

Information Item

Committee of the Whole



Meeting date: April 3, 2024

Topic

Imagine 2050 Equity Chapter Update

District(s), member(s):	ALL
Policy/legal reference:	Minn. Stat. § 473.145
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Division/department:	All

Background

The Metropolitan Council is tasked with preparing and adopting a comprehensive regional development guide. The Council undertakes this work every 10 years. The current adopted regional development guide is *Thrive MSP 2040*. As part of the next regional development guide, titled *Imagine 2050*, the Council has developed five regional goals on topics of equity, climate change, natural systems, economic resilience, and public health and safety.

The Council endorsed a regional Equity Framework at its Committee of the Whole meeting on September 20, 2023, to guide the development of *Imagine 2050* to center equity in both the process of developing the guide and in the policies developed as a part of the guide. These efforts are supported by Minn Stat. § 473.145 which states:

“The comprehensive development guide must recognize and encompass physical, social, or economic needs of the metropolitan area...”

The Council’s regional equity goal states:

Our region is equitable and inclusive.

Racial inequities and injustices experienced by historically marginalized communities have been eliminated; and every person feels welcome, included, and empowered.

At the April 3rd Committee of the Whole meeting, the Council will review the draft concepts within the Equity Chapter of *Imagine 2050*. This consists of several Frameworks to guide the Council’s work and include not only the already endorsed regional Equity Framework, but an environmental justice framework, a community-centered engagement framework, an anti-displacement framework as well as the work of the Native Advisory Council currently in process.

The intention of these frameworks are to set the direction for Council action, show Council commitments, set expectations for how the Council conducts work, and guide decision-making at all levels within the Council. The work embedded in the frameworks under review include the immense amount of engagement with community and regional stakeholders over the course of the development of *Imagine 2050*, including the direction from the Council to be bold and ambitious with this work.

Equity Framework (Angela R. Torres for the Equity Task Force)

The Council endorsed *Imagine 2050's* Equity Framework on September 20, 2023. The framework sets the direction of the work of the Council and identifies how the work of the Council will be conducted. It provides a consistent, clear vision of and process toward equity, includes a method of co-creating solutions with communities for long-term, sustainable equity work, and provides guidance on the concept, implementation, and goals of equity for the entire Council, regardless of particular areas' prior experience with equity work.

The Framework has three main principles:

- **Contextualized:** This ensures solutions are addressing a systemic inequity by naming institutionalized inequities and centering communities' account of their history. Contextualization of an issue, a community, a neighborhood, or experience helps to understand how historical injustice leads to present injustices, disparities, and barriers. This requires examining systems of privilege and power, and how they inform the Council's work.
- **Community-Centered:** This ensures we are working with the population affected by said inequity to co-create solutions. Leading with community voices means that community's expertise guides the work and decision-making processes are largely participatory. It requires transparency and proactiveness in sharing information as well as innovation and imaginative thinking to embed community voices in policy.
- **Reparative:** Ensures we are creating solutions that are commensurate with what caused the inequity, and institutionalizing equity into all Council processes. This requires mechanisms to be in place to build upon and improve policies and includes disrupting unjust systems to ensure future generations benefit from solutions. Importantly, the community needs to agree that the solution is commensurate with what caused the inequity.

This framework clarifies the existing Council definition of equity. Equity centers Black communities, Indigenous communities, and peoples of color, LGBTQIA people, people of marginalized genders, immigrants, people of low wealth, and people with disabilities. Equity understands inequitable policies, practices, and cultures are integral to the history of our state and country, understands these historic and current inequities lead to unjust patterns of resource distribution, and actively seeks to correct these unjust patterns.

Importantly, equity repositions community as experts in their history, needs, solutions, and resources. This framework leverages the Council's authority and influence to support communities.

Environmental Justice (EJ) Framework (Sarah Gong and Laura Bretheim, for the EJ Task Force)

The Council reviewed the Environmental Justice definition in the fall of 2023, voicing support for the direction and efforts underway at that time towards building an EJ Framework. The work on environmental justice builds from the foundation of the Equity Framework and the work conducted during the development of the Climate Action Work Plan adopted by the Council in December of 2022. The definition of EJ resulting from Council review states that

Environmental Justice is
the right for all residents to live in a clean, safe environment
that contributes to a healthy quality of life

Using the Equity Framework as foundation, the EJ Task Force centers the Framework in Black communities, Indigenous communities, communities of color, disabled communities, immigrant and refugee, and low-income communities who have and continue to experience a legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers that have resulted in environmental injustices, harms, and risks.

Through its regional values of equity, leadership, accountability, and stewardship, the Council commits to conducting community-centered engagement, repairing past and ongoing harms, distributing benefits equitably, and preventing future burdens. Environmental Justice at the Council requires necessary adaptations to Council services, requirements, policies, practices, processes, and decisions, starting with its Regional Development Guide, to support a healthy and safe region.

- **People centered, data-driven decision-making:** Data and lived experiences of overburdened



communities inform decisions. This means understanding the environmental history and present experiences relevant to communities who experience a legacy of environmental racism or other structural or systemic barriers such as disability, ageism, or being in poverty.

- Prioritize engagement with overburdened communities. This means transforming community engagement processes towards reparative, respectful relationships with communities – particularly the most overburdened and vulnerable, and identifying the internal cultural barriers that prevent us from doing so.
- Community benefits beyond harm mitigation. This involves prioritizing maximum environmental benefits to the most overburdened communities, especially where legal frameworks insufficiently address regional community concerns, and establishing Council practices and practices maximize environmental benefits, rather than solely mitigate harms.

Community-Centered Engagement Framework (Michelle Fure)

Community-Centered Engagement intentionally puts people first and centers community perspectives in the process of Met Council decision-making. It facilitates the following values:

- Partnering with community as co-creators
- Committing to shared agenda setting
- Investing in community capacity building
- Focusing on assets in community

The Community-Centered Engagement Framework builds on the foundation from the Public Engagement Plan, as part of *Thrive MSP 2040*, to more explicitly call out the value of centering community voices in Council decision-making, while imbedding the public engagement principles and strategy directly in the Regional Development Guide. It also connects the engagement-related elements of the other aspects of the Equity Framework together.

As outlined by the Community-Centered tenet of the Equity Framework, the Council's approach to engagement must center community voices in our work and ensure community voices guide our decision-making processes. Over the past 10 years, since the adoption of *Thrive MSP 2040* and the implementation of the Public Engagement Plan, the Council's approach to engagement has grown as we have dedicated more resources to intentional, people-focused engagement. In that time, we have worked to identify specific practices that more intentionally involve community voices, including:

- Embracing nationally recognized standards of engagement, including the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) and their engagement categories and spectrum, with small modifications.
- Prioritizing community partnerships that empower and compensate community leaders and individuals in guiding decision-making.
- Supporting engagement and research cohorts to both support community voices in planning processes, but also build capacity for leadership in public processes and decision-making spaces.
- Intentionally identifying impacted communities, to ensure their involvement in a decision-making process.
- Dedicating budgets to engagement in a way that supports community voices and builds community capacity for public decision-making.
- Prioritizing engagement with overburdened communities and recognizing the need for engagement processes to include shared agenda-setting and decision-making that support the Equity Framework elements of being reparative, respectful, relational, and culturally relevant and responsive.

Community voices shaped the Public Engagement Plan created in response to the equity commitments in *Thrive MSP 2040*. Since that time, community voices and the experience of our public processes have identified ways to more intentionally imbed principles of equity and inclusion into engagement and



decision-making processes – namely recognizing historical patterns of injustice and exclusion, and the impact of unilateral decision-making.

In addition, the Metropolitan Council has established tribal relations policies – including both formal government-to-government consultation, staff involvement, and community engagement expertise since creating the Public Engagement Plan. The Council has also updated its interpretation of the public purpose doctrine to include incentives and compensation for engagement and community expertise. These updated practices are more reflective of a community-centered approach to engagement and should be included in regional plans for 2050.

Community-Centered Engagement honors community expertise, addresses inequity by acknowledging and compensating the value of community expertise, and prioritizes processes that invite community participation and partnership. It recognizes a full spectrum of connection with community voices, from informing to co-creation. It ensures all people are represented in decision-making and that the weight of feedback from community is proportional to the impact a decision has on communities. Community-Centered Engagement represents a fundamental commitment to addressing equity in community engagement.

Next steps include engaging the Equity Advisory Committee in validating and implementing this framework, and a community engagement effort to validate prior engagement principles, ask community members what transparency and accountability look and feel like to them, define with community what centering community voices means, and establish qualitative and quantitative measures of involvement.

Anti-Displacement Framework (Maia Guerro Combs and Olivia Boerschinger, for the Housing Policy team)

On April 3rd, the Committee will review the work of the Anti-Displacement team including its definition, key components of this work, and strategies. The Anti-Displacement Framework is an assessment framework that includes strategies and tools to outline the potential effects of displacement from Met Council investments. The Anti-Displacement Framework works to uncover the potential impacts investments can have on a community and uplift community centered actions and decision making to combat the generational effects of inequitable policies such as redlining and racial covenants.

Defining Anti-Displacement for the Met Council:

Anti-Displacement is an active process of centering and empowering communities to protect their home, access to resources, and sense of belonging from loss due to a Council investment or policy.

Key Components of Anti-Displacement:

To prioritize those most impacted by displacement and reduce harm, key components of anti-displacement for Met Council policies, processes and systems should include:

- Preservation of existing cultural connection
- Creation and strengthening of community inclusiveness
- Be justice-centered; repair historical injustices by empowering overburdened communities to co-create best practices to remedy historic and ongoing harm
- Prioritize overburdened communities that are most impacted by displacement

Anti-Displacement Framework Objective:

Increase the ability for residents to keep their housing, amenities, health and/or sense of belonging in a neighborhood.

Anti-Displacement Framework Strategies:

- Met Council investments go through an anti-displacement risk assessment
- Prioritize projects that support community connection and anti-displacement in Met Council grant programs



- Provide best practices and resources through engagement and collaboration with overburdened communities

Land, Water, and People Commitments (Allison Waukau for the Native Advisory Council)

On March 25th, the first Native Advisory Council meeting was held with over 12 members of the Native community representing some of the most respected elders and community leaders in the metro. The Native Advisory Council, which centers Dakota voices, includes a range of tribal affiliations, tribal nation representatives, executive directors, presidents, and CEOs of respected non-profits, community organization leaders, and native residents in the metro. The discussion was sponsored by Council member Lilligren and led by Allison Waukau, Met Council Tribal Liaison and Native Relations Coordinator.

This Advisory Council will meet bi-weekly for four months, tasked with developing a Land, Water, and People statement of commitment for the Council and *Imagine 2050*. This effort is often called a land acknowledgement, but the first consensus of the Advisory Council indicated a negative history with Land Acknowledgements, that actions and commitments are necessary. The Advisory Council will identify necessary commitments and actions for the Council as well as review all policies and actions with references to indigenous peoples in *Imagine 2050*. This work is based again, on the endorsed Equity Framework (Contextualized, Community-Centered, Reparative).

The Advisory Council responded to these questions:

- What does a Land Acknowledgement mean to you?
- What would you like the metro to look like in 10 years? 50 years

Below are a few messages that we heard:

- There needs to be an honest and meaningful recognition of past harm.
- Representation and partnership in decision-making is crucial.
- Access to sacred sites is essential.
- Support for community-based organizations and culturally-responsive services is needed.
- Safe, affordable, and welcoming neighborhoods are critical.

Discussion at the next meeting will explore the role of the Met Council and the regional development guide including policy areas and potential actions the Advisory Council would recommend. This work is ongoing and will develop over the coming months. Council staff will give a brief update on these activities and look forward to reporting back again as more work develops.

