

Pickering Anti-Black Racism Taskforce Report

The Pickering Anti-Black Racism Taskforce is a committee working on guidelines dealing with Anti-Blacks and Racism in Pickering. This report is a summary of the PARBRT's most recent meeting, Oct. 12, 2023.

Chairperson Grignon opened the meeting punctually with an overview description of the agenda.

The agenda

1. Welcome and call to order
 2. Review and approval of the agenda
 3. Disclosure of Interest
 4. Approval of Minutes
 - 4.1 Sept. 14, 2023
 5. Presentations
 - 5.1 Elaine Knox, *Community Safety & Well-Being Plan*
 - 5.2 Hanna Mohammed [Durham Region], *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*
 6. Delegations
 7. General Business
 - 7.1 Terms of Reference
 - 7.2 Events update
 - Confront Anti-Black Racism Workshop
 - Black Joy Holiday Market (Winter Nights, City Lights) 2nd annual
 - 7.3 Media release of PABRT Statement/Letter
 8. Correspondence
 9. Other Business
-
-

[Some portions of the agenda have no commentary as there was no business done there.]

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Grignon following Agenda items # 1-4.

Presentations

#1 Community Safety & Well-Being Plan

The first presentation, by Elaine Knox, dealt with Community Safety and Well-Being. Knox explained the Community Plan with its relationships to the Durham Region Police Plan, along and a description of its related risks. She explained the key responsibilities relating to the plan, displaying a key chart:

Regional	Municipal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health services• Planning and economic development• Housing services• Children's services• Family services• Income and employment support• Long term care and services for seniors• Transit• Police services• Regional road maintenance• Public works including water and waste management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• City Development – Building Services, Planning and Design• Maintenance of the local roads and sidewalks, including snow removal• Library services• Fire services• Animal services and municipal law enforcement• Parks• Recreation• Arts and Culture• Economic Development• Property Tax collection• Stormwater management

Phase I of the plan

The plan consultation process included the Durham Police as well as community input through surveys. Among the high priorities were ‘safe-walking throughout the community’ and ‘practical access to local health services. More information would be forthcoming on a website.

Phase II of the plan

The second phase of the plan would include an *Open House*.

Priorities of the plan

Knox described the priorities of the plan:

1. Community Vitality
2. Learning Education and Creative Communities
3. Creating Safe and Welcoming Neighbourhoods
4. Physical Health and Wellness
5. Improvement of Living Standards

6. Support for Basic Needs
7. Promoting Inclusion, Diversity and Equity.

Time line

The process for the completion plan calls for City Council approval and more refinement through more community input. The goal is to have a completed plan in mid 2024.

#2 Durham Region Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan

The Durham Region Anti-Racism Taskforce Work Plan has been developed with conjunctions to that of Pickering. Coordinator, Hanna Mohammed introduced the Durham Plan with a brief history over the years since its inception. See the chart below:



The two cohorts developing the plan have set the following as their priorities:



The Durham Plan Taskforce is dedicated to *community engagement*, meeting as often with community representatives as time and personnel permit.

General Business

7.1 Terms of Reference

The 'Terms of Reference' was given cursory attention with coordinator Sharleen Mascoll stating that her report would be available in a month.

7.2 Events Update

- **Confront Anti-Black Racism Workshop**

Work in this area is aimed at development of a definition as a guide for the developers' work. There was an explanation about the '*dehumanization*' experienced by the Black community and again, this taskforce aims to develop a plan to help reduce this negative impact on the Black community.

The PABRT Chair invited and invites interested persons to join this small working group.

- **Black Joy Holiday II Market (2nd annual)**

The inaugural BJH I Market was a limited success given its debut. Much has been learned promising that the 2nd year's event should be a bigger success. The taskforce working on the event is looking for more

Black owned vendors to participate in this three day event: Nov. 24, 25, 26, Friday 5:30-8:30 pm, Saturday 5:30-8:30 pm and Sunday 12:00-5:00 pm

7.3 Media Release of PABRT Statement/Letter

Recently Councillor Lisa Robinson was the center of activity and initiatives which became very controversial in the City council chambers, in the City and elsewhere. PABRT also found Robinson's initiatives very troubling in particular her use of the phrase, "*modern slave*." PABRT issued a statement in response to Councillor Robinson's use of the phrase:

Dear Pickering Community Members,

On September 26, 2023, City of Pickering Councillor Lisa Robinson stated that she was a "**modern-day slave**" due to losing 30 days of pay after an investigation by the City's integrity commissioner. This comment has left members of the City of Pickering - Pickering Anti-Black Racism Taskforce (PABRT) horrified and deeply concerned.

Councillor Robinson's comparison to losing 30 days of pay to the likeness of being enslaved is heinous. It demonstrates a blatant disregard for the weight and impact of her words as well as how it inflicts harm to others. Councillor Robinson's comments diminishes a dark, traumatic chapter in history that continues to affect Black people in Canada and worldwide profoundly.

Councillor Robinsons' use of the term "modern-day slave" as a white person with privilege is problematic due to the historical context, inaccuracy, insensitivity, and potential to perpetuate harmful misconceptions about race and oppression. Referring to oneself as a "modern-day slave" is problematic because the term "slave" carries a specific, deeply ingrained historical context of racial oppression, particularly in the United States and Canada, where slavery was predominantly a system of Black enslavement and oppression of Indigenous people. Misusing this term can trivialize the immense suffering and historical injustices enslaved groups have faced.

Councillor Robinsons' statement also shows a definite lack of accuracy. In contemporary society, individuals who are not subjected to forced labour, human trafficking, or similar forms of extreme exploitation should avoid likening their circumstances to slavery. Modern slavery involves human trafficking, forced labour, and other heinous crimes that result in severe human rights violations. For someone who can make a choice not to work and be sanctioned because of her actions, likening that to the outcome of slavery because she is not happy with the unanimous

decision of the council shows the complete lack of awareness and sensitivity that should be displayed by someone who was chosen to represent the people of Pickering at City Council.

The use of such a term reflects the distinct privilege of an individual who, through their own misconduct was punished financially, and further belittles the tragedies endured by kidnapped Africans who were enslaved throughout the Caribbean, Europe, North, South and Central America. Using such terminology can also be interpreted as insensitive and offensive to those who have experienced actual modern-day slavery. The adamant lack of remorse as demonstrated by this irrational statement by Councillor Robinson is a clear indication of her entitled mindset. It is disappointing that a person with a position to influence positively has instead produced messaging that is degrading, disempowering and harmful.

We strongly request that proper training and disciplinary action as a mitigation strategy be developed at minimum to address these issues.

In conclusion, we want to strongly reiterate that using the term "modern-day slave" as a white person of privilege and influence is problematic due to the historical context, inaccuracy, insensitivity, and potential to perpetuate harmful misconceptions about race and oppression. It's essential to choose language carefully and be aware of the impact it may have on others.

We want to affirm our commitment as a task force to standing in solidarity with all community members and community groups that work towards breaking down systemic barriers and colonial ways of thinking.

Sincerely,

City of Pickering- Pickering Anti-Black Racism Taskforce (PABRT)

Additional comments reinforced the sentiment expressed in the PABRT statement were made by Mayor Ashe and Jaclyn San Antonio. Chairperson Grignon may have summed it up most succinctly by underlining how such comments as made by Councillor Robinson are sad ‘symptom of the time.’

Black conscientiousness training

The next order of business was a spontaneous development from the Robinson issue, the need for Black conscientiousness training. The discussion revolved about the need for Black conscientiousness training in the community, perhaps starting with the City council. Discussion to consensus was not achieved not because of the

sensitivity of the concept but because of employee-‘non-employee’ employment regulations and restrictions. No clear conclusion was reached suggesting that this important issue will likely be revisited in the future.

Other Business

The Casino killing

The criminal incident at the Pickering Casino where a 28 year old security guard was fatally shot was raised by a committee member asking if more was known about the event. Mayor Ashe’s response was that the City had no more information, that Durham Police were releasing information as they felt was suitable and that he looked forward to an early and concrete outcome to the investigation. A ‘go fund me’ page has been started for the victim.

Future PABRT meetings: Hybrid vs Virtual

The final item of discussion was feedback as to future PABRT meetings being Hybrids (live with virtual attendees) vs VIRTUAL (via Internet). No consensus was reached.