

City of Salem, Massachusetts



**"Know Your Rights Under the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. c. 30A ss. 18-25 and**

**City Ordinance Sections 2-2028 through 2-2033."**

The City Council Committee on Government Services co-posted with Committee of the Whole

met remotely via zoom on Wednesday, February 16, 2022 at 6:30 P.M.

for the purpose of discussing the matters(s) listed below. Notice of this meeting was posted on February 14, 2022 at 2:41 P.M.

(This meeting is being recorded)

**ATTENDANCE** All members of committee as well as Councillors Merkl, Riccardi, Prosniewski and Dominguez. Elizabeth Solomon and Alphone Wright

**ABSENT WERE:** None

**SUBJECT(S)**

#28 – Meet to discuss creating a Land Acknowledgement Statement for the Council to read at the opening of Council Meetings

ES: Elizabeth Solomon  
JC: Councillor Cohen  
AW: Alphonse Wright  
LM: Councillor McClain

Elizabeth, - Thank you. There has been a tendency in the past few years, though more so in other countries. There has been a flurry around this in the last few years. There has been a progression of thinking in the indigenous community around land acknowledgements. Initially it was exciting to hear that people were doing these, as we felt invisible particularly in the northeast. It has recently become trendy, and that is the feeling. For a long time, I have been encouraging any group to take some time to think about why a group wants to do a land acknowledgment. This is something that any institution or municipality is a very individual thing that people need to do their internal work around if any institution wants to do a land acknowledgment. What does this mean going forward? Are we just checking the box, does this mean something in terms of how we are engaging with indigenous communities or will we do something? What does this mean? There is a big range. I have seen many folks being concerned

about what this means, particularly when attorneys get involved. We are acknowledging that we are the original inhabitants, and we are still here. We are not talking about titles and land, our tribe has made an explicit decision to do nothing that would displace others. That happened to us, we don't do it to others. We are all here together, we will all stay here together. We need to find ways to collaborate in ways that honor all of us. Does that mean that the history we are talking about is not difficult? No. That's the history. How we are now and how we move forward is important. As I said to Ty, my approach with the city of Salem is very different than other municipalities. We have found our interactions with Salem to be very welcoming and open. I have worked very closely with Elizabeth Peterson, who I can not speak highly enough about. I feel there is an interest in engagement in Salem. Our tradition is around relationships not transactions. The idea of building relationships is what we value the most. If I were speaking with another municipality with whom we have had no interaction, this would be different, because we would have no relationship. I feel more comfortable exploring this with Salem.

Alphonse - I feel much more comfortable about his process with your presence Elizabeth. Councillor Cohen may be able to speak to this more. I can speak about why we decided to discontinue. I felt the topic of indigenous peoples was currently just lip service, until we were doing something with or for indigenous people I didn't want to do something that felt fake. I am hopeful that this process will result in something positive, and I will be happy to start this again.

Jeff Cohen - 6 or 7 years ago, Mike Millett brought to our attention his desire to have indigenous peoples day as a holiday in Salem. We spent many years in necessary and uncomfortable conversations. At some point we brought this to then councillor Madore, who was liaison to NP4H. We met, this was the impetus for the city doing indigenous peoples day. Fara Wolfson started the process of us having a land acknowledgment. I don't disagree with Alphonse, we need an ongoing dial

Megan Riccardi - Thank you to our guests for visiting, these are difficult conversations but they are important to have. This isn't easy. It is important to stretch the conversation outside of just October November. In Canada even at private corporations, they state a land acknowledgment. I have been trying to understand the background. We need to talk about Why. Here are my whys. To have this topic be something that is something that people are discussing, it should be on everyone's mind. There is no way to do this without doing this. Use the platform we have to make a statement. Why do we want to do this? What is the conversation behind that piece. I appreciate the information that has been presented here. Important to be able to have everyone

Alice Merkl - I want to reiterate what Councillor Riccardi said, this needs to be a thoughtful process. These are great perspectives and food for thought. Glad to hear about your interactions with the people of Salem. If this is a learning process, important to take a step in this direction. Grateful for the conversation

Elizabeth Solomon - I didn't work directly with Elizabeth Peterson on the land acknowledgement. Have worked with Salem on the portrait that has been commissioned by the city of Salem. The development of that relationship is already in process. Want people aware of what the history of this place is before colonization, so much emphasis on the colonial history of Salem. I would encourage folks to go a little bit further. A land acknowledgment done once doesn't have to stay that way forever. This is fine, more educational than anything else. A land acknowledgement is specific to the needs of the organization or municipality

Caroline Watson Felt - Thank you so much for being here Ms Solomon. I personally feel that acknowledgements are an important act of humility. I am a history nerd. I think about this frequently, this is meditative. It is complicated for me to think about how we function inside this. Acknowledge continued issues. Statement in City hall does not recognize colonization, a statement from the council should recognize this. This is one way to bring attention

Andy Varella - I appreciate your perspective about how we can do more with this conversation. The one thing that sums this up is land use, how we use this land. We have started some conversations about how to use land for agriculture. At Mack Park we practice traditional agriculture. Important to continue this conversation about how this land is used, continue this conversation. We can do more with this. Make mor impactful.

ES - we wouldn't say land use, our cosmology would see ourselves as part of the land part of the environment, not as a people who use the environment. That's exceiting to me, currently involved in rematriation process.

JC - Thank you all for coming, so much synergy, appreciate councillor watson felt. There was a reference to colonization in what NP4H came up with. There are states passing laws so that people can't teach things. My minor was history, I never learned about the Tulsa Massacre, how many people in Salem know what the word Naumkeag means. If we are going to approach an equitable society, we need to know why we got here. Important

LM - Thank you for joining us for this conversation. What are your opinion of the elements of a successful ongoing relationship, how does this happen

ES - What are the other municipalities doing? Salem is the model! Salem has taken the lead in a very positive way. All relationships are different. Salem is different than Beverly. Where are we where do we want to go. A land acknowledgement should evolve over time, just as relationships do. No one in our tribe lives in Salem, but that doesn't change our connection to the place. WE are currently on a good path.

LM - land use. I've noticed one of the things that has come forward is our response to climate change. That feels very connected to place in a way our conversations aren't. What is the indigenous perspective on this moment, what is the tie in.

ES O Stone living lab, primarily focussed in Umass Boston, a lab that is looking at coastal resilience. I'm on the lab and board there. These are the issues that are coming up. 10,000 years ago Boston harbor was dry land, well past harbor island. We don't live in a Static world. Internalize that. The world will change, we need to change with it. People are always thinking about "how can we presever the world as it is?" not possible in the long term. When we talk long term we talk 2-300 years not 50 years. Don't just look at immediate. What are things going to look like in 300 years.

Alphonse Wright - as the language has come up, I can share

ES - This is actually quite good, talks about it is one step. I would like to see something around relationships. Attorneys may have an issue with the word "unceded" I don't require that entities put the word unceded into a statement, that may be a stumbling block moving forward. We never believed that we held the land, we still hold the land. Unceded is the truth, it's a tough truth.

ES - Relationships - why are you doing what is your responsibility? What does that mean? That should discuss relationship building. For instance: "Salem will undertake to include indigenous history in everything it does" Dependant on the interest, commitment, capacity of what we are doing. We are talking about the possibility of co-management of spaces in the Harbor Islands. There is no set answer, this is about relationsh

Council President Morsillo - I want to take the time to make sure that if we do this we do this the right way. We want to ensure it's not just a part of the agenda. We're not here for the next 20 years, these seats change, we have to build into it that we come back to it every two years. You have to continue to look at things and have a fresh perspective. I would like this to ground us as Councillors. Much of what we do has to do with how we interact with the land. That struck me in the conversation, this is going to take some time.

Councillor Prosniewski - Thank you, I can feel the passion in what you are talking about, I have nothing but the utmost respect for what we are doing. When we were sworn in, the clerk took us to the vault and showed us the deed, the parchment. I thought this is such priceless history. I was taught that indigenous people never viewed land as something to be sold. Listening to this brings back waves of thoughts about why we're here. The city has taken the right path by commissioning a portrait. Looking forward to seeing the portrait. Land acknowledgement is nice, good to recognize. I challenge us to do something.

AW - A question for the council as a whole, I would be happy to help draft this. Councillor Morsillo and Prosniewski made

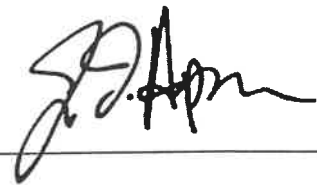
JC - Move to keep in committee, meet within the next 2 months. Coordinate a first draft with human right coalition

AV - second

5-0 motion passes

ES - this has been a wonderful meeting, many municipal meetings. I offer my help

On motion of Councillor Varella 5-0 adjourn at 7:31pm

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. D. Apru', is written over a horizontal line.

(Chairperson)