

**Dane County Housing Meeting, Mayor Paul Esser Remarks
Building Racial Equity and Inclusion, City of Sun Prairie
Thursday, September 17, 3:00 – 4:30 pm**

How Sun Prairie got started with racial diversity and inclusion initiative.

The City of Sun Prairie's efforts with diversity and inclusions starts in 2014 when I began to think about running for mayor. I was motivated to run because I wanted to have a conversation with the community about issues that I thought were important for our future and one of the issues was diversity and inclusion. I was prompted to be concerned about this after reading an article by the US Census Bureau saying that by 2050 white people in the USA would be a minority. This is a huge demographic change for the United States, and I believed our communities need to begin to prepare for it now.

Also, I was motivated to embrace diversity and inclusion because of my oldest son. Brian is gay. He is a fine person and I could not imagine that anyone would treat him differently just because of his sexual orientation. As he and his husband prepared for adopting children, they shared books with us detailing the life experiences of gay parents. I came to understand the way marginalize people may be treated just because of who they are.

So, diversity and inclusion became one of the three vision statements I had for my campaign along with transportation and updating our comprehensive plan.

During the election campaign, I said frequently that the Sun Prairie of the future needs to embrace all people who wish to live here. It is important that all people feel that this is a community that welcomes them and appreciates what they have to offer without regard to personal characteristics. The Sun Prairie of the future needs to have all people working together and now is our time to begin to incorporate all people into the fabric of the community.

I was successful in the April 2015 election. After the election I had a conversation with Stan Davis who helped me clarify my thinking on just what diversity and inclusion means for the city. Then in conversations with City Administrator Aaron Oppenheimer and Stan Davis we focused on what we could do about diversity and inclusion. We crafted a resolution which the City Council approved In August 2015, that directed us to form the Ad Hoc Steering Committee on Diversity to explore these matters and make recommendations to the City Council.

The resolution directed that the Ad Hoc Steering Committee on Diversity be chaired by me and was to consist of 16 diverse community members, so I searched out and appointed people who were diverse by age, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientations. We met twice a month from October 2015 to April 2017. The charge to the Committee was

1. City's workforce: The Committee is to provide recommendations that will enhance the City's capabilities to locate, recruit and hire qualified candidates with diverse backgrounds.

2. City services: The Committee is to identify and provide a better understanding of the unique needs of different individuals and communities within Sun Prairie.

The Ad Hoc Steering Committee sent the City Council its final report in April 2017 with a recommendation that the City create an ordinance on Accommodation and Employment. Only a few cities in Wisconsin have this ordinance and we used Appleton's as our model. This ordinance prohibits discrimination in employment and in services offered to the public. Since these are already protected by constitutional law in the USA this did not change anyone's life but it was a message to the world that Sun Prairie cared enough about these matters that we were willing to take a public stand saying that we are a place that supports all people without regard to personal characteristic. I believe this message is important to the people in our community but it is also an economic development message in that we are telling companies that we are a good place to locate and their employees will be safe and accepted here.

The final report submitted to the City Council included a number of other recommendations many of which the city has acted on and others that we continue to make progress on. Several of the recommendations resulted in the creation of the position held by Reuben Sanon and guide the work he is doing for the city.

Let me turn it over to Reuben for his presentation. Thank you for being here today.