

Reading adopts ‘Proclamation of Inclusion’

By Lauren Dorsey
Staff Writer

On Jan. 8, after discussions at four meetings over as many months, the Reading Selectboard voted unanimously to adopt a “Proclamation of Inclusion.” The text, written by selectboard member Bob Hartnett, closely reflects the language used by Gov. Phil Scott in his 2021 statement of inclusion.

It says in full:
The Selectboard of Reading, Vermont, proclaims the following:

The Town of Reading stands with Governor Philip B. Scott and the state of Vermont in condemning discrimination in all of its forms and agrees with the Proclamation of Inclusion signed by Governor Scott on May 7th, 2021.

With this Proclamation of Inclusion, the Town of Reading follows the lead of the state and formally condemns discrimination in all of its forms and welcomes everyone to our community.

The Town of Reading commits to treating everyone in

our community without discriminatory prejudice, and to being a town where everyone can freely express their opinions.”

Given under our hand this 8th day of January 2024.

However, a group called the Vermont Declaration of Inclusion, a statewide

grassroots movement which first approached Reading about adopting its statement of inclusion in October, has said that the new Reading proclamation fails to fully meet their criteria. According to Barbara Pulling, a volunteer with the Vermont Declaration of Inclusion, it falls short because, unlike their version or the statement released by Scott in 2021, Reading’s new proclamation does not specify any marginalized groups.

“‘All are welcome’ is a little washed down, and it’s too broad. It’s almost like a marketing message,” Pulling told the Standard. “We

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— Barbara Pulling, Vermont Declaration of Inclusion

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During the Reading Selectboard meeting last week, Hartnett presented two different versions of a statement he had written. The primary difference between the drafts was that “Version 1” listed a series of marginalized groups and “Version 2” did not.

Hartnett explained that after a previous selectboard meeting, he added the changes the town had discussed and successfully secured

the approval of the Vermont Declaration of Inclusion for Version 1. “We were ready to go forward with [that version], when some other folks

came in and [explained that] anytime you start to list all of these [communities], any group might feel slighted. You have the potential to not include somebody [and to] actually be less inclusive.”

Although Hartnett said that he preferred Version 2, he noted that he didn’t like the idea of excluding Reading from the Vermont Declaration of Inclusion’s list. “I don’t want us to be perceived by others as not caring about inclusivity because we’re not on this other list that everybody seems to feel is the master list of inclusivity,” Hartnett said during the meeting. “I don’t think we can go wrong re-

ally with either version at this point. I think we need to just make the statement and move on.”

After a discussion in which many residents of the town agreed that they preferred Hartnett’s second version, Hartnett turned to the other members of the board.

“I think both versions hit the nail on the head,” said selectboard chair Gordon Eastman. “Version 1 is somewhat explicit, but it doesn’t include everybody like Version 2 does, right? I will be in favor of Version 2.”

Before the vote, Hartnett expressed his desire to follow through with an earlier commitment to review Reading’s policies for bias, regardless of the version they chose. “If we adopt this, I am planning in future meetings to start asking for volunteers,” said Hartnett. “It’s probably going to take a small committee [with] whatever resources the state might have to guide us [on how to] do these policy re-

views for unintentional bias that may be in the language. This is step one today, step one of many.”

While Pulling regrets that Reading failed to pass a more assertive statement, she also commends the community on their thoughtfulness and dedication to the subject. “Reading did such a great job. We appreciate what they did involving the community,” Pulling told the Standard. “There was so much attendance at so many of those selectboard meetings and it’s truly great that the selectboard [wants to] take a look at the town’s policies and procedures and make sure there’s no discriminatory or exclusionary language in there. It just boils down to the wording of the actual declaration that they passed.”

“I am very happy that the selectboard recognized the importance of this,” wrote Reading resident Bill Baker in an email to the Standard. “But, we also all know that this is just a first step in making sure we create Reading into a truly welcoming place for all.”

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