

City of Markham Council - General Committee Meeting of April 19, 2022

Agenda Item 8.1: Diversity Action Plan and Anti-Black Racism Plan

Statement by Dr. Mary Anne Chambers, Special Advisor to the City of Markham
on Anti-Black Racism

Mr. Mayor, Chair and Members of City Council, I regret that due to a prior commitment, I am unable to attend today's meeting to speak to the report and resolutions on the Diversity Action Plan and Anti-Black Racism Plan that are before you for consideration and approval. I very much appreciate the opportunity to have my remarks shared with you in my absence.

It often seems that time goes by so quickly when we are having fun. You might be feeling that way about the long weekend that just went by. You will also no doubt recall how slowly time seemed to go by when you were waiting for exam results after long days and late nights of anxious preparation and a sense of urgency when you needed the results in order to make plans for the steps you wanted to take next. Those long waits can be stressful and extremely humbling as you await a fate that seems to be in the hands of others although the hard work has been done by you and it is your future that will be impacted by the decisions on that essay that you hope the professor will like. I have used that analogy to describe where we are today, in relation to the steps to be taken next to realize the implementation of the new Diversity Action Plan and Anti-Black Racism Plan.

We each have some control over our lives, the rest is often left to the judgement of others. As I think this through, I am recalling my campaign for provincial election

almost 2 decades ago. You might also be thinking about your campaign for municipal election. We might think we have earned the result we desire yet ultimately, our fate is determined by the favour and preference shown and the decisions made, by the electorate. We serve at their pleasure. I am thinking of you as the electorate as you consider and determine the fate of the Plans before you today.

Forty six years ago, as our airplane landed in Toronto bringing me, my husband, and our two young sons to Canada, the country we had chosen to make our home, I made two promises that I remember as though that happened today. I promised myself and my family that Canada would be good for us and I promised Canada that my family would be good for this country.

I cringe as I acknowledge that when the Statistics Canada 2016 Census reports that 59 percent of the population of the City of Markham are immigrants, that includes me and my husband. On the other hand, I have no problem with the fact that we are counted in the 78 percent of the population of the City of Markham that is described as racialized. In my mind there is a very important distinction to be made between the two classifications. I am black, for sure. That will never change, even if I wanted it to change, which I don't. But while I chose to immigrate to this country 46 years ago, I believe I have been living up to the promise that I made, that I would be good for Canada. I subscribe to the Proverb that advises us to grow where we are planted and I consistently speak with genuine pride about being Canadian.

My heart hurt when I read the summary of responses to questions referenced in the Anti-Black Racism Plan

- 68 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I have experienced anti-black racism.”;
- 55 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that other communities are allies of the Black community;
- 51 percent of those asked, disagreed or strongly disagreed that the City regularly seeks feedback from the Black community on policies, programs and initiatives;
- 44 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that the City provides opportunities for all to learn about Black history and culture.

I know we can do better than that as a City. I know that because I sensed your support as a Council and I felt the engagement and support of the City’s Commissioners and senior management when we discussed the *Let’s Talk Racism* awareness training that was conducted last year. I know there is a real commitment to do better because I have experienced it in discussions with the Mayor, the Chief Administration Officer and the Chief Human Resources Officer. I thank you for that and I ask that you support the next steps that are outlined in the resolutions before you for approval today.

Last year, it was acknowledged that the Diversity Action Plan which had been in place for more than 10 years was due for a significant overhaul. That has been done in a manner that reflects thoughtful consultation with members of the Markham community. The recommendations also recognize the importance of measurement

and accountability and the reality that as things change, so also should our Plans be able to adapt and be strengthened.

I ask you to imagine the focus of the Plans before you, and the recommendations that you are being asked to support. Most of all, I ask you to consider the lives that you will have the ability to impact for the better, not for their own satisfaction necessarily but the larger picture, that is the quality of life that the recommendations could help to determine for all who call the City of Markham home.

I refer to recommendations like those that will assist in attracting, developing, promoting and retaining diverse talent in order to achieve the City's strategic plan to provide exceptional services by exceptional people. I also refer to recommendations that will support entrepreneurship and business development where businesses that target diverse marketplaces feel welcome.

A City where every resident is able to contribute to their full potential can obviously target its investments in ways that provide greater returns for the City. All of this will enable the City to do more to ensure that it is the destination of choice for the best talent, and the ideal place to live, work and do business.

This is not just a good thing to do. It's the smart thing to do.

Thank you.