

Context of Report from the perspective of the Anti-Racism Advisory Committee with BIPOC Youth and members of the BIPOC Community

Mayor Amarjeet Sohi's inaugural motion is in response to the continuous incidents of hate based violence occurring against BIPOC communities and acknowledges that Edmontonians are ready for their city to take action against racism. The issue that specifically focused the minds of Edmontonians has been the frequent and terrifying attacks against Black Muslim women in our city. The motion was unanimously supported by Council, and it's helpful to notice the events that paved the road for a new political climate to emerge where comprehensive and impactful antiracist strategic action can now be considered. These events include the video capture of the murder of George Floyd by police in the United States of America during a pandemic when the greater society was already anxious and uncomfortable. This brought unwavering global attention to the grassroots Black Lives Matter movement. Furthermore, the consistent work of Indigenous communities to hold non-Indigenous people accountable in Truth and Reconciliation and to fight to demonstrate evidence for what they had been saying for decades and were not being heard on – that their children were taken and murdered by the government and institutions under the guise of 'education', and that unmarked graves are now being evidenced at Residential School sites.

The motion asked for a strategy with actionable items because the Mayor knew – as the Anti-Racism Advisory Committee (ARAC) and BIPOC communities know – that Indigenous, Black and People of Colour communities have spoken enough about what our experiences are and what we think needs to happen. We have asked enough if the instruments of our systems will listen, believe and enact change. The time to listen is complete, and the time for strategic action has arrived. The motion asked for 'collaborative decision making' between Administration and the Anti-Racism Advisory Committee and BIPOC communities. The previous City Council also recognized that collaborative decision making with the people most excluded and negatively impacted by decisions is required and not optional for anti-racist change to take place.

The aim for this work was to return an Anti-racism Strategy report to City Council in 100 days (and this presentation is close to that timeline). While the time was short, it seemed possible to complete this task given the commitment for action expressed by both City Administration and the Anti-Racism Advisory Committee. The City Manager's Office took responsibility for Administration's side of this work, supporting the various business units, and proactively aiming to do things differently than had been done before. ARAC had already developed deep relationships with those most marginalized and impacted within BIPOC communities, embodies significant expertise in grassroots anti-racism, operates a

culture and process of acting in anti-racist ways, and is able to bring these strengths to the process through its position by the motion as a collaborative partner.

When ARAC speaks of anti-racism, this includes all intersections of oppression including and not limited to gender, heterosexism and transphobia, ableism, age, religious expression, etc. It is the vision of the Anti-Racism Advisory Committee to actually reduce racist ideologies and racist behaviours among Edmontonians, and to facilitate Edmonton to evolve into a city that is anti-racist in its systems, processes, programs and culture. In this way, ARAC's vision is that Edmonton comes to be known as Canada's leading anti-racist city.

Nevertheless, succeeding in bringing forward this Anti-Racism Strategy turned out to be extraordinarily difficult, and at times felt impossible, given the significant barriers built into the administrative system. When systems are built from colonial ways of thinking and acting, cultures and processes are formed which continue those perspectives. This is how systemic racism forms and exists, and this happens even when the individuals within that system desire and intend to function differently.

This tension between anti-racist ways and colonial ways is further exacerbated by a number of factors. First, city administration operates a well used system and is able to begin action and continue action at a pace. In contrast, ARAC operates a limited-capacity, volunteer system and takes time to begin action. When city administrative processes start first and drive action at a pace that ARAC struggles to participate in, and when that action comes from colonial thinking and processes, ARAC and BIPOC community members experience stress, overwhelm and discouragement about participation and effectively impacting the outcome. Second, city administrative processes function in a well-resourced environment while the ARAC and BIPOC community members function in an under-resourced environment. Examples include administrative salaried staff working on this project as part of their daytime workload with access to benefits, supports, supervision and teams. In contrast, the Anti-Racism Advisory Committee, BIPOC youth and BIPOC community members work as volunteers around additional commitments and stressors, without compensation and a support work structure. While remuneration for volunteers is envisioned, it does not acknowledge the quality or amount of work required from this collaborative partner. Third, city administration is the gate-keeper of city council process information and the flow of resources, which further compounds inequity. Finally, this work is ordinarily completed solely by city administration, and ARAC and BIPOC communities are collaborative partner in this case to bring the Anti-Racist lens and access by marginalized and excluded peoples to the decision making process. In this way, ARAC is embodying the Anti-Racist oversight and accountability in the project. When one partner is the holder of accountability, and also lacks the resources to equitably participate and is made up

of those directly impacted by the outcomes of the work, the emotional labour provided is notable.

One example of this systemic struggle occurred during the report writing phase of this project. Never before has an outside party been included in the process of writing a report from administration for city council. In keeping with traditional practice, city administration began drafting the report and aimed not to include members of ARAC or BIPOC communities in its process or review. At the same time, administration requested a photo from the Chair of the Anti-Racism Advisory Committee and a Message from the Chair to be inserted into the report, even while ARAC was being denied an opportunity to review its content. Had the Chair of ARAC not resisted this, such actions could have irrevocably damaged the relationships in BIPOC communities ARAC had fostered since its inception. These issues were finally resolved through advocacy by ARAC. When members of ARAC, the BIPOC community and BIPOC youth finally saw a draft, it was clear that while the agreed 3 recommendations remained intact, there was a discrepancy between how administration and ARAC, BIPOC youth and BIPOC communities understood the focus, audience, rationale and implementation of those recommendations, as well as the overall outcome desired from council at this stage with this report. It became difficult for members of ARAC, BIPOC youth and BIPOC communities to comment on this draft, and through a collaborative community process, it was decided by this partner to write a new draft for administration to consider, especially one that framed the report as a clear strategy with outcomes to achieve and which linked the 3 recommendations to mechanisms to achieve those outcomes. ARAC's report writing process included collaboration with 16 individuals from ARAC, youth council, and BIPOC communities including Indigenous people, 2SLGBTQ+, Black people, Asian people, Muslims and women. Furthermore, because of processes within city administration that provide time for review and comment by city executive leadership, the time for ARAC and our partners to review the report was constantly framed as not existing and with a sense of urgency. In the first instance, we were given only 36 hours to review the original draft and return comments. Through advocacy and resistance, ARAC carved out more time for BIPOC youth and community members to reasonably carry out this work. However, the conditions remained consistently stressful and pressurized.

It is important to note that, as difficult as the process has been, there was good will and good intention on all sides. While struggling to function outside of their traditional processes, members of city administration did aim to facilitate the feedback they were receiving from ARAC, and supported the outlining of the experience here to help foster an understanding of how systemic racism functions. Anyone who has experienced some baseline anti-racism education has learned that this perpetuation is not personal, and may not even be conscious. It is not a failing of individuals. Rather, the systems, policies and procedures are inherently designed

to function in this way. Furthermore, the above is a snapshot of the immediate experience on this project. Members of ARAC, BIPOC youth and BIPOC communities appreciate and respect the work that is done by the various Branches, as well as all BIPOC staff within city administration. We honour the achievements and successes they have gained while working within the administrative system and processes. Thus, it is helpful to understand that systemic processes and outcomes occur regardless of the identities, intentions and desires of staff.

Finally, these difficulties did help members of ARAC and BIPOC communities remember that there are some key critical actions needed in an Anti-Racism Strategy for Edmonton in order to counter systematic racism. These elements underpin the 3 recommendations brought forward in this strategy. The ideas are not new, but reflect the best thought in anti-racism over decades and resonate with ideas expressed by Indigenous Elders. They amplify and strengthen the efforts brought forward previously by many members of BIPOC communities in Edmonton, and support the work by previous city council and many in administration.

Without these foundational elements, Edmonton's efforts against racism will continue to be disjointed, limited in their impact and even tokenized. These foundational elements allow collaborative decision making to become possible and new processes to exist that are anti-oppressive. They allow those most excluded and negatively impacted in our society to become equitable partners in bringing forward solutions, especially our BIPOC 2SLGBTQ+, disabled, youth, women and seniors. They provide the structure needed to address hate-based violence, deliver the best supports for communities experiencing hate and violence, champion anti-racist and anti-violence initiatives to the provincial and federal governments to secure resources and support, advocate for legislative tools and work with partners to support and amplify anti-racist initiatives and responses.