, and they perpetuate a lack of representation for historically underrepresented groups.

If the moral or ethical arguments around diversity do not persuade people here, perhaps the financial one will: A study by consulting firm McKinsey & Company found that companies in the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity in management were 35% more likely to have above-average financial returns compared to peer companies. In other words the lack of diversity on city commissions and committees is likely costing us money.

I've spent most of my 20-year career working to empower marginalized communities. Through this work it is clear to me that in order for long-term, sustainable change to occur diverse groups of people need to have a seat at the table. Serving on city commissions and committees brings with it business opportunities, resume-building, connections and access. They are also often a stepping-stone to running for elected positions. There are innumerable and long-lasting ripple effects when historically underrepresented groups continue to not be appointed to these institutions.

This first step in fixing a problem is to acknowledge that there is a problem. If Concord wants to market itself as a welcoming and vibrant community it needs to recognize the lack of diversity among those who have been appointed to public commissions and committees. Putting words on a website is not the same as making actionable choices and standing up for what is right and just. I appreciate your time and attention on these issues.

Sincerely,

Kevin Porter