

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
SOCIAL EQUITY COUNCIL | REGULAR MEETING - **DRAFT**
June 4, 2024 Meeting 10:00 A.M.
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

1) Call to Order and Welcome

Andrea Comer called the meeting to order at 10:01 A.M. and welcomed committee members, council colleagues, state agency and legislative representatives, SEC staff and members of the public.

2) Attendance

Kyle Abercrombie
Corrie Betts
Avery Gaddis
Subira Gordon
Andrea Hawkins
Michael Jefferson
Daniel Karpowitz (Absent)
Melvin Medina
Ojala Naeem
Edwin Shirley
Shirley Skyers-Thomas
Kelli-Marie Vallieres
Kevin Walton

Staff: Ginne-Rae Clay, Executive Director

3) Approval of May 7, 2024 SEC meeting minutes

The meeting proceeded with the approval of minutes from the May 7, 2024 session, which was motioned by Michael Jefferson and seconded by Edwin Shirley, followed by unanimous approval.

Motion – by Michael Jefferson
Second – by Edwin Shirley
In Favor – All
Opposed – None
Abstentions – None
Motion passed unanimously.

4) Executive Session

Andrea Comer called a motion to move into executive session for the purposes of discussing potential litigation, which was motioned by Michael Jefferson and seconded by Corrie Betts, followed by unanimous approval.

Motion – by Michael Jefferson

Second – by Corrie Betts

In Favor – All

Opposed – None

Abstentions – None

Motion passed unanimously.

5) Vote on Equity Joint Venture Application Recommendation

Andrea informed the Council that there were no Equity Joint Venture applications requiring a vote at this meeting. Consequently, no action was taken on this agenda item.

6) Executive Director’s Report

Executive Director Ginne-Rae Clay provided an extensive report covering several key areas. She began with staffing updates, noting that five finalists have been identified for the legal program director position, with interview logistics being finalized. Additionally, a certified list of candidates for the program manager and research analyst positions has been received, and the interview team will be assembled this week.

Clay then moved on to program updates, starting with the Canna-Business Revolving Loan Fund, which received two new applications in May, bringing the total to 18. Of these, eight are awaiting additional information, six are being packaged for underwriting, one is currently under review, and three have received letters of interest. Community reinvestment and collaboration efforts are on hold, with further comments expected during committee reports. In terms of social equity and workforce development, several plans were approved in May.

For outreach and education, the SEC is working with Oaksterdam University and CohnReznick to provide the public, particularly those affected by the war on drugs and interested in cannabis careers, with information on applying for the lottery and qualifying as social equity applicants. Two entry-level workforce training programs are being offered: the Responsible Vendor Training, with 16 public enrollees and SEC staff participation for professional development, and the Responsible Vendor Management Training, with 33 enrollees, including SEC

staff. The first boot camp series began on May 30th, with the second series starting on June 11th.

Clay also discussed community conversations, highlighting the finalization of PSAs for New London, Norwalk, Stamford, and Bridgeport. Efforts to identify trusted messengers in Meriden, Bristol, and Ansonia are ongoing, involving meetings with local mayors. Recently, the SEC participated in the Bridgeport Community and Business Expo, where they hosted a workshop attended by over 30 individuals.

The report included updates on digital media and outreach, noting successful social media promotion of SEC programs without additional costs. A recorded live Zoom session with Oaksterdam University about workforce training and boot camps will soon be available on the SEC website and YouTube channel. Looking ahead, Clay outlined the June goals, which include conducting staff interviews, finalizing strategic planning logistics, continuing outreach and education efforts, ensuring compliance with new legislation and reporting mandates, and closing out the fiscal year-end budget.

Upcoming meetings were also mentioned: Outreach Committee on June 14th, Reinvestment/Workforce on June 18th, Policy/Governance on June 20th, Finance Committee on July 9th, Personnel Committee on July 24th, and the next Council meeting on July 2nd, with the possibility of a special meeting to be confirmed by the end of the week.

During the Q&A session, Councilwoman Kelli-Marie Vallieres asked about the outcomes of Oaksterdam's first contract, including participant numbers, costs, and results. Clay agreed to share this information with the full Council. Vallieres also inquired about the timing of the next lottery and its impact on training schedules. Clay explained that while they expected to have more information by now, the timing is still unknown, but early education efforts were made in anticipation of the next lottery. The session concluded with Andrea Comer thanking Clay for her comprehensive report and discussion, encouraging everyone to follow SEC on social media for updates and information.

7) Committee Reports and Recommendations

➤ Policy/ Governance Committee

Policy and Governance Committee report was presented by Chairman Edwin Shirley. Shirley reported that the committee held a special meeting on May 23rd to review and update the bylaws to align with new legislative changes impacting council membership and reporting requirements. Executive Director Ginne-Rae Clay confirmed a plan to revise the bylaws with Kristina Diamond, with the goal of circulating the draft prior to the June 20th meeting.

Shirley noted concerns about the need for a process to incorporate Council input before legislative changes are made. Chairperson Andrea Comer clarified that the adoption of bylaws reflecting the legislative changes must be completed by July 1st. The committee has prepared a draft that integrates the new legislative requirements with the existing bylaws, which will be circulated by June 7th.

A joint meeting with the Personnel Committee on June 20th is anticipated to review the draft bylaws. A full Council vote will be necessary before July 1st, likely necessitating a special meeting. Chairman Shirley expressed that despite efforts to avoid it, a special meeting seems unavoidable.

Councilman Kyle Abercrombie requested a copy of the draft bylaws, offering to review and support the process. Shirley agreed to circulate the draft to the committee members. With no further questions, Comer thanked Shirley for his report.

➤ Reinvestment/ Workforce Committee

Ojala Naeem, provided an update. Naeem reported that the committee had not met since the last Council meeting, noting a previous decision to pause activities for one week to get clarification from the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus. Since then, new developments included recommendations from the Caucus and work on a financial audit by the comptroller's office. Naeem proposed a motion to pause all reinvestment activities until the comptroller's special report was completed, which was seconded by Kyle Abercrombie.

Corrie Betts expressed respect for the Governor and the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus but emphasized the Council's independence and commitment to social equity without yielding to political pressures. Betts highlighted the need for a comprehensive plan that addresses community needs effectively and stressed the importance of transparency and accountability. He supported the delay to ensure strategic planning and proper fund allocation.

Michael Jefferson opposed the motion, expressing frustration over the sudden pushback after years of independent work. He highlighted the Council's achievements and criticized the lack of recognition and support from legislators and the Governor's office. Jefferson argued that delaying reinvestment activities would undermine the Council's power and jeopardize future funding. He emphasized the historical context of systemic injustices and the need for timely action to redistribute wealth to impacted communities. Jefferson concluded by expressing disappointment over the perceived failure to support community reinvestment and the potential dismantling of the Social Equity Council.

Council members, including Edwin Shirley and Melvin Medina, raised concerns about the need for a clear strategic plan and communication regarding fund

distribution. Shirley, though absent from the previous meeting, expressed disappointment at the proposed delay and sought clarification on specific concerns.

Ojala Naeem, the Committee Chair, responded by highlighting the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus's concerns about the lack of alignment, communication, and strategic planning in fund distribution. She emphasized the need for a coordinated strategy and mentioned concerns about an audit of the Council's finances.

Council members acknowledged the importance of addressing specific concerns but cautioned against pausing progress due to external pressures. They discussed the challenges of balancing immediate action with thorough planning to ensure effective use of funds and meaningful impact on targeted communities impacted by the drug war and mass incarceration.

Andrea Hawkins shared mixed feelings about delaying funds to impacted communities but stressed the need for strategic planning to maximize benefits, suggesting discussions on strategic planning before making further decisions.

Kevin Walton emphasized the impact of delayed funds on communities, questioned the sudden interest in SEC's work, and urged hard questions be asked of the Council itself, not just the staff.

Subira Gordon reminded the Council of assurances from Representative Walker regarding fund allocation, urging deliberate and intentional spending to create a transformational difference.

Kyle Abercrombie expressed support for pausing to build trust and get the spending right, suggesting an analysis of previous fund allocations and strategic planning for impact.

Edwin Shirley aligned with addressing concerns from the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, emphasizing the need for rapport with them and welcoming the audit as an opportunity for improvement.

Avery Gaddis initially supported immediate fund distribution but shifted to support the pause for careful planning, proposing an amendment for a longer pause until further consideration.

The motion to pause until further consideration was passed, with most members in favor, two opposed, Kevin Walton and Michael Jefferson and one abstention from Edwin Shirley. Discussions also included requests for the recirculation of the previous reinvestment plan and reports on outcomes from the pilot funding round.

Motion – by Ojala Naeem
Second – by Kyle Abercrombie
In Favor – All
Opposed – Michael Jefferson, Kevin Walton
Abstentions – Edwin Shirley
Motion passed.

➤ Finance Committee

Presented by Chairman Avery Gaddis. Gaddis provided an overview of the committee's discussions and decisions from their recent meeting on May 30th. They reviewed expenditures and discussed the Oaksterdam University contract, focusing on deliverables and outcomes. Gaddis mentioned plans for a more thorough review of financial documents and proposed lowering the approval threshold for Council scrutiny from \$50,000 to \$25,000, aiming for increased financial oversight without micromanaging. He commended the SEC staff for their responsiveness and assistance in providing information to the committee.

Gaddis raised a concern about the flow of information between SEC staff and partner agencies like the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS). He wanted to ensure seamless communication and information sharing without bureaucratic hurdles.

Executive Director Ginne-Rae Clay confirmed that there were no impediments to providing information but noted a process where information leaving the office is reviewed for accuracy and value. Gaddis emphasized the importance of fluid communication among state agencies for efficient collaboration and transparency.

➤ Outreach Committee

Chairwoman Subira Gordon mentioned that the committee had not yet met. Therefore, there was no report to present. Gordon noted that Executive Director Clay had already provided an update on community conversations during the meeting. She indicated that the committee would have a report ready for the next meeting after their scheduled meeting on Friday.

➤ Personnel Committee

Chairman Michael Jefferson indicated that the committee would reserve comment due to the information provided by Chairman Shirley regarding the status of the bylaws and personnel matters to be included. No further details or discussions were reported during this agenda item.

8) For the Good of the Order (New Business, Updates, Information)

Chairman Michael Jefferson addressed concerns about the narrative surrounding the SEC's work. He emphasized the positive contributions of the SEC towards establishing equity in the adult cannabis business, noting that despite areas for improvement, the SEC is performing well overall. Jefferson expressed discomfort with the narrative being circulated, highlighting the Finance Chair's findings of no discrepancies in the documentation received from the staff. He welcomed an audit, emphasizing the SEC's transparency with public meetings and open documents for scrutiny. Jefferson concluded by stating that the negative narrative is false and may be used to justify actions against the Social Equity Council.

9) Adjourn

Councilman Avery Gaddis moved to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Councilman Kyle Abercrombie.

Motion – by Avery Gaddis
Second – by Kyle Abercrombie
In Favor – All
Opposed – None
Abstentions – None
Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 11:17 A.M.



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Date: June 4, 2024

RE: Minutes: June SEC Council Meeting Minutes Minutes (Draft)

Please be advised that the above-referenced typewritten minutes are a true and accurate description of the proceedings obtained from the recorded conversations to the extent that the audio could be clearly heard/understood. Portions that could not be heard/understood have been notated with a (an “inaudible” or “?...”).

Sincerely,

Brenda LaFleur

Brenda LaFleur
Owner, A Plus Reporting Service, LLC

I certify that this document is a true and accurate description of the proceedings obtained from the recorded conversations contained in the listed audio file.

Boden Truitt

Boden Truitt,
Transcriber

