

Naperville is working toward broad steps to address race, inclusion

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Body

The city of Naperville is considering several action steps to address race-related concerns, which recently have included comments offensive to Asian Americans and a battery that remains under investigation. City council members, during a virtual meeting Tuesday, thanked two Chinese leaders for stepping up to condemn a series of remarks that were read into the record during a meeting April 7 and an attack reported March 21. Nancy Chen and Bill Liu both asked the council to denounce these and other actions that they say have unfairly stereotyped and singled out Asian American people, especially in light of the coronavirus pandemic. Chen called on the city to adopt a resolution to end racism and hate crimes.

The suggested resolution she read aloud drew support from several council members. But City Manager Doug Krieger said, instead of adopting a resolution or proclamation, the city plans to roll out a broader diversity and inclusion plan that has been in the works for several months. Work toward the plan began after two high-profile episodes of unrest last fall, one involving a multiracial group of 18 asked to move at Buffalo Wild Wings because staffers said two white customers did not want to sit by them, and another involving a 14-year-old white student who posted an ad online showing a photo of a black classmate with the words "Slave for Sale (NAPERVILLE)." The city in December updated its mission statement to include a focus on "creating an inclusive community that values diversity." Krieger said a future diversity plan will include recommendations related to the staff members and partner organizations, taking into account feedback received from the U.S. Department of Justice. The plan is expected to come before the council May 19. The plan could help address concerns raised by Chen and Liu, who said some recent actions have served to divide the city. Chen said a Chinese American man jogging on a trail March 21 "was physically attacked by two women who spit on him and yelled at him to go back to China." Naperville Crime Stoppers is offering a reward of up to \$1,000 for information that leads to an arrest in the case. Police are investigating. A few weeks later, comments submitted by Erika DeCarlo during the city's first virtual council meeting called Asian members of an Opt Out group advocating against recreational marijuana sales "roving carpetbaggers" and made remarks Chen and Liu said they found hurtful. "I cannot disagree more with Ms. DeCarlo's depiction of many Naperville citizens of Chinese descent who support the Opt Out as carpetbaggers," Liu said. "The portrayal was demeaning and highly offensive." Council members echoed Chen's and Liu's denouncement of the remarks. Council member Benny White said he is meeting with Krieger later this week to discuss steps toward a potential commission or other framework to address race-related issues. He also has been hosting a series of Naperville Neighbors United meetings to promote dialogue around race and inclusion.

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