

Oshawa Community Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday, November 25, 2025

Meeting Time: 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM

Location: Virtual

Present: Saumya Bhasin, Elle de Lyon, Leah Norman, Jacob Powless, Lee Rosen, Donald Shields, David Mandziuk, Sadie Goddard-Durant, Ariela Kong, Nadea Clarke, Kweku Winful, Pam Reines

Regrets: Maria Chinelli, Christine Goodwin, Ayesha Khan

Staff: Vanessa Abban, Sana Kohistani, Catherine Richards

Guest presenters: Lauren Gould (Extra Cardamom), Seema Jethalal (Extra Cardamom)

Meeting Notes

1. Welcome

- V. Abban opened the meeting.

2. Land Acknowledgement

- V. Abban read the City of Oshawa's Land Acknowledgement.

3. African Ancestral Acknowledgement

- V. Abban read the African Ancestral Acknowledgement.

4. Approval of Agenda

- P. Reines moved to approve the agenda. Members agreed.

5. City Update

- The City's grants program is now open. Applications are due December 31. More information is available on the City's website.
- New member, David Mandziuk, was welcomed to the Committee. D. Mandziuk is completing the term of departing member F. Milfort.

- “Stronger Together: Celebrating Our Cultures,” an upcoming event exploring similarities and differences across cultures, will take place on December 11 at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery. Event details will be shared with the Committee.
- Staff recently concluded the Employee Demographic Census and have launched a follow-up survey and focus groups as part of the D.E.I.A.A. Strategy development.
- Analysis and engagement on the D.E.I.A.A. Strategy will continue through December.

6. 2026 Work Planning

- V. Abban presented the report from the D.E.I. Forum held earlier this year and outlined the key action items identified through community engagement.
- Members were invited to discuss priorities and opportunities for the 2026 work plan.
- Members expressed interest in community engagement activities, including regular town halls to amplify diverse voices, elevate youth voices, and build community capacity.
 - Members prioritized increasing visibility and strengthening engagement with Council, particularly during the annual special Council meeting in May where the Committee shares progress and updates.
 - Members also emphasized strengthening engagement with City staff and exploring additional opportunities to support ongoing D.E.I.-related initiatives.
 - The Committee discussed how recommendations from the D.E.I. Forum can be mobilized and presented to Council as advocacy points supported by community input.
- Questions were raised regarding the differences between advisory committees and the Committee’s current structure, including potential benefits and limitations.
 - Members expressed interest in connecting with other advisory committees to learn about their processes and explore opportunities for collaboration.

7. Culture Plan Consultation (Extra Cardamom)

- L. Gould and S. Jethalal facilitated a consultation session as part of the development of the City's new Culture Plan.
- The previous Culture Plan was created in 2014. The City is undertaking extensive public engagement, focus groups, benchmarking, and economic impact analysis to reflect current community needs and growth.
- The Committee was invited to respond to the following four questions about culture in Oshawa.
- Question 1: What does culture mean in Oshawa?
 - Culture was described as belonging, shared practices, community connection, and everyday experiences.
 - Participants valued family-friendly events, grassroots initiatives, and the growing diversity in the city.
 - Accessibility, limited promotion, and lack of diverse leadership were noted as barriers.
 - Participants expressed interest in more inclusive programming, stronger collaboration with community groups, and improved outreach.
 - Suggestions included improved public spaces, mentorship and leadership opportunities, and integrating Indigenous knowledge into planning.
 - Participants envisioned a future with more representation, walkable and vibrant spaces, and stronger partnerships between residents and the City.
- Question 2: Cultural life in Oshawa (events, spaces, traditions, creative practices)
 - Participants were asked to reflect on equity-deserving communities and identify what is working well and which events, spaces, or cultural practices make them feel welcome, included, and reflected.
 - Participants valued family-friendly events, inclusive spaces, and community gatherings that foster a sense of belonging.
 - Accessibility was identified as essential to ensure all residents, including people with disabilities, can fully participate.
 - Oshawa's growing diversity and the contributions of grassroots groups were recognized as central to cultural life.

- Culture was described as shared traditions, food, arts, language, and everyday practices that reflect identity.
- Some noted that while cultural efforts exist, more transformative—not just performative—initiatives are needed.
- Question 3: How can the City better support participation in cultural life among equity-deserving communities?
 - Members noted barriers such as limited diversity in leadership and bylaws or systems that further marginalize communities.
 - Concerns were raised about the ongoing pressure on grassroots groups to deliver cultural programming with limited resources.
 - Accessibility, availability of community space, safety, and uneven distribution of cultural infrastructure across the City were identified as challenges.
 - Gaps in communication and outreach were noted, including the need for stronger social media presence, more accessible information, and better use of community spaces such as faith-based centres and local hubs.
 - Suggestions included improved urban planning, welcome materials for new residents, neighborhood-based initiatives to build connection, and broader City-wide involvement beyond D.E.I. alone.
- Question 4: Desired cultural changes over the next ten years
 - Participants expressed a desire for more equitable access to resources across the City, reducing the divide between north and south Oshawa, and ensuring services and cultural spaces are more evenly distributed.
 - There was strong interest in more diverse, community-driven leadership and strengthened City–community collaboration.
 - Participants called for long-term investments in grassroots groups, mentorship programs, youth engagement, and cultural programming that reflects Oshawa’s diversity.
 - A vision was shared for a culture grounded in accessibility, walkability, Indigenous knowledge, inclusive public spaces, and vibrant neighborhood-

level activities. Many stressed the need for deeper, transformative approaches rather than performative initiatives.

- Suggestions included increased visibility for equity-deserving communities through public art and banners.
- There was emphasis on expanded grants for cultural projects and festivals, along with broader advertising and outreach across multiple platforms.
- Participants supported greater use of community hubs such as libraries, faith-based centres, and neighborhood spaces for cultural workshops and events.
- Transparency, co-design with residents, safe and people-centered streets, and cultural initiatives that celebrate identity, belonging, and Oshawa's evolving character were also highlighted.

8. Adjournment

- Members agreed to adjourn the meeting.

The next meeting is January 27, 2025, 7:00PM – 9:00PM, Committee Room, City Hall.