



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor Diane Wolfe Marlin and City Council Members  
**FROM:** Carol Mitten, City Administrator  
**DATE:** January 13, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** A Resolution Regarding the Implementation of Gender-Neutral Language in Official Written and Verbal Communications by the City of Urbana

**Introduction:** Councilmembers Miller and Roberts offered a proposed Resolution for consideration by the Council that would commit the City to work toward the use of gender-neutral language when conducting official business. The draft Resolution was offered as a Discussion item at two recent Committee of the Whole meetings (December 21, 2020 and January 4, 2021). The Council consensus was to move the Resolution forward for action without delay.

**Discussion:** The primary take-away of the discussion on the Resolution to date is that it is not a question of whether the City should implement gender-neutral language, but how. The language of the Resolution has been updated to recognize that this effort must be gradual, because of the extent of the effort involved. The scope of effort will become clearer below, as I have identified short-term, medium-term, and longer-term efforts to achieve the intent of the Resolution. I have no reservations about the Resolution or that adopting gender-neutral language is appropriate. However, I think it is important for Council and the public to understand that full implementation of these changes will take a long time.

**Short-term efforts:** Thanks to the initiative of Councilmember Wu, we have a proposal from Municode to review our City Code and offer a series of changes that would implement gender-neutral language changes throughout. The cost of that review would be \$4,500. The implementation of the changes themselves would take 4-6 weeks, which does not include the time for Municode to conduct the page-by-page review of the City Code or the time for City Council to consider and adopt the ordinance changes.

Further, there is clearly training that needs to be developed and conducted for City staff, Councilmembers, and members of boards, commissions, and committees. The focus of this effort would be on verbal communications, since progress in this area can have the most immediate and visible effect. This will take time to implement across all these individuals, but we can certainly make substantial progress on this effort in the next six months.

Councilmember Brown suggested that the Municode update effort could be funded by reallocating funds for Council Travel, Education, and Training. HR/Finance has prepared a budget amendment that would reallocate \$4,500 of money from Council Travel, Education, and Training to pay for the Code update and \$2,150 to pay for training development and implementation.

*Medium-term efforts:* I would suggest that the next installment of effort go towards the pages on our website, which could include standard forms. The focus would be on outward-facing documents before we turn to inward-facing documents over the longer term.

Apart from and prior to the effort around gender-neutral language, we have been trying to update the City's website. The biggest impediment is the commitment of staff time involved. While the language-update effort would be narrower and focused on swapping out specific words, it still requires page-by-page changes by staff members whose time is already over-subscribed. We could batch this work based on the most frequently visited webpages and most frequently used forms, but this will require a considerable effort. These changes would not affect existing PDFs that were created and posted prior to the adoption of this Resolution, to the extent those PDFs capture a time-specific document.

*Longer-term efforts:* There are a multitude of internal policies and procedures that would need to be updated as part of this effort. The Police Department alone has 163 policies (currently comprised of a total of almost 600 pages). The City's Policy and Procedure Manual currently has 91 separate policies. In addition to internal policies and forms posted on the City's internal website, there are informational pages that would also require review and editing. It will be years before all of these documents and pages can be completed.

**Recommendation:** I recommend that City Council approve the attached Resolution. I would ask that the Council and the public recognize that the time lag in full implementation of gender-neutral language is not reflective of a lack of respect for those individuals who are affected most acutely by outdated language norms, but by a lack of available staff resources to move more swiftly to make the necessary changes.

Attachment: Draft Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. 2021-01-004R

**A RESOLUTION REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE IN OFFICIAL WRITTEN AND VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS BY THE CITY OF URBANA**

**WHEREAS**, the City of Urbana ("City") is a home rule unit of local government pursuant to Article VII, Section 6, of the Illinois Constitution, 1970, and may exercise any power and perform any function pertaining to its government and affairs, and the passage of this Resolution constitutes an exercise of the City's home rule powers and functions as granted in the Illinois Constitution, 1970; and

**WHEREAS**, the City recognizes that gender-neutral language is a generic term covering the use of non-sexist language, inclusive language, or gender-fair language, that the purpose of gender-neutral language is to avoid word choices that may be interpreted as biased, discriminatory, or demeaning by implying that one sex or social gender is the norm; and

**WHEREAS**, the City recognizes that using gender-neutral language also helps reduce gender stereotyping, promotes social change, and contributes to achieving gender equality; and

**WHEREAS**, the City recognizes that gender-neutral language is more than a matter of political correctness, that language powerfully reflects and influences attitudes, behavior, and perceptions; and

**WHEREAS**, the City believes that all individuals living in or visiting the City should be treated fairly and with respect and dignity; and

**WHEREAS**, the use of gender-neutral language by the City can be expected to further enhance and demonstrate the City's commitment to being a safe, inclusive, diverse, and welcoming community; and

**WHEREAS**, ever-increasing awareness exists that language matters, and in particular with regard to the subtle and not so subtle, and intended and unintended consequences of language, including implicit or explicit bias; and

**WHEREAS**, linguistic conventions that differentiate and identify people by perceived gender may fail to respect the broad spectrum of sex, gender, gender identity, and gender expression of those individuals living, working, and visiting our community.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the City Council of the City of Urbana, Champaign County, Illinois, as follows:

**Section 1.** The City shall work to update the Urbana City Code to replace instances of gender-specific language with appropriate gender-neutral language.

**Section 2.** When brought forward to future Committee and Council meetings, all future additions, amendments, or other changes unspecified here to the City Code will utilize gender-neutral language, rather than gender-specific language.

**Section 3.** All future proposed Resolutions and Ordinances will utilize gender-neutral language, rather than gender-specific language.

**Section 4.** The language used in the conduct of routine parliamentary proceedings during meetings, staff presentations, official videos, and other verbal communications, whenever practical and possible, shall utilize gender-neutral language, rather than gender-specific language.

**Section 5.** City officers and staff, including members of boards, commissions, and committees, shall strive to use gender-neutral language, whenever possible and practicable, in official documents and non-verbal communications pertaining to the City and official City business. The City will provide training to facilitate greater understanding of gender-neutral options in communications.

**PASSED BY THE CITY COUNCIL** this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

AYES:

NAYS:

ABSENT:

ABSTAINED:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phyllis D. Clark, City Clerk

**APPROVED BY THE MAYOR** this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Diane Wolfe Marlin, Mayor