

## **Vision 20/20**

**Championing Diversity**

**Action Team**

---



**Monday, July 29, 2013**

---

**Recommendations for Championing &  
Celebrating Diversity in Elizabeth City, NC**

## About the Championing Diversity Action Team

In 2012, Elizabeth City Mayor Joseph W. Peel announced his *Vision 20/20* initiative with the purpose of bringing together caring and dedicated individuals who live and/or work in Elizabeth City to seek ways to improve the economy and the quality of life in the area. Over a period of many months, more than 200 citizens identified five critical areas for improvement related to economic and community development. To provide more attention to these five critical issues Mayor Peel formed action teams, which included the [Championing Diversity Action Team](#).

The Championing Diversity Action Team is comprised of 10 community members who represent different races, ages, genders and lifestyles. The committee was charged with developing measurable goals and strategies for reaching these goals.

The Championing Diversity Action Team had its first meeting on March 11, 2013, and over the course of more than three months, the team met numerous times in an effort to identify ways to increase awareness of and appreciation for the vast diversity that exists among the people who call Elizabeth City “*home*.” To further achieve the goals set forth by Mayor Peel, the Championing Diversity Action Team reached out to community members and stakeholders who represent various diverse and cross-cultural segments of Elizabeth City for their input and ideas. On June 25, 2013, the Championing Diversity Action Team met with the selected community representatives at the Albemarle Hospital in Elizabeth City, NC for a discussion facilitated by Jan King Robinson. The following issues were discussed:

- *What are some of the obstacles to creating a more unified and cohesive sense of community in Elizabeth City?*
- *What kinds of discrimination (if any) have you witnessed or experienced personally?*
- *What kinds of things can the City of Elizabeth City do to foster greater understanding among the diverse population*

The Championing Diversity Action Team took all recommendations made by the community members, community stakeholders, and Action Team members into consideration when creating the following recommendations. The Championing Diversity Action Team adjourned on July 29, 2013.

The members of the [Championing Diversity Action Team](#) are:

*Hezekiah Brown, Chair*

*George Bright*

*Phil Donahue*

*Maureen Donnelly*

*Ann Hoffman*

*Kurt Hunsburger*

*Travis Hunter*

*Jackie Latson*

*Jannety Mosley*

*Mary Walker*

## The Championing Diversity Action Team Recommendations

### Introduction:

Elizabeth City has long been a diverse, yet divided community, primarily along racial lines. Black and white residents go about their lives, crossing paths but rarely coming together in a significantly shared way.

The richness and vibrancy of Elizabeth City stem in large measure from the diversity of its people. In order to celebrate and champion our diversity, we will have to redefine how we see ourselves and each other, recognizing, accepting and respecting our differences.

As one member of the Vision 20/20 Commission said: “It won’t matter if the waterfront is redeveloped if all the people who go there are the same.”

Our nation will continue to become more diverse. Elizabeth City’s success at building a community that embraces and celebrates its diversity could become a model for other cities.

Moving forward to create such a community in the face of entrenched attitudes won’t be easy. Our recommendations are meant to get the process started. Strong leadership, commitment and tenacity will be required to keep it going and ultimately achieve lasting change.

1. The Committee recommends that the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Community Relations Commission assume leadership in celebrating the city and county's diversity. To do that, the commission must directly engage the city and county leadership to determine their support of the Commission and its mission and goals. The Commission members must ask: Does the city council, mayor and city manager see value in keeping the Commission alive? Are they prepared to support and nurture the Commission? What are their expectations for the Commission?
2. If the Commission is to successfully carry out the recommendations of the Vision 20/20 diversity action team, it must reassess its mission and objectives to reflect that role. (See current purpose/mission statement below.) Working with the city/county leadership, the Commission must develop an agenda and action plan and submit a budget based on that plan.
3. The city and county must empower, fund and promote the Commission to help it achieve its goals.

4. We recommend that the Community Relations Commission be comprised of the following:

- 4 African Americans
- 4 Caucasians
- 4 Other Nationalities
- 3 Younger members aged 16-30
- 1 member of the Elizabeth City Council
- 1 member of the Pasquotank County Commissioners

These individuals should represent diversity with regard to gender and economic status as well. Each appointing body should work to ensure that their appointments reflect this diversity.

5. The Committee recommends that the leadership in Elizabeth City/Pasquotank County participate in training to build better understanding of our individual and cultural differences. Participants should include the following: the Elizabeth City Council, the Pasquotank County Commissioners, the Board of Education, and the Chamber of Commerce board and staff. The Committee additionally recommends that community resources be utilized to achieve this goal.
6. The Committee recommends that the Community Relations Commission organize two new events annually that celebrate the diversity of our community. The focus or theme of these events could be sports, music, arts, food, etc. or other cultural activities around which a diverse population can come together to learn about one another, share and celebrate their history and lifestyles.
7. The Community Relations Commission should be the body that oversees and ensures that these recommendations are reviewed and acted upon. They should work to ensure that government appointments to all Elizabeth City and Pasquotank Community Boards are comprised of a diverse group of people that reflect the cultural, ethnic, religious, gender, age and economic diversity within our community. They should work to ensure that all organizing committees for community events, such as the Art Walk, Potato Festival, Ghost Walk, etc., reflect the diversity within our community.
8. The Community Relations Commission should be empowered, funded and promoted to allow it to be a resource within the educational community, in order to provide

advocacy and education to teachers and administrators, on issues of diversity such as managing conflict and understanding our cultural and individual differences.

## **COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION**

### **ESTABLISHED:**

In 2003 by the City of Elizabeth City Council and the Pasquotank County Commissioners under the direction of Mayor John Bell and County Commission Chairman, John Kitchen

### **PURPOSE:**

- To promote the equal treatment of all individuals
- To discourage discrimination based on race, color, sex, national origin, age, disability, family status and veteran status
- To protect each person's lawful interest and their personal dignity, so as to make available their full productive and creative capacities
- To promote harmony and equal opportunity among all people

### **MISSION:**

- Conduct and promote activities that foster mutual respect and understanding
- Study problems of discrimination
- Encourage fair treatment of all citizens
- Protect basic human and civil rights
- Create an atmosphere to promote amicable relations among citizens using education, communication and collaboration with other organizations

### **MEMBERSHIP:**

- Eight members appointed by the Mayor
- Seven members appointed by the Chairperson of the County Commissioner
- Members serve a term of three years, not to exceed three terms

### **MEETINGS:**

- Monthly, the fourth Monday of each month, 6:00 p.m. in the Pasquotank County Courthouse.
- Open to the Public.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- Receive referrals, mediate complaints and provide community programs that will address concerns that result from prejudice and discrimination with regard to race, religion, age, gender, sex, ethnicity and disability
- Promote awareness, understanding, respect and harmony among cultural groups
- Study community issues and develop recommendations that serve to enhance respect and dignity for all citizens
- Develop skills in cross-cultural communication and understanding
- Promote the values of our multicultural society through education
- Become a resource to the community at-large and its institutions

## APPENDIX: Championing Diversity Action Team Barriers to Diversity

Age	Better communication between generations; more contact, group discussions on neutral site; exercises in understanding.
Comfort-Social Circles	Diversity enhances social development. Interacting with people from a variety of groups widens your social circle by expanding the pool of people with whom you can associate and develop relationships.
Covert Racism	This can only be reduced by long-term education at the attitude level.
Economic Status	Explore the intersections between ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture and race as dimensions of diversity.
Fear	Understanding our fears by confronting them. Education through training films such as "Color or fear."
Gender Bias	Education, legal and cultural awareness training. Sensitivity training.
Health Issues	Education and training on how economic and educational factors restrict access to quality health care.
History	Looking at history from all perspectives. Black history month and other culture/minority specific holidays are a good example of focusing on racial struggles through education.
Ignorance	Ignorance can only be changed by education.
Inclusion Reluctance	Incorporating more diversity within organization during membership selection process or at community events.
Inferiority	Prejudice implies inferiority, leads to suspicion and is detrimental to communication and interpersonal relations. Again, education and training will be needed.
Inflexibility	From a perspective of cognitive and emotional flexibility, it is hoped that we will not impose values that conflict with those of other groups.
Lack of Trust	If there is a lack of trust, even the best training will fail. A culture survey can help determine where problem areas may exist.
Language	This is most important in our schools. Academic and emotional setbacks result when students' unique cultures are not incorporated

	into the life of the classroom.
Lack of Leadership	Our political and governance organizations, as well as business organizations, must educate the populace on why leaders need diversity training.
Life Experiences	Having conversations allow all parties involved to share their experiences to better understand that we all are different.
Tradition	Have focus on religious and cultural holidays. Share traditions and foster understanding.