



Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB), City of Burlington

Date: March 11, 2026

To: Rep. Mary Katherine Stone

From: Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak
Kelli Perkins, Director, REIB, City of Burlington

Re: Recommended Action: for the Vermont Legislature to Vote in Favor of a charter change for the City of Burlington to add the Office of Racial, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Introduction

This memo proposes the formal addition of the Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB) to Burlington's City Charter and recommends the Vermont legislature vote in favor of the charter change in congruence with the Town Meeting Day approval of a majority of Burlington voters in favor of this action.

Establishing the REIB Office within the city's charter signifies a commitment to advancing racial equity and social justice throughout our city. This initiative aligns with our ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive community, and it addresses systemic inequities that have historically affected the most underrepresented, underserved, and marginalized members of our community.

History of Racial Equity and Social Justice Work in City Governance

The City of Burlington has taken significant strides towards racial equity and social justice since the early 2000s. In 2000, the City Council adopted the Legacy Action Plan, outlining a vision for improving the city's economic, environmental, social, and cultural health for future generations. This plan initially overlooked the urgent need to assess and address systemic barriers related to diversity and racial equity, which were incorporated into the plan in 2010.

In 2011, under the direction of the Social Equity Director, Wanda Hines, a Unity Retreat convened over 50 stakeholders to identify structural barriers and emphasize the necessity of a coordinated, city-supported plan to advance racial equity. This work laid the foundation for future initiatives. A resolution to create a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee was passed by the City Council in 2012 and by late 2013, the city enlisted the Vermont Partnership for Fairness and Diversity to develop a strategic plan addressing racial and ethnic disparities. This plan was adopted in 2014 with the goal of embedding inclusion, equity, and justice into city operations.

In response to identified gaps in Burlington's approach to addressing racial and social disparities, the Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB) was established in 2019. This formal launch created a centralized structure to lead internal systems change efforts and public-facing equity initiatives throughout the city.

Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Initially, the City of Burlington's efforts to address racial equity were often reactive rather than proactive, leading to a fragmented approach to social justice. Establishing a dedicated Office of



Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging provided a centralized focus for racial equity and social justice-based efforts and initiatives, ensuring ongoing attention to issues faced by the most underrepresented, underserved, and marginalized members of our community.

Since its establishment in 2019, the Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB) has emerged as a key driver of systemic equity efforts throughout city governance. The office's work is now integrated into internal policies, public engagement initiatives, budget planning, education and training, and service delivery. In response to community needs and organizational gaps, the REIB's strategic and operational responsibilities have expanded. The REIB continues to be relied upon to lead and support equity-based initiatives across departments and within city policies.

Currently, the need for a formal REIB Office is more urgent than ever. National conversations surrounding racial inequality and ongoing attacks on human rights reveal the systemic injustices faced not only by racial and ethnic groups, but also by various underrepresented, underserved, and marginalized groups, including those impacted by socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and other factors that result in disparate treatment.

The focus on inclusion and belonging emphasizes the importance of creating a community where everyone feels safe, valued, and supported, irrespective of their backgrounds or experiences. A chartered Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging would ensure that racial equity and social justice considerations are integral to all city policies and programs, rather than an afterthought.

Justification for Including the Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging and REIB Director position in Burlington's City Charter

Institutionalizing the Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging within Burlington's City Charter offers numerous benefits for future governance. By embedding the REIB Office in the Charter, the city demonstrates an unwavering commitment to prioritizing racial equity and social justice in all aspects of governance and community development. This institutionalization creates a mechanism for long-term accountability, ensuring that city officials and employees remain responsible for promoting equity and belonging in both policy decisions and program implementations.

Furthermore, a chartered REIB Office facilitates a centralized, coordinated approach to equity-based initiatives, effectively breaking down silos between departments while ensuring comprehensive strategies that address systemic inequities. It also allows for dedicated funding and resources, thereby enabling the sustainable development of programs that cater to the needs of the most underrepresented, underserved, and marginalized members of our community. This formal commitment fosters greater public trust and engagement, as community members will feel more included in the decision-making processes knowing there is an office specifically dedicated to their concerns.

With the REIB Office enshrined in the City Charter, considerations of racial equity would be systematically integrated into all city policies, programs, practices, and services, promoting a culture of inclusion throughout municipal governance. The REIB can conduct regular assessments, collect data, and provide ongoing training regarding racial equity, leading to



better-informed decision-making by city officials. Moreover, its establishment encourages community engagement and empowerment, creating a platform where voices from various backgrounds can be heard, leading to more impactful initiatives.

Additionally, the REIB can set measurable goals and benchmarks for achieving racial equity, allowing the city to track progress over time and make necessary adjustments to strategies. Ultimately, embedding the REIB Office within the City Charter serves to facilitate a cultural shift towards inclusivity, supporting a broader societal change that values diversity and belonging. In summary, institutionalizing the REIB Office would create a robust framework for addressing systemic issues, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive Burlington for everyone.

Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB) Charter Language

Title VIII, Article 92B. Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB)

§ 374 Enumerated:

The City of Burlington shall form an Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion and Belonging and establish a Director of Racial Equity Inclusion and Belonging.

The REIB Director role shall be a permanent position in the City selected and hired in accordance with City of Burlington Human Resources policies and procedures.

1. The REIB Department shall be under supervision, direction and control of director subject to the orders and ordinances of city council;
2. The office of racial equity, inclusion, and belonging administrative officer shall have all of the powers, duties, and responsibilities as are provided in the racial equity, inclusion, and belonging director position description.

Subject to the orders and ordinances of the City Council, the Mayor and REIB director shall develop and implement a comprehensive racial equity, inclusion and belonging strategy for the City of Burlington.

In furtherance of this work, the REIB director shall, subject to the orders and ordinances of the City Council, have the following rights, powers and duties, and implement such alongside all city departments:

1. To work on behalf of the City to advance equity and social justice by championing diversity, inclusion, belonging, and anti-racism;
2. To develop, coordinate, implement, and administer racial equity and inclusion strategies and projects for the City;
3. To provide consultation to city departments, the mayor's office, and City Council, on policy and program changes to better advance racial equity and inclusion in the City;
4. To enhance representation in city government through decision-making bodies, community engagement initiatives, and policy development process for folks who hold underserved communities;
5. To coordinate and facilitate resident engagement in the City that encourages inclusive spaces for engagement with city government.