

## **Disability Inclusion Equity Pledge Community Meeting Transcript** **Thursday, April 20, 6:00 pm**

*Raania Mohsen*

Okay, so good evening. Thank you. Everyone for joining for this community meeting to review the Disability Inclusion Equity Pledge. This meeting is being sponsored by the City Manager's Office of Administration, Policy and Intergovernmental relations, and before we begin, I'll just take a few minutes to introduce myself, and I'll begin with describing myself.

My name is Raania Mohsen. I'm the Disability Affairs Officer here at the City of San Jose. I have long brown hair, brown eyes, fair skin, with an olive undertone, and I'm wearing a black blazer, and white T-shirt.

I have been working in public policy and intergovernmental relations for about 18 years now, here in the Bay area, across various levels of government. Before taking on this role in December of 2022 I worked for former Vice Mayor Chappy Jones with the City of San Jose for about 4 years. I'm personally interested in this role because I see it as a continuation of work that I value, and began with former Vice Mayor Jones to improve accessibility in San Jose, particularly around ADA Compliance with our small businesses. As a mother, wife, and daughter I have served as a support system with my own family members with disabilities. For me, improving accessibility and working with the disability community are matters of civil rights, equity and inclusion. And since beginning this role in December, I have learned quite a bit, and I look forward to continuing to learn and grow in this role.

So I just wanted to do an Access check-in. We will mute all microphones for this presentation. We have enabled live transcript and Caption.

If you don't see it, you can click the arrows by the double "CC" at the bottom of your zoom screen to view the full transcript. Arthur C. is with us today providing American Sign Language interpretation. We will respond to questions towards the end. We have designated some time for feedback and input from all of you. And so we do ask that you either verbally ask your question or type it in the chat, and the chat is available for the host and co-host to view. We ask that you speak slowly and wait for others to finish before joining in, and, if possible, please use your "raise hand" icon when you wish to speak, and we will call on speakers.

I have Katerina with me today from the City Manager's Office. She is co-hosting the meeting, and will be helping to facilitate as well. And, as I noted earlier, the meeting is being recorded, and will be available for viewing online or upon request.

I do just want to do a quick check-in and make sure everyone's access need is being taken care of for this meeting. Okay, I see a thumbs up. So let's continue.

Our agenda today includes the access check-in that we just completed.

We do have councilmember Pam Foley here with us today. We're so excited to have her join us. She will be providing some welcome remarks, and then I will continue with a Disability Affairs update. I will review and actually read the pledge as well. We'll have some time for feedback and input from all of you, and then I will review some next steps and what happens after this meeting. Also on the slide, I just wanted to describe the image that's on here.

We do have an image of 3 people gathered around a computer ready to begin a meeting. We have a woman with a green scarf around her head, sitting, and one in the middle standing in between a young man with Down Syndrome, who is sitting in front of a computer.

So, as I mentioned, Council Member Foley is here with us today, and I want to give her an opportunity to say a few words. She has been a champion on the City council, and has provided some great leadership for the disability affairs effort here at the city of San Jose. Welcome!

*Council Member Foley*

Thank you. Raania. Are you ready for me? I am Pam Foley, Council Member for District 9. District 9 is located in the southern part of the City, north of Almaden, south of Willow Glen, in between Campbell and Highway 85, or 87. Those are the rough boundaries of District 9. I want to thank all of the community members who have joined us, and to Raania for taking on this position. It's such an important topic, not just for our city, but nationally as well. We're here tonight to review San Jose's Disability Inclusion and Equity pledge. This shows we are ready to double down on our efforts to increase accessibility for people with disabilities. This has been in the works for quite some time. I led the push to direct the administration with completing an assessment related to disability, access, and to explore setting up of an office of disability affairs in San Jose, and it took a little bit of time but we got Raania to take over the position, and she has jumped in very effectively and efficiently, and it looks like we're going to be budgeted for this position for next year. I've seen a preliminary draft of the Budget and it looks like it's included again, which I'm really happy to see, because it really did take some effort to get to this point.

We should aspire not only to be ADA compliant. We know that's the floor, not the ceiling. We have to go above and beyond and become a national leader for accessibility and inclusion. People with disabilities face many barriers that prevent them from fully participating in society, and we should be doing everything we can to make sure their needs are met, and that we are uplifting those who do great work in supporting the community. I've heard directly from residents in my district that accessibility has been an ongoing challenge for them. City staff has worked tirelessly to determine how we can better serve our residents with disabilities and our employees, for that matter. They have held community meetings with those who have lived experiences and it's essential that we remain heavily engaged throughout this process. I look forward to hearing your feedback shared tonight, and having a robust discussion on the topic moving forward, particularly the disability pledge. I'm looking forward to your input, so I'll be sitting here and listening for the remainder of the hour. This pledge will come to council for approval in June. With that I turn it back to you Raania and welcome everybody. Thank you all for being here.

*Raania Mohsen*

Thank you Councilmember Foley. Also on the slide, I just wanted to go ahead and just note that I have my name on here, and title as Disability Affairs Officer, and the fact that I represent the City manager's Office of Administration, Policy and Intergovernmental Relations. We also do have a graphic here: a colorful illustration of people standing in line with their hands up and interacting, engaging, representing people with disabilities.

So for the Disability Affairs Update, we heard from you in 2022.

I want to thank those who have continued to engage with the City Manager's Office on disability affairs. As you may know, in 2022 the city Manager's Office led an assessment that included meetings with community members and employees and conducting surveys to assess disability access across departments. We're excited to report, as Councilmember Foley mentioned, the Council supported the City Manager's Organizational disability assessment and appropriated funding for a workplan to improve accessibility in the city's programs and services.

Our efforts today are in response to the community stakeholder input that we have received. As you know, challenges of the pandemic surfaced a number of inequities that impact our most vulnerable communities, including people with disabilities and access to basic services, public meetings and emergency resources. As the new Disability Affairs Officer, I will continue the assessment, gap analysis and propose recommendations in the next 18 months.

We also have brought on a consultant, World Institute on Disability, to assist with this effort. In continuing our partnership with the community, our effort is about going above what is required by State, federal, and local policies.

Our efforts will include two phases of work activities. Phase one will include the following work plan objectives.

1. Catalyze cultural change by building institutional awareness through education and training.
2. Support disability affairs organizationally, both internally and externally, and
3. Improve accessibility in 5 areas across departments: communications and information access, community sensitivity, physical access, employment access, and share data collection.

As we continue to assess existing service gaps with departments and work on improvements, this will inform our work for phase two. And as we work to achieve these objectives, we are bringing forward the disability inclusion equity pledge for consideration, and adoption by council. We are here today to hear any feedback or input that you may have before we present it to council. The purpose of the pledge is to establish the framework for our next steps, and to advance systemic change within our culture that normalizes inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities. The pledge provides context for the city's prioritization of disability affairs and formalizes the city's commitment. I also want to note that this pledge is modeled after the county's pledge that was adapted by Michelle, Mashburn, who I notice is here with us today, and she represents the county's office of disability affairs. Thank you, Michelle.

So I will now take a few moments to read the pledge. City of San Jose. Disability Inclusion Equity Pledge. There are 61 million, or nearly 1 in 4 adults in the United States who live with disabilities. The United Nations defines disability as an evolving concept resulting from attitudinal and environmental barriers hindering the participation of persons with disabilities in society. The notion of disability is not fixed, and can alter depending on the prevailing environment from society to society. Disability can include difficulties in hearing, vision, cognitive function and ambulation. It can also include chronic health issues. People with

disabilities experience exclusion through physical, attitudinal, financial and policy barriers. Disability intersects with all identities and structural forms of marginalization, including racism and gender bias, and exacerbates the stigma and discrimination experienced by people with disabilities. Ableism is a core barrier to equity and inclusion, as defined in the book "We move together." Ableism is a form of discrimination that wrongly considers only somebody's minds and behaviors to be normal, worthy, and valuable. Ableism creates barriers for disabled people, making it hard to meet friends, learn at school, find a place to live, get a job and participate in community events. Disability must be recognized as a key element in any commitment to social justice, equity, and inclusion. Increasing evidence indicates that diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible workplaces cultivate higher performing organizations.

We commit to prioritizing disability inclusion through a learning process, modeling behavior and action steps which may take us beyond the minimum legal requirements. We affirm that the full and complete realization of the human rights of all persons with disabilities is an essential integral and invisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We pledge to prioritize disability inclusion to ensure the human rights of persons with disabilities are achieved.

We promise to work to build trust and confidence among persons with disabilities as ongoing ableism has harmed the trust and confidence among people with disabilities.

We confirm that people with disabilities deserve an environment that allows them to participate on an equal basis, fully and effectively with others.

We will strive for the disability independent living motto of "nothing about us without us." We must partner with our community first, so that we can adequately address the needs of all residents. All people must be included in planning and problem solving. We recognize that these are first steps, and commit to a continuing learning and implementation process that will advance systemic change within the city of San Jose and serve as a model for disability inclusion in the city and beyond. We commit to pursuing the following in our efforts to gain disability inclusion.

Engage the disability community through the creation of community engagement, policy, and principles for including people with disabilities in community engagement activities and other advisory roles in the spirit of the disability rights principle, "nothing about us without us."

Implement best practices that help recruit, retain, and promote people with disabilities as city staff, including, but not limited to accommodation policies, job descriptions, and training of hiring managers.

Build staff capacity and training programs that include disability, education, access, equity and inclusion training.

Prioritize events accessibility that includes accommodations, language on invitations, and registrations for all events that the City hosts and sponsors citywide.

Use disability-inclusive language by recognizing that the language of identity is an individual choice that varies widely among the disability community, use both pers-first and identity-first language to respectfully acknowledge different preferences in internal and public facing communications and style, guides.

Create disability metrics as a dimension of diversity and equity, to work collectively to track disability participation, as appropriate, in the city of San Jose's programs and services aiming to optimize accessibility and participation.

So, now, now that I've read and reviewed the pledge, I would like to take the time to open it up for folks to provide some comments and ask questions. As a reminder, you are welcome to either ask verbally, by raising your hand or typing your question in the chat, and we can repeat the question. We just ask that you speak slowly. Wait for others to finish before joining in, and to say your name before you speak as well.

#### *Comments from Meeting Participants*

Thank you. Good evening, everyone. My name is Viviana Barnwell. I am a local leader that supports families of individual with autism, especially Spanish speaking families. I am the parent of a 10-year old boy, with multiple developmental disabilities and at the State level I am the Governor's appointee to the State Council on Developmental Disabilities. I would like to really quickly start by reminding everyone that regarding children in the US, one in six children have disabilities, and in the State of California as reported in a recent CDC report, one in 22 were diagnosed with autism in 2020. I just wanted to start with that, because while reading the report in the last page, when we were talking about engaging the disability community, I think it's important to also mention engaging not only people with disabilities, but family members, because many people with disabilities, are either really young or might be impaired intellectually or not be able to exercise self-advocacy. As people with disabilities say "nothing about us without us," many family members that are present here know that whenever my child doesn't have access, I don't get into that place either. So even though we don't have lived experience firsthand, we do have it, because when our children are excluded and alright segregated, we experience it too. So thank you so much for this effort. I just wanted to bring attention and remind that as I have said many times, to some part of District 9 Council Member Foley knows there's a big number of children with disability in our community, and they don't have access to minimum things like parks. Thank you again for this.

Thank you, Viviana.

Next we have David Clifford.

Hi there, my name is David Clifford, and I actually live in District 9 as well. So I love this. I want to say, thank you for the council member for setting it up, and for everybody who is involved. And you know, getting it into the system. One thing I really love, though, is to represent the people with all disabilities and not just physical disabilities. I noticed, like all the imaging on Twitter and Instagram has, you know, people with physical disabilities just like the lady that was before me, there's a lot of intellectual disabilities as well as neurological

disabilities, and just wanted to make sure that those people are included as well and it's a good point to include the caregivers as well. Thank you very much.  
Thank you. David.

Next we have Joanna Kent.

Hi, thank you. My name is Joanna Kent. I am also from District 9. I am a parent of a child with severe disabilities, with a rare disease, and I want to echo what Viviana was saying, but in the respect of in the very beginning of the statement it specifically says adults. And I would like to maybe reflect that people with disabilities was used throughout the entire document. And I appreciate that. But my son is a child. He is not an adult, and so I don't see him reflected in that statement. I also wanted to echo what David said, that in many of the diagrams and things that we use to represent disability, it is the obvious, and that it would really help if we could educate on the less than obvious, because when we have adults and teenagers that have cognitive disabilities, they are impacted cognitively and want to use our parks. They are looked at in ways that I think is unacceptable, but that the parents think is acceptable because they don't. They're looking out for their own child, and they're not realizing maybe that this is a place that everybody deserves to be. So I just wanted to echo what David was saying about the images. That would be great if we could figure that out as well, and I want to say, thank you. I think it really overall is great. The only thing that I didn't notice was the safety piece. I think that safety is a huge priority that's neglected. I'd love to see a little bit more of that added in there. So thank you.

Thank you Joanna.

Next we have Katherine Hedges. Sorry about that. I had a hard time finding the button. I have speech differences. Something I see is a lot of casual ableism by council members and various people, such as readily saying ideas are crazy or saying, you know, talking casually about crazy people there, crazy people that and even though I'm not a person with a mental illness, I think complaining about mental illness with things being illogical or poorly planned, or malicious is a problem, and that the city should pledge to, you know, not be throwing around this type of casual ableism and maintaining these negative stereotypes.

Thank you Katherine. We appreciate your participation.

Relative, or you can go ahead and speak. Yes, thank you for this opportunity to speak. A couple questions regarding this piece here, and just having my experience with San José, and how they approach individuals with disabilities. One thing that I want to express, that for me, my background is working with individuals with disabilities for the past 20 years both in school settings and recreational settings. What makes this different from prior promises that the City has done from you know, the aspect of, for individuals with disabilities? And also there is, I feel, like there is a lot of work that needs to be done with the City in regards to educating and hiring individuals that have experience, either in degrees or in experience working with individuals with disabilities, not just in the lower positions, but also in the super visual positions, and so forth. So going back to the first question is, what makes this different from prior false premises?

Yes, thank you for that question. I believe, what makes this different is that we are trying to create this cultural shift within our organization. And we are planning to do this through some education and training for all employees, which will be required for all employees. We are going to initially provide, some disability training “101,” on disability, accessibility, and provide some education about ableism, language, etiquette. And that will be the first session, and then we're planning to provide more targeted training to address the gaps that we find through a survey that we're going to be distributing to all of our employees to assess their knowledge and understanding of disabilities and accessibility. And really the purpose of the training and the education is to create a cultural shift so that our employees are thinking about accessibility as they create programs and as they implement programs, policies and initiatives. It will take time, it's not something that's going to happen overnight. It will be a process. And we here at San Jose have prioritized this in order to create this shift and improve accessibility across our departments. In addition to the training and education, we will also be doing some deep analysis and assessment to measure the gaps in our services across departments. I mentioned that we brought on a consultant, World Institute on Disability to help with this assessment. And then based on that, we'll be bringing forward some recommendations that will guide our actions moving forward, which will be the second phase of our work plan.

Okay, let's move on to the next question.

I think next, I think the next person is Sherry.

Hi, thanks Raania. Thanks to you and Council Member Foley for your steadfast work in moving this forward, really appreciate all the efforts that you put in and bringing us together again to review the pledge and the priority areas. I had 2 comments or suggestions, and then one question with regards to the statistics, it's always important, I think, to source statistics like that. So I actually, we've utilized the one and 4 number in covering the gamut, basically of all ages, from 0 to, you know, a 100. So that higher percentage is typically inclusive of regardless of the age. So I'm not sure if the adults reference is actually accurate. There usually is a smaller percentage when we're talking about adults 18 to 64. And, as we all know, as people age, the percentage of people with disabilities goes way up. So if we include children, I think that affects that number. So I think, just checking the statistics on that and making sure that that's inclusive. And it's not just specific to adults and then to Vivian's point about making sure that we're including family members and caregivers. I think it might be easy enough to include that in the last page that has the recognized statements. The first bullet is :engage the disability community through creation of, etc.” Perhaps engage the disability community, including family members and caregivers, might address that. That's just a one suggestion. There, I do think that makes sense, because some people with disabilities, especially children, need a guardian or spokesperson and advocate on their behalf. And then the last thing I had was just a question, and you started to address it with the last persons. Question was at this point, Is there a timeline or a draft timeline on implementing some of these activities that are part of the plan moving forward? Or is that something that's going to be formulated in the next few months?

Yes, so thank you, Sherry, for your comments and your questions, and I appreciate your suggestion to check the stat and source.

18:38:24 I will say that statistic is actually sourced from the Center for Disease Control. So we'll definitely verify that. And I appreciate the suggestion as well to add caregivers and family members into the pledge. Now to address your question about the timeline. So yes, we are doing the work now, and we expect to continue doing this work, and we should have our recommendations ready for implementation in the next 14 months but we are continuing to do the work now. We are currently doing the assessment. We are also addressing some low hanging fruit, and making some improvements. Today, for example, we just launched a new web page that centralizes the city's disability access programs and services currently in place. We have created a "go to" place that community members can go to for this information that basically includes our programs and services, provides some resources and information about current projects that are underway here at the City. In addition, we are also going to be launching the first part of the training this year as well, in the summer. We are also making additional improvements like improving our ADA complaint procedure, and making that a little bit more accessible for folks. And then we are trying to also work with our neighboring jurisdictions on some of these efforts, including the county.

Next we have Christine Fitzgerald.

Thank you. I was having problems with that. Okay, a couple of things occurred to me. I'm a little bit concerned on this statistic. It's a little disconcerting to hear the statistics are being gathered from something related to disease, which I do not like the use of the term disease. The other question, or, for me, the other thing that I'd like to mention where you're mentioning the idea of bringing on board people with the education side. I think that's great. I applaud that because far too many people are unemployed. So let's get people hired.

Thank you. Christine.

Next we have Trisha, Coates.

I applaud this meeting, but I was just going to say, I hope this conversation, you know, goes on, and this isn't the end of the conversation and ideas and swapping ideas. And then I also wanted to mention when you were mentioning that you are starting your web page to make sure that it is fully accessible. I have friends who use screen readers or voiceover on their devices. My last point is piggybacking on what Chris Fitzgerald just said, having people with disabilities and education would be great. You know, we people who live with disabilities have the disability. A lot of them have it through through their life, from the beginning. You learn a lot through that. You know, education is great, and so is personal experience. Thank you.

Thank you. Trisha.

Next we have Liz.

Good afternoon. Thank you for this great opportunity. Couple of things. First of all, if you look at me, you cannot see that I have disabilities, and so there are many people in our city that do.



in fact, have disabilities, who don't look like they have them. And so it's important that we take into account all individuals. And I think hopefully that this pledge will do part of that. I have spent the last 23 years as the Disability Integration Regional Lead for the American Red Cross, spending some fantastic time at various shelters from Watsonville to Gilroy and of course in San Jose at the Seven Trees Community Center. And we need to, in fact, make sure that all people in San Jose understand the needs of the disabled individuals and the community. And again, as it's been mentioned before, it's not just mobility impaired. It's people who have all varieties of impairments, and certainly all children, adults. In my sideline when I'm not wearing a red T-shirt I'm a District nurse, part-time for San Jose Unified. Let me tell you, there are a number of kids who need assistance. There are the kids, but these parents need assistance because they're dealing with these children for the rest of their lives. And yes, I turned 77 in March, and I discovered that things don't work as well in the body when you get to be 77. I think things begin to fall apart, things have issues. And so we need to look at this from birth to death, because we are all in particular, and we, in fact, need to work with all of our partners. We can in Red Cross. We cannot function by ourselves. We must, in fact, work with the other agencies, and I've had very valuable lessons from Sherry, Michelle and other individuals. And let me tell you, Covid was quite a learning experience during that time, and I'm afraid, since I've been a nurse now 54 years it ain't going away, and that it's morphed, and it will morph, and that we, in fact, will have many different things that we need to. So we need to do this now so that we can be prepared for the next iteration. And I appreciate the support and all that's been done. Thank you.

Thank you. Liz.

*Raania Mohsen*

Okay, I don't think we have any more hands raised. So let's continue and speak about next steps, but before that I just want thank you all for participating and attending this evening, and sharing your comments and questions. I truly appreciate your lived experience and want to continue working with you and the community, and would like to see a continued dialogue regarding next steps. I've taken some notes here, and we'll definitely be considering the comments and feedback that we've heard tonight and incorporating that into the pledge.

The plan is to take this pledge to Council in June of this year. The tentative date for that meeting is June 6th, so I will be sure to send out some information about that. As that date gets closer, you are welcome to attend or participate in that meeting, and provide comments as well, either through email, through letters. You can also provide public comments virtually or in person. And if you do need additional information on how to participate in that process, please feel free to reach out to me, and I can provide that guidance.

We also will continue our work with the consultant to complete the internal assessment and citywide employee training. We look forward to continue our collaboration with the county's Office of Disability Affairs, other jurisdictions and our nonprofit community partners as well. We are planning to co-host a listening forum with the California Commission on Disability Access in August. This Forum is intended to bring together the disability community and small business owners to address barriers that people with disabilities may experience in accessing service at small businesses, and also understand barriers for small businesses in

meeting the ADA requirements and really focus on providing this as forum and as an opportunity to provide some education and facilitate ADA compliance. And then last, I do want to stay engaged, and welcome, outreach, emails, phone calls.

I also have been participating in community meetings as well so I definitely look forward to continuing this dialogue. And we have launched this new web page centralizing the City's accessible programs and services and resources and encourage you to take a look and give us some feedback and comments. It is available through the city manager's website within the Office of Administration, Policy and Intergovernmental Relations.

And so with that, I just want to say Thank you again. This is my contact information. You are welcome to reach out to me at any time. This is also my direct office line as well.

I specifically chose this graphic picture in the spirit of inclusion. I do like the fact that it does have people here with and without disabilities, playing and working together and envisioning a world without barriers. Thank you.

I don't know if Councilmember Foley is still here. There she is! Do you want to say any closing remarks, or any comments?

*Council Member Foley*

Thank you for this opportunity. I really appreciate the disability pledge. I appreciate the comments from everyone here. I too took some notes as well. And I truly take to heart nothing about us without us. I truly do consider that, and I know Mollie Mcleod isn't here.

But Mollie is the one who pushed us, or strongly encouraged my Office to take up this mantle and make sure that our City is as open and encouraging and accepting of employees with all disabilities. And that's the first step to me. But then we must go out and be as accessible for all the members of our community too, and that's from birth to death, as was mentioned, the disabilities change as we age. I feel my own pains and aches and pains as I get older as well, and to look at me you wouldn't know that I have some mobility issues, either, so I really truly appreciate all of the comments and all of my residents who are here from district 9. Thank you for being here. But this is something I'm very passionate about and it's not something that we are just passing to put words out there and making us all feel good. There really must be actions behind the words, but the words are our starting place. Thank you all for being here. Thank you.

*Raania Mohsen*

Thank you, Council Member, for your support and we're looking forward to really creating some real change here, based on what we heard tonight and our next steps and workplan moving forward. Thank you all. Good night.