Oshawa Community Diversity Equity & Inclusion Committee

Meeting Date: Monday, September 28, 2026
Meeting Time: 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM
Location: Civic Recreation Complex and Microsoft Teams

Members: Nadea Clarke (Vice Chair), Leah Norman, Ariela Kong, Chinonso Okafor, Lola Adenihun, De-Mario Knowles, Chantal Genereaux, David Mandziuk, Pam Reines (Chair), Lee Rosen, Maria Chinelli, Kweku Winful

Regrets: Saumya Bhasin, Elle de Lyon,

Staff: Enez Perkins, Vanessa Abban, Arpita Savaliya

Agenda

1. **Welcome**
    - P. Reines called the meeting to order and welcomed members to the first meeting of the term.
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**
    - K. Winful moved to approve the agenda. Members agreed.
5. **Introductions**
    - The committee participated in a roundtable of introductions.
    - New members were welcome to the committee, including Chinonso Okafor, Lola Adenihun, De-Mario Knowles and Chantal Genereaux
6. **City Update**
    - V. Abban shared that City updates will be provided to the committee as a memo included in the meeting packages to allow for more discussion time during the meetings.
    - The City Updates portion of the meeting will instead be dedicated for questions or feedback instead.
7. **National Day for Truth and Reconciliation**

- The committee shared their reflections on how they see themselves contributing to the larger commitments to Truth and Reconciliation.
- Committee members provided positive feedback about the *Honouring Truth and Reconciliation event* earlier in the day at Civic Square, noting that it felt authentic and was impactful for students and non-students alike.
- Members noted that resources for newcomers to understand their role toward Truth and Reconciliation would be valuable as they have limited exposure to these topics before coming to Canada and still have a responsibility towards reconciliation.

8. Discussions: Meeting dates and Chair elections

- Chair and vice-chair elections will be held during the October meeting.
- Chair and vice-chair are elected every year for a one-year term. There are no limits on the number of terms a committee member can be chair,
- Any committee members interested in running for either role should contact V**.** Abban and A. Savaliya to confirm they will be running.
- The committee agreed that future C.D.E.I.C. meetings will be held on the third Tuesday of each month.
- Please refer to Appendix A for the full meeting schedule and please refer to Appendix B for key committee dates.

9. Discussion: Bright and Merry Market

- The committee discussed the City's Bright and Merry Market and provided feedback on how the event could be more culturally inclusive.
- Discussion highlights include:
    - Consider rebranding the event with a broader, more inclusive winter-focused name.
    - Broaden the winter focus by maintaining Christmas elements but also incorporating elements from other holidays and celebrations taking place during the season.
    - Introduce and highlight winter attractions and activities through marketing channels.
        - Consider expanded photo opportunities and cultural programming.
    - Consider reviewing the marketing and outreach process for both vendors/artists/displayers and attendees to ensure the marketing reflects the event is inclusive and open to everyone.

    - The committee also recognized the importance of early-planning and recommended conducting a thorough review of the event's marketing and consolidating feedback for implementation next year.
- Please refer to Appendix C for detailed notes about the discussion.
- Action: Committee members to provide recommendations on performers, future programming and vendors
- Action: A.Savaliya to include information about Bright and Merry market and vendors/performers to D.E.I. webpage.
- The committee deferred discussions about broader recommendations to the events team for larger changes to another meeting.

10. Work planning

- The main function of the C.D.E.I.C. is to support the City's work, however, there may be some additional initiatives that the Committee works on or recommends.
- The committee engaged in a work planning and prioritization activity, drawing upon their recommendations to Council from the May 2026 Special Council Meeting and how the C.D.E.I.C.'s workplan for the 2026-2027 term can support those recommendations.
- The committee equally addressed ways to measure success with the ideas that were discussed.
- Action: A. Savaliya and V. Abban to consolidate notes from the discussion and share a workplan to the full committee before the October meeting.
- Action: Committee to review the proposed workplan and finalize it during October meeting.

11. Adjournment

- Members agreed to adjourn the meeting.

Next Meeting: October 20, 2026, 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.

Appendix A – Meeting Schedule

Community Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee 2026-2027 Meeting Schedule

The following meeting schedule for the C.D.E.I.C. was confirmed by members at the September 28, 2026, Committee meeting. Meetings will take place on the third Tuesday of the month.

1. Tuesday, October 20th, 2026 – 7-9 pm
2. Tuesday, November 17th, 2026 – 7-9 pm
3. Tuesday, January 19th, 2027 - 7-9 pm
4. Tuesday, February 16th, 2027 - 7-9 pm
5. Tuesday, March 16th, 2027 - 7-9 pm
6. Tuesday, April 20th, 2027 - 7-9 pm
7. May – Special Council Meeting TBC
8. Tuesday, June 15th, 2027 - 7-9 pm

Notes

- Meetings are held at City Hall or the Civic Recreation Complex unless otherwise noted. City Hall is located at 50 Centre St S. in Oshawa and the Civic Recreation Complex is located at 99 Thornton Rd. in Oshawa.
- There are no meetings in December, July, and August unless otherwise agreed by the committee.
- Committee members may agree to additional whole committee meetings and sub-committee meetings beyond this meeting schedule as needed.
- The date of the May meeting will be confirmed later to align with the Special Council Meeting on Accessibility and Diversity and Inclusion.

Appendix B – Key Committee Dates

- February – Black History Month
- April – D.E.I. Forum
- May – Asian and South Asian Heritage Month; Special Council Meeting
- June – Pride Month
- July – Disability Pride Month

Appendix C – Bright and Merry Market Discussion

Goal: To gather high-level feedback on how the Bright and Merry Market can be diversified through programming, marketing, and outreach, and how it can be positioned as an inclusive and welcoming event for all attendees.

Overall Perception and Branding

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was that the current branding and presentation of the Bright and Merry Market is strongly associated with Christmas, which may unintentionally discourage participation from community members, vendors, and performers who do not celebrate Christmas.

Suggestions for future consideration:

- Explore rebranding the event with a broader, more inclusive winter-focused name such as:
    - Oshawa Winter Market
    - Oshawa Winter Festival
    - Oshawa Winter Carnival
- The name “Bright and Merry” is often perceived as Christmas-specific. A more neutral name may help signal that the event is intended for all residents.
- Members referenced the approach taken by the Black Queens of Durham Christmas market, which maintains a winter and holiday atmosphere while using more neutral framing.

Event Theme and Programming

Broaden the winter focus

Rather than centering the event primarily around Christmas, members suggested celebrating winter more broadly and recognizing the variety of holidays and cultural celebrations that occur throughout the season.

Members emphasized that Christmas elements should remain part of the event, as many residents celebrate and value those traditions. The recommendation was to add to the existing programming rather than remove existing Christmas-focused elements.

Recommendations included:

- Incorporating elements from other cultural celebrations that occur during the event period
- Recognizing celebrations such as Diwali through visual elements like lamps, candles, or light displays

- Highlighting the diversity of winter traditions and festivities represented within the community
- Add cultural and seasonal elements rather than removing the existing Christmas features
- Position Christmas as one aspect of a broader celebration of winter and community

Attractions and Activities

Introduce Additional Signature Features

Members suggested looking into other winter festivals and markets and how they create prominent attractions that are not solely associated with Christmas.

Examples included:

- Ice sculpture displays or competitions (like Quebec)
- Winter art installations
- Snow and winter-themed photo opportunities
- Features inspired by winter festivals such as the Quebec Winter Carnival

The goal would be to create alternate focal points that encourage participation regardless of cultural or religious background.

Suggestions included:

Expanded Photo Opportunities

- Offering photo opportunities with winter-themed characters or displays (e.g., snowmen) in addition to photos with Santa
- Promoting a variety of winter experiences rather than primarily emphasizing Santa-related activities

Cultural Programming

- Inviting a henna artist to participate in the market
- Exploring opportunities for cultural demonstrations, performances, and artistic showcases that reflect Oshawa's diverse communities.

Vendor, Artist, and Performer Recruitment

Inclusive Outreach

Members noted that potential vendors and performers may self-select out of applying because they perceive the event as a Christmas market and do not see themselves fitting within that context

Recommendations included:

- Reviewing how opportunities are promoted and described
- Communicating clearly that the market welcomes diverse vendors, artists, performers, and cultural organizations.

Action Item:

- C.D.E.I.C. members to share the application form to vendors, performers, and market organizers within their network, highlighting that the City is actively seeking a diverse array of artisans and that it is a general, winter market rather than a Christmas market.

Application Process

Questions were raised regarding:

- Whether the current vendor application process provides enough flexibility or options for diverse participants
- How performers are expected to apply and whether that pathway is clearly communicated

Marketing and Communications

Shift Marketing Messaging

Several comments focused on the possibility that the event itself may already be welcoming, but the marketing may not effectively communicate that inclusivity.

Suggestions included:

- Reframing promotional materials to emphasize that the event is for everyone
- Highlighting the winter, community, art, culture, and seasonal celebration rather than leading primarily with Christmas-focused imagery and messaging
- Featuring a broader range of attractions, activities, and cultural experiences in promotional materials

Targeted Outreach

Recommendations included:

- Featuring vendor, artist, and performer calls on the D.E.I. page of the City's website and its related channels
- Exploring targeted social media outreach to communities that may not traditionally participate in the market
- Expanding communications beyond existing audiences to attract a more diverse pool of applicants and attendees

Potential Future Role for the C.D.E.I.C.

If there is interest from the Events Team, C.D.E.I.C. members expressed willingness to support a future review of the event's marketing approach and outreach strategy.

Potential next steps include:

- Reviewing past promotional materials and messaging
- Understanding the Events Team's scope
- Identifying barriers that may discourage participation from communities that do not celebrate Christmas
- Developing recommendations to improve inclusivity and engagement
- Exploring these changes in advance of next year's event planning cycle

Key Takeaway

The feedback emphasized broadening the event's identity from a predominantly Christmas-focused market to a winter celebration that intentionally reflects the diversity of Oshawa's communities. Members generally supported maintaining the existing elements while adding new attractions, cultural elements, and marketing approaches that make a wider range of residents, vendors, artists, and performers feel welcomed and represented.