



DATE: August 6, 2021

TO: Mayor Anthony Fanucci
Council President Dr. Elizabeth Arthur
Council Vice President David Acosta
Councilman Ronald Franceschini, Jr.
Councilman Paul Spinelli
Councilman Albert Vargas

FROM: The Vineland Green Team

RE: 2021 Vineland Municipal Boards and Commissions
Diversity Survey

Dear Mayor and Members of City Council:

The City of Vineland achieved Sustainable Certification in 2017, and was subsequently re-certified in 2019. As the Vineland Green Team works to complete re-certification in 2021, one of the priority actions we are required to update from our initial certification is a diversity review of the city's various Boards and Commissions. This action provides an assessment process that allows elected officials to consider the degree of inclusion and representation on the various entities in relation to Vineland's community profile.

These Boards and Commissions represent a key component of community engagement activities in city actions and decision making. Members provide valuable insight, help shape key policy decisions, and provide community-based input into the design and administration of city services. Diverse membership encourages the exchange of different perspectives, facilitates innovative problem-solving, and supports social equity in the community.

The survey was administered by a sub-committee of Green Team members. Data for this action was collected and provided to the Green Team by the Chairperson or Secretary of each individual Board or Commission, and by interviews conducted by the sub-committee. The 10 groups profiled include the Environmental Commission, Housing Authority, Industrial Commission, Library Board, Planning Board, Police Athletic League Board, Recreation Commission, Vineland Development Corporation, Vineland Downtown Improvement District, and Zoning Board. For the purposes of this action, the gender and ethnicity of individual members was collected.

Taking into account current vacancies on the various Boards and Commissions, our universe of participants consisted of 80 appointees. Since the results of the 2020 census have not yet been released, Community Profile data was obtained from the 2010 census and subsequent American Community Survey updates. It is important to remember that because the sample size is small, minor changes in the make-up of the various Boards and Commissions can result in seemingly large percentage shifts. Much of the turnover the various entities have experienced has occurred in the past 19 months. The following is a breakdown of the demographic data collected through the surveys and community review process:

Ethnicity Breakdown

	<u>2017 Survey Results</u>	<u>2021 Survey Results</u>	<u>Community Profile*</u>
Caucasian/White	58.7%	66.2%	54.8%
Hispanic/Latino	28.6%	24.0%	30.4%
African American	9.5%	6.3%	11.3%
Native American	1.5%	0%	.1%
Asian	1.5%	3.5%	1.3%
Pacific Islander	0%	0%	.1%
Other	.2%	0%	2.0%

Diversity is one of Vineland’s biggest strengths. According to the survey findings, current appointees to the city’s various Boards and Commissions do reflect this diversity. While there has been a small decline in Hispanic/Latino and African American participation, the difference is not alarming, especially considering the difficulties presenting by the COVID-19 pandemic with respect to recruiting candidates. In fact, if current vacancies were to be filled by Hispanic/Latino and African American candidates, the previous balance within the various Boards and Commissions would be restored to pre-pandemic levels.

*Community Profile Data has been weighted to compensate for individuals who self-identify as more than one race.

Gender Breakdown

	<u>2017 Survey Results</u>	<u>2021 Survey Results</u>	<u>Community Profile</u>
Male	60.3%	68.8%	47.2%
Female	39.7%	31.2%	52.8%

According to the survey findings, males are overrepresented on the city’s various Boards and Commissions in comparison to the Vineland Community Profile. Unfortunately, the research shows that this phenomenon has been occurring throughout the United States for many years. Studies show that more than half of the civic Boards and Commissions across the United States have no women on them at all. That’s thousands of all-male boards making decisions that impact millions of families. In fact, many communities, in states around the country, find themselves unable to meet the gender requirements even when they have laws on the books mandating gender balance on their municipal Boards and Commissions.

Additionally, there does not seem to be any consensus as to why this phenomenon exists in both large and small communities since most studies show that women generally are more likely to volunteer than men. Although Vineland has not reached gender balance, we are doing much better than municipalities in many states. Again, while we did see a small decline in female participation from the 2017 results, we would also attribute this to the effects of the Pandemic and a smaller pool of candidates. Since the Mayor and Council members are essentially unchanged from 2017, we have no reason to believe there has been a change in the philosophy for selecting candidates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Serving on a municipal Board or Commission is a significant and meaningful way for citizens to participate in civic life. Numerical data gathered as part of the Vineland Diversity Survey project demonstrates that successive Vineland administrations have done a good job of making appointments to the city's various Boards and Commissions that are broadly representative of the community profile in key areas such as ethnicity and gender. While there are deficiencies, the Green Team does not believe that there are any existing "policies, practices, or procedures" that require corrective legislative or administrative actions.

With that said, this does not mean city officials should not take every available opportunity to encourage volunteerism and public participation in municipal government from all segments of the community. The following are easy to implement suggestions which could help the city recruit and maintain an even more diverse pool of qualified applicants available to fill future openings:

- Utilize upcoming appearances before local clubs, organizations, and community groups to remind the membership about the critical work performed by the city's various Boards and Commissions, and to encourage them to participate in this very important aspect of local government.
- Work with women from local leadership groups, schools, and other organizations to brainstorm what "public service messages" might resonate best with women in the community.
- In addition to the existing announcements posted on the "Public Meetings" page of the city website, regularly utilize other public information tools to encourage participation including the Government and Education Cable Channel 9, Municipal Utilities bill inserts, social media platforms, and press announcements.
- Place hard copies of the "Registration Form" for individuals interested in serving on a Board or Commission in public areas of City Hall such as the City Clerk's office or the mayor's waiting area. Those responding would be placed on a waiting list for consideration as openings become available.
- Continually encourage current Board and Commission members to spread the recruitment message within their social networks and professional associations.
- Create a recruitment brochure and/or flyer that could be distributed to local clubs, organizations, and community groups.
- Consider producing Public Service Announcements for use on local radio and television outlets, and city social media accounts.
- If possible, refrain from appointing members to simultaneously sit on two or more Boards or Commissions
- Look for creative and fun ways to recognize Board and Commission members. This will improve retention and help in the recruitment of new volunteers as well. There has never been a volunteer who has been thanked too often!



An increased public effort at recruiting new applicants will create more visibility for the various Boards and Commissions, identify the valuable work they do, and promote the commitment of the individuals who do the work. Recruitment may also attract qualified individuals who have never before considered the idea of participating in local decision-making or public policy. The more that people are aware of real opportunities to serve on a Board or Commission, and the impact they can have on issues that are important to them, the more likely they are to seek appointment.

Diversity of life experiences is important in developing representative and balanced local practices and policies. A truly sustainable community is one in which all members achieve, participate, and thrive; and where they voluntarily contribute to improving the quality of life and enjoy economic, social, and other benefits of a prosperous and resilient community. Ensuring diversity on municipal Boards and Commissions provides the opportunity of offering different perspectives, sharing different life experiences, and helping to guarantee a fairer and more democratic decision-making process