



## **Meeting Minutes | March 7, 2023**

### **Present Members**

- Alphonse Wright | Chair
- Shimon Avish | Treasurer
- Pamela Geiser | Clerk
- Veronica Faustino | Member
- Katelyn Adams | Liason, Salem State University
- Lucy Corchado | Liason, Salem State University
- Julio Mota | Liason, City of Salem, Mayor's Office
- Captain John Burke | Liaison, Salem Police Department
- Jessica Rondinelli | Liaison, Salem Police Department
- Patti Morsillo | Liason, Salem City Council
- Elise Towle Snow | Member

### **Present Guests**

Chris Fuccione, Salem Democratic Committee Coordinator  
Alan Hanscom, SATV  
Robert McCarthy, Acting Mayor of Salem  
Jeff Cohen, Ward 5 Representative  
Steve Dibble, Candidate for Mayor of Salem  
Dominick Pangallo, Candidate for Mayor of Salem  
Alice Merkl, Salem City Councillor  
Meg Scott  
Debbie Tucker  
Skyler Clark, Witch City Action

**Meeting called to order, recording initiated.**

**Welcome and Introductions.**

**Opportunity for Public Comment.**

- Per Chris F. this Sunday, March 12<sup>th</sup> Witch City Action is holding a Mayoral Forum at 1:00 p.m. at Riley Plaza in Salem.

**Governor's Statement, read by Chair.**

### **Special Presentation "The Poverty Trap" by Veronica Faustino**

This presentation is not necessarily about the causes of poverty, but the concept of where people in poverty get stuck. Hopefully this will raise awareness. We will discuss the multidimensionality of poverty, where the trap lies, and the ways in which poverty is a human rights issue and public health concern.



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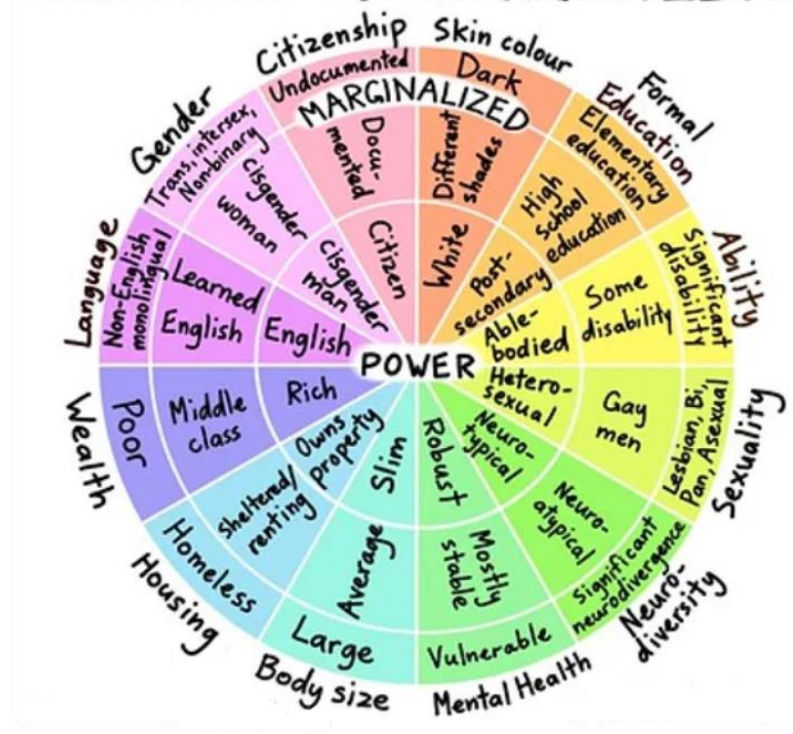
Veronica grew up in poverty, and in 2019, was in a family shelter. She secured housing through the Salem Housing Authority. In order to qualify, Veronica had to quit her job to prove she needed childcare through the Department of Transitional Assistance. Throughout this process, she had no choice but to learn how to navigate these complex systems.

Challenges, like even asking for help, can cause things like stigmatization. You feel and are treated differently when people know you are experiencing poverty. Even government agencies, who are supposed to offer support, make you feel like something is being held over your head – and that something – are basic needs like housing, food, clothing, and other resources. The lack of privacy, while needing to prove your qualifications to get help, is exhausting.

It's not about realizing you are stuck, and then getting out somehow. It just doesn't work like that. For 17.61% of our residents in Salem, a life in poverty is an everyday experience. Nearly a third of low-moderate income residents experience severe cost burdens wherein 50% or more of their income goes to housing needs *alone*.

A person who is poor can suffer **multiple** issues at once – like no healthcare, no childcare, no food...much of it dependent on their place on the wheel of Power/Privilege below:

### WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE





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It's also not as simple as increasing your income - a new job may disqualify you from some benefit programs but does not pay enough to make up the difference. It's the law of diminishing returns.

Economic shocks affect behavior, and our sense of security is affected. This causes people to experience a poor quality of life and become disengaged politically.

Policies for "Social Protection" provide resources of support as folks climb the ladder. So Veronica asks: "What is Salem's role in addressing poverty?" A place to start is to be as aware as possible of our privilege and how we can use it to make an impact.

Our culture of governance tends to exclude the poor from decision making process. By bringing those experiencing poverty to the table and giving them input, leaders can allow them space to exist and express their needs, too. It's important to be accessible and understandable to all ages and abilities, low literacy, ESL, etc.

An opportunity for Salem is Universal Basic Income. Cambridge was the first in MA to do this using ARPA funding.

It's also important that we develop affordable housing Policies, affordable housing itself, and elect lived-experience members on relevant Boards.

The Mother of revolution and crime is poverty." - Aristotle

Alphonse: Based on the Living Wage Calculator, a single adult with no kids needs to make \$27.50/hour to avoid living in poverty. Our Federal Minimum Wage is only \$15. Add kids to the mix, and a single parent with one child must make \$46.84/hour.

Patti: Inflation and rental increases since pandemic have increased need. Push for more than 10% affordable rental units. There has to be a balance. Salem's poverty numbers are not that different than the national average of 30% - should be addressed at the State and National level, too.

Alphonse: Time poverty also exists. For those who may not know what that is, think of it this way: if I need to make an appointment with an Agency to get the help that I need, but I need to take the bus – I am then at a loss of time to be able to get to my appointment in the event something happens, like the bus is late, breaks down, etc. This is just one example.



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Steve: Need senior housing to open up small and large homes. Asked to stop taking business properties off the market and use them as housing. Addressed costs of Boston housing vs. Salem housing rising together.

Dominick: Pushing back that housing goes up in pricing because the supply of housing is not sufficient. The solution to rising costs is to right-size the housing supply. Fewer investments in housing in Salem than in many cities. Back to Veronica's point, what can make Government Agencies more approachable and alleviate the stigma of utilizing these support systems; and second, how do you get people with lived-experience to Board meetings or for public comments?

Veronica: For State Agencies, seems to be an effect of Compassion Fatigue, lack of employee support that would enable them to better serve their clients. For bringing people to the table, the language of Board meetings is not always accessible. Access and language are important to get new voices on Boards in marginalized communities.

Jeff: Some in our community look past those that are poorer than others. We should be living as a community not detract from people who can't afford to live here. SNAP Benefits ending will also cause a significant need for food security.

Bob: Recently toured the Shetland Park food pantry, and allocated ARPA funds to them. They serve 2,500 residences, and now have a food van to make mobile deliveries. They are in need of expansion, but we need long lasting solutions. Perhaps we could allocate a meals tax fund to improve food security benefits? Adjust the inclusionary zone to create affordable density bonuses?

Patti: We should see what the State Representatives are up to with the new Administration's housing focus.

Julio: Motion to end pending rejoin on another platform.

Alice: Veronica, everything you've said is spot on. You curb everything in your life to avoid risk when you're poor, and the trauma of that builds up over time.

We should look into Uniform Base Income since Salem has not done so yet. What are the pros and cons? Boston just instituted a Food Rescue Program – maybe we can look into incentives vs. the ordinance?

### Officer Reports



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### **A. Chairs**

General Updates. Bylaws Subcommittee will finalize draft edits for presentation to the Coalition at the next meeting.

### **B. Clerk**

Requested approval of Minutes from February 7, 2023 – unanimously approved. Julio will post to SHRC website with past Minutes.

### **C. Treasurer**

Current Balance \$225.29. Lucy and Shimon both reimbursed, and nothing is owed.

### **Liaison Reports**

#### **A. Julio Mota, Mayor's Office**

The City of Salem is offering Spanish classes to all City employees. They are so popular they're adding a second session!

#### **B. Capt. John Burke, SPD**

The complaint brought up at our last meeting was investigated by our CID Lt. as an IA case. We had a meeting with the chair and were able to show him the BWC (body worn camera). The complaint was found to be unfounded regarding the bias allegation. The complainant had been arrested after an incident in her apartment building. Nothing else new to report.

#### **C. Katelyn Adams & Lucy Corchado, SSU**

SSU is celebrating Advocacy Month and Earth programming in April. Details <https://www.salemstate.edu/calendar>.

### **Upcoming Events**

Salem Public Schools will host a series of virtual forums on Tuesday, March 14th, with the finalists for the position of Executive Director of Special Education. Finalists are listed below, along with a link to their respective forums.

- 5:00 p.m. - Michael Lister, current Principal at Saltonstall School (Salem)  
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87257549313?pwd=VDBSOghLYVdrQzlpMTZOSzRsSzhmQT09>
- 6:00 p.m. - Jennifer Doucette-Ly, current Director of Elementary Special Education (Salem)  
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83893531340?pwd=c0tpRUhjZkxPcnZCdjhvRUNpSzdRdz09>

### **Next Scheduled Meeting**

April 4, 2023

### **Adjournment**