

Minutes of the

MEETING OF THE EQUITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, June 18, 2019

Committee Members Present: Nelima Sitati Munene, Francisco Gonzalez, Aarica Coleman, David Ketroser, Tommy Sar, Tie Oei, Chai Lee, Kris Fredson, Sarah Rudolf, Anita Urvina Davis, Juliana Miller, Lanise Block, Metric Giles

Committee Members Excused: Samantha Pree-Stinson, Leslie Redmond, Shirley Cain, Miah Ulysse, Leah Goldstein Moses, Mohamed Sheikh

Committee Members Absent: Abdirahman Muse, Sonya Lewis

CALL TO ORDER

Committee Co-Chair Sitati Munene called the regular meeting of the Council's Equity Advisory Committee to order at 6:14 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

The agenda was moved by Lee and seconded by Gonzalez.

The meeting minutes from April 16, 2019, were moved by Fredson and seconded by Lee.

WELCOME NEW EAC MEMBERS

Co-chairs Nelima Sitati Munene and Francisco Gonzalez welcomed the new committee members to the Equity Advisory Committee and initiated introductions.

REGIONAL PARKS INTEREST EARNINGS

Libby Starling, Deputy Director of Community Development; Emmett Mullin, Manager, Regional Parks and Open Space Unit asked for the committee's advice on how to use new funding [annually accrued interest earnings] for the use and betterment of the regional parks system. In 2015, the Minnesota Legislature passed session law that directed the Council to use "the interest earnings ... for the use and betterment of all regional recreational open space lands under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Council." This language was effective on January 1, 2018. The estimated interest earnings available to be allocated is approximately \$700,000.

Committee members had the following comments:

- Have the implementing agencies identified any ideas?

The implementing agencies have many ideas, such as equity grant funding for noncapital projects, land acquisition, covering funding gaps, while some have asked for the money to be used at their discretion.

- Do you have information about who the regional parks are serving versus who they are supposed to be serving?

The research was conducted in 2015. We are working on getting more specific information at the park-level. Staff can send some information to Yolanda if you are interested.

- If the staff hasn't already, you should connect with the State of Minnesota's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) because they have some equity initiatives related to parks.

- The parks could use the funding for programming. A community survey should be conducted to ask residents what resources or amenities they would want.
- Are staff finding that people are more frequently using parks that are on transit lines? Or that are more walkable? Are staff looking into those kinds of factors when looking at activities?

We have found that parks that are more centrally located tend to be more popular. This summer, we have a project between Metro Transit and the Parks Unit: buses that are wrapped with butterflies specifically on bus routes that go to regional parks.

Also, the staff is testing the distance between transit stops and park entrances to see how intuitive it is to find park entrances. If someone didn't know where the entrances are, could they figure it out? We have a lot of work to do to better connect our parks and trails to transit. The majority of our regional parks system exists out of the metro and those are harder to serve. This is an important question: How can we better connect the regional parks to metro transit?

- If we are giving the money to the various implementing agencies, does this give us the authority to decide how they spend the funding? Or are we providing a suggestion that they may or may not do?

That is up for discussion. If we are distributing a formula and we give it to them then no, we cannot stipulate how they spend the funding. If the funding is distributed through a grant agreement, we would put specific stipulations. Or they would have to compete for the funding, and we would decide which to fund.

- It is recommended that the RFP require a culturally specific plan and then we can review and see if it matches what we are looking for.
- Can we require the implementing agencies to subgrant the money? If we can't give the money to community organizations ourselves?
- Can we build what people of color (POCIs) want? How can we find out what people want to use? For example, skate parks.
- Many community organizations are familiar with our work, have you been working with them? How can we incorporate some of what they are doing into our work? Parks and Power for example. Shirley knows a group working in Saint Paul for parks equity issues for Native Americans.

In the equity grant program, we are trying to encourage the implementing agencies (IA's) to incorporate community partners into the design and implementation of the projects. Sub-granting may be more burdensome than beneficial because it would come with administrative tails (reporting, monitoring, etc.). We want to encourage IA's to take on the responsibility, closer and closer to the ground because they are responsible for managing the parks. The equity grant program may be an opportunity to push the parks to invest in other things (e.g. skate park).

- I would like to encourage you to stay open to community groups if they are trying to be involved. Often, when it's not working at the ground level, (implementing agencies) then they come to us.
- Are all these grants competing against each other? Small projects competing against larger projects? Is there some assurance that resources would be spread across the metro?

The capital equity grant program will be coming to the Council next week. It is a small pool of \$300,000 for this pilot year with the possibility of expanding to \$600,000.

- There are passes required at some regional parks and parking costs. Have you considered a free day a month or a week? The Walker Art Center does this. This is something to take into consideration for the grant money.

Seven out of ten of the implementing agencies do not have a gate fee. But in place of the gate fees, for some parks, there are special-use fees. This is a good idea to look into.

- Ramsey County has no component of equity and they said they are looking to the Met Council for equity in parks. But we also don't have an equitable process either. With all these agencies, do we have a starting point about where they are in terms of equity? So we have a foundational place? When we distribute the funds?

We have some data, but we are looking at how to get that data more frequently and that it is more up to date. We know the demographics for residents and demographics of who is using the parks. We want to look more closely at the discrepancies.

- Also, want to point out that accessibility is a barrier (for people with disabilities) and for transit access.
- It is recommended to look into renting out wheelchairs that go on grass and gravel. There are options, but it's expensive. Nice to have equipment that people can rent. I want to get into the forest and go fishing. Also, it would be nice to go beyond the beaten path.
- Recommendation to have one pot of funding for community improvement projects, and another for capital improvement so the projects do not compete with each other.
- Who are the parks serving? We would like baseline data of who is using the parks and how we can increase access? Curious about what type of programming and engagement could be used.
- What are the processes and timeline?

Sometime between now and the end of 2019, it will come to the Community Development Committee (CDC) and then to full Council. We will be discussing how to use the funding now, and then how to use it in the future. There would be a placeholder in the Council's 2020 budget – a line item for what the distribution would be going forward. It could be a competitive process, could also not be.

- Important questions to keep in mind: how will the implementing agencies (IA's) implement equity? What are some of the goals? We are going to prioritize funding IA's that are focusing on certain issues that will bring us further along in having an equitable regional park system.
- It is suggested that the EAC assists with research for what their communities want in terms of resources.
- During the design and implementation, think about how we are capturing the voice of the residents – particularly Areas of Concentrated Poverty (ACPs). It is important to have a data-driven approach rather than making decisions based on perceptions; we would like to see more data.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE EAC BYLAWS

Co-chairs Nelima Sitati Munene and Francisco Gonzalez presented proposed amendments to the EAC Bylaws. The committee will not vote on proposed changes until a later date; however, the co-chairs wanted feedback from committee members regarding proposed changes to the process for filling vacancies and the attendance requirement.

1. Filling Vacancies: Co-chairs went through the process of re-seating committee members, but those terms are going to expire next year. Our thought was to do this more efficiently by having the Community Co-chair make a recommendation to the Council Chair for the appointment.

2. Attendance: Members would be automatically removed after missing six meetings in a calendar year; we want to make sure that we are getting input from community members and if they aren't available to participate fully, we understand, but we should appoint someone else.

Several committee members shared comments:

- Regarding appointments, where are we pulling these people from? How would they be selected?
- For attendance, we would have to discuss a start date for implementing the proposed attendance policy. Many members would be eligible for removal. How will we begin implementation and how do we communicate it?
- Allowing six vacancies is too generous.
- If you have missed three months, that's too many. I think it should be three consecutive excused OR unexcused. 5 is a lot.
- We should remove the distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Extended leave of absences should not be allowed.
- The attendance would need to be enforced. If you don't enforce it, then it doesn't mean anything.

Gonzalez requested that committee members send any additional feedback to Yolanda; we will bring this to a future meeting for a vote if we move forward.

COMMITTEE PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

Co-chairs Nelima Sitati Munene and Francisco Gonzalez discussed several items related to committee processes. The new EAC Agenda Request Form, if implemented, would be filled out by staff for the Standing Committee's review. The Standing Committee would then decide whether or not to take up the item at a future meeting. The document would also track EAC recommendations and next steps following the meeting.

Committee members supported the use of the new tool and shared the following comments:

- This would be helpful because even with that presentation we just had, how is that info is used? What are the follow-ups? There should be a section added to the document regarding follow-ups.
- We should consider adding to the form "what were the actions as a result" or "how did we influence the change".
- It would help us have clarity on what our recommendations were during the meeting.
- I appreciate the priority ranking for certain areas that we are interested in.
- This will help determine if we are a rubber stamp committee – three I's: information, input, influence; hope that this will help us better our engagement and we can start tracking the actions so there are some clarity and transparency.

The committee briefly discussed ideas for new advisory committees or subcommittees: Next Generation Advisory Committee; Emerging Entrepreneurs Advisory Committee

- I think we need to get our committee under control. If the Council is willing to do another committee that involves those individuals, great! But I think we need to get our house in order.
- Do other committees have subcommittees and how do they interact?

The committee discussed the defined process for Council to receive, consider and respond to EAC recommendations from the Regional Administrator.

Committee members had the following comments:

- Can we issue a dissenting opinion when the Council makes a decision we are not in agreement with? This is what we told them, and this is how we felt about it. We can voice our displeasure even if it doesn't change the decision.
- We need a formal process to document our recommendations so that it gets to the Council clearly.

OUTSTANDING FOLLOW UPS

Co-chairs Nelima Sitati Munene and Francisco Gonzalez asked the committee to respond to the Research Team's memo. The committee will invite the Research Team back in July to discuss their work.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chair Sitati Munene had several announcements for the committee:

- The Standing Committee will now be meeting here at the Met Council Robert Street location. We've all made a concerted effort to find an external space that works, but ultimately, the feedback we have been receiving is that it would be preferable to have a consistent, accessible location. Our next meeting is on Tuesday, June 25 at 5:30 pm. As always, if you are interested in participating in the Standing Committee, let me or staff know, and we will forward you the calendar invitation.
- Please fill out the post-meeting survey. It only takes a few minutes to complete, and your feedback is really useful. Yolanda will send the survey link.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Yolanda Burckhardt
Recording Secretary