

DECLARATION OF INCLUSION

A Vermont Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiative

Vermont's Declaration of Inclusion is a grassroots effort working with community leaders to reinforce the message that Vermont is a welcoming, safe place for all.

Partners include:

**Vermont League of Cities and Towns
Vermont State Chamber of Commerce
Vermont Social Equity Caucus
Vermont NAACP**

Website: vtdeclarationofinclusion.org

INTRODUCTION

It is our vision that Vermont will become known as the most inclusive state in our nation for all people regardless of identity.

With that vision in mind, in January of 2021 a small group of Vermont citizens organized to develop strategies to assist the State, cities and towns in the planning, adoption and implementation of a Declaration of Inclusion.

The information following is intended for use by those who are interested in learning more about this initiative as well as providing thoughts for Select Boards, Town Managers and legislators who wish to lead that initiative in their communities.

BACKGROUND

Distressed by recent catastrophic events unfolding across the country relating to human rights, justice and equality, Bob Harnish, a long-time resident of Pittsford, decided to do something. His concern led him to Al Wakefield, a former businessman in the Rutland area, who shared a similar distress and felt a need to do something “hands on”.

Together, the pair began thinking of an overarching statement that would build on Vermont’s agreed upon uniqueness, its long standing reputation for leadership in addressing injustices, and ensure that events occurring in Wisconsin, Minnesota, New York and other states do not happen here. They realized that, at the same time, such a statement could attract people with myriad skills and traditions to Vermont to live, work and raise families. They found that statement in the Declaration of Inclusion first adopted by the Town of Franklin in 2020.

INTENT OF THE DECLARATION OF INCLUSION

The intent of the Declaration of Inclusion is to indicate and reinforce the message to all visitors, residents, and those thinking about or planning to come and stay, that:

Vermont is a welcoming community

Vermont invites all to bring their families and friends as well as their talents and skills

Vermont is a community of people who will treat them fairly, provide encouragement and support for their interests, and

Vermont will bring the full resources of the State, its cities and towns to ensure their well-being and security.

THE DECLARATION OF INCLUSION

The Town of Burlington condemns racism and welcomes all persons regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, age or disability and wants everyone to feel safe and welcome in our community.

As a town, we formally condemn discrimination in all its forms, commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community and will strive to ensure all our actions, policies and operating procedures reflect this commitment.

The Town of Burlington is and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions.

By the _____ City Council _____ 2022

GOAL STATEMENT

To have each Vermont municipality adopt and implement a Declaration of Inclusion.

ADOPT means formal approval by the municipalities governing body.

IMPLEMENT means the enactment and furtherance of plans, policies, programs, procedures and relevant training which support and advance the intent and spirit of the Declaration.

REASONS TO ADOPT

A Declaration such as this would mark the town and its leaders as a forward-thinking community of people, stepping out in front for what we know is right and deeply rooted in the values that America and Vermont say they champion.

We were all taught that America assimilates people from all over the world;

America has always claimed to welcome diverse people and embraced their cultures, languages, foods, customs, religions and traditions. This has not always been true but let us now move forward to make this a reality. Let's take this small but affirmative step toward the American ideal as stated in our precious constitution.

THOUGHTS ON SELECT BOARD LEADERSHIP

Select Board members are recognized by their towns for their leadership skills and are respected for their good judgement.

Acting on a Declaration of Inclusion is the type of Select Board action that is expected by the voters.

The role of the Select Board is changing. It is no longer limited to budgets, law enforcement and maintaining infrastructure.

Select Boards are now called upon to affirmatively and aggressively institute and promote policies and programs which support economic growth

By adopting a Declaration of Inclusion, a Select Board sends a powerful, positive, forward-thinking message for the town and aligns it with other towns that are seeking healthy growth.

By adopting the Declaration of Inclusion the Select Board joins the statewide effort to encourage businesses, talented individuals and investors to come to Vermont and specifically to your town.

By adopting the Declaration of Inclusion the town signals its agreement with the Governor's Proclamation of Inclusion.

OUR VISION FOR "PROJECT INCLUSION"

The goal is to increase diversity, abolish racism and have our towns, their employees and policies manifest respect for the dignity of all people. This is the obligation of our largely white population and we will benefit and grow from it.

Municipal leaders and law enforcement officials must engage effectively with community members on the subject of systemic racism, racial justice, public safety and law enforcement. They need to lead the public in conversation on these and other issues important to an increasingly diverse population.

There are many State organizations ready to help: The Vermont Chamber of Commerce, The Vermont League of Cities and Towns, the Vermont Office of Racial Equity, the Vermont Equity Caucus, the Vermont NAACP and the Vermont Council on Rural Development.

CONTACTS

Al Wakefield al@wakefield-global.com 802 770 3958

Bob Harnish rharnish24@gmail.com 802 779 7714

Norman Cohen norcoh26@gmail.com 802 558 1998

OF COUNSEL

Liz Weinmann

Elicia Pinsonault

