

MEETING MINUTES OF THE EQUITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, May 19, 2020

Committee Members Present: Francisco Gonzalez, Nelima Sitati Munene, Leah Goldstein Moses, Tie Oei, Chai Lee, Lanise Block, Andres Boland, Phillip Sterner, Anita Urvina Davis, Edward McDonald, Desralynn Cole, Mohamed Sheikh, Michael Luseni, Sarah Rudolf, Richard Paul

Committee Members Excused: Nicholas Jenkins

Committee Members Absent: Sonya Lewis, Miah Ulysse, Tommy Sar, Julia Miller

CALL TO ORDER

Committee Co-chair Gonzalez called the Metropolitan Council's Equity Advisory Committee to order at 6:08 p.m. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Committee was held virtually, via Webex.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

The May 2020 agenda was moved by Co-chair Gonzalez. Oei motioned and Lee seconded. Verbal roll call of present members called, with approvals from all members. Motion passed.

December 2019 meeting minutes moved for approval by Co-chair Gonzalez. Cole motioned and Sheikh seconded. Verbal roll call of present members called, with approvals from all members except Council Member Sterner, who abstained. Motion passed.

January 2020 meeting minutes moved for approval by Co-chair Gonzalez. Sheikh motioned and Council Member Lee seconded. Verbal roll call of present members called, with approvals from all members. Motion passed.

February 2020 meeting minutes were moved for approval by Co-chair Gonzalez. Sheikh motioned and Paul seconded. Verbal roll call of present members called, with approvals from all members. Motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS OPEN

Co-chair Gonzalez opened the meeting up for comments from the public; however, there were no members of the public connected via phone.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS/ ORIENTATION QUESTIONS:

The committee members welcomed the seven new EAC members: Andreas Boland, Desralynn Cole, Richard Paul, Nicholas Jenkins (not present), Edward McDonald, Michael Luseni, Phillip Sterner and everyone on the committee briefly introduced themselves.

CHECK-IN REGARDING: COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Co-chair Gonzalez opened up the floor to discussion regarding how the current COVID-19 Pandemic is affecting the committee members, their families and communities:

- Co-chair Gonzalez commented on how the Met Council is struggling with how to do the work of the council remotely, and how to work within the communities, attending meetings and functions with constituents and get the feedback to bring back to the council remotely. How do we do we do better community engagement remotely? Issues of access to technology, but community isn't quick with inequity in technology. What emerging issues are you seeing that may affect the work of the Met Council?
- Cole was concerned with the technology divide in communities of color, and that increasing access to internet service is bare minimum. Additionally, meeting platforms like Teams, Zoom, Webex need wider access. She's Concerned with the lack of access that low income communities have to

laptops, tablets, etc. What will be the process if we will continue to have public meetings going forward due to social distancing guidelines so the community can have these resources? It's an equity issue.

- Co-Chair Gonzalez, we're seeing that issue in the public schools with the technology issue as well.
- McDonald mentioned he's concerned with the social economic gaps. Concerned that the legislature is passing the multi-billion-dollar bonding bill and that half will fall in met area, however with current disparities with no provisions that elevate low income/ PoC to equal levels, and there is apparently no indication that the Met Council is going to use its influence with the Governor or legislature to impact equitable practices, using contracting for small businesses of color/ women owned to utilize those funds. As of now there is no language that ensures equal access to low income businesses or levels the playing field through contracting or other means. Could be a lost opportunity if momentum isn't used for funding.
- Oei agreed that the technology is worried that the voiceless will become more voiceless with the lack of technology. The pandemic has shown how unequal we really are, and we've been unequal for a long time. The pandemic has made the inequality greater and I agree with that we could lose the momentum regarding the bonding bill money if we don't do something with that.
- Sheikh commented that the pandemic is an example of how a disaster can be a blessing in disguise, in that it shows how the haves continue to have more and the have nots continue going to the bottom of the barrel. The problem is multi-faceted. Even if we provide technology to the community, the problem is in know-how, it is still difficult for people to use online technology if they are not use to it. Besides access, teaching it is an issue.
 - Additionally, Minneapolis City Council approve funding for Rental Assistance, but the unfortunate part was that they gave priority to people in the suburban areas to apply instead of the low-income areas where people are unable to pay their rent due to the pandemic. That shows how priorities are misplaced. Does the Met Council have a similar system? Since we don't know if the pandemic will last through the fall, we don't know if people will be unemployed and risk losing their homes in greater numbers. Is there a way that the Met Council can help people proactively in the metro area with a wider window of rental assistance to catch more potential applicants that may be in need?
- Boland added his concern is that the pandemic has wildly amplified the systemic inequities; from the bonding bill in the legislature to the technology gaps, but the biggest concern he has is: how will people be able to pay for services when the state and local tax revenue starts drying up because people are not spending money?
- Goldstein-Moses commented that her concern with COVID-19 is around data and decision-making and how they interact.
 - With the decision-making, in a crisis, decisions are being made very quickly, sometimes without ideas being vetted and without the implications for people or communities being fully thought through and what I worry is that the habit of making decisions quickly will last past the current crisis and when the time to be much more thoughtful in the decision-making process correct, i.e. when it becomes time to ramp up transit again, or housing vouched to make sure that the processes are inclusive and vetted against multiple stakeholder interests and highlighting those who have been most impacted but are least represented in decision-making.
 - Second part is data. That as things shut down and society moves to a virtual system, while it seemed like we were flooded with data, in reality the perspectives we were hearing were, in fact much more limited because those who had limited resources to have their voices heard, those who are experiencing homelessness, or have other barriers to access or inclusion lack pathways to being heard and were severely constrained. Much harder for reporters to reach out to communities than it was before the pandemic hit. Worry that without those perspectives we will think we are making good decisions, but in reality, we are not.
- Co-chair Sitati-Munene was curious to know how the Council was thinking the current situation and is playing out with the all the inequalities and the biggest question how is the council thinking about doing things differently and not just in terms of operations but about in terms of the disproportionality of impact of the pandemic of communities of color. As a regional body, how is the Met Council thinking about the impact of the pandemic, if we are to achieve equity in our Region, i.e. – distance learning and lack of access? When we look at the disproportionate levels of inequities around the Region, does the

Council have a reactions or plans, as a planning agency? Who needs public transportation more than others? Which jobs are not going to be coming back, housing issues, etc.?

- McDonald added that he wanted to ask some questions of Council leadership and staff that the EAC's existing goals and plans as it relates to the priority areas and the workplan, will those be revisited as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, and re-worked?
 - Co-chair Gonzalez: Absolutely. This is the first step, your first impressions, input and ideas from the last couple months witnessing the impact in our communities. The Council and the EAC are reviewing the way in which our plans and projects in the near future with what has happened will move forward. These are discussions that are happening at a Council level and with the EAC we will be moving forward with our workplan to and how the areas are changing with the new challenges that are more urgent now.
 - Co-chair Gonzalez: One last thing, I like the comments, about how there are new opportunities that are out there. The worst thing that can happen is that after this emergency is over is, we just try and go back to December 2019 and the way things were before. I don't think that is feasible anymore. I don't know what the new shape of the world is going forward, but I do hope that it is not the shape that it was six months ago.
- Sheikh commented: in order to increase public involvement, we could think about distributing technology to communities and then involve key community individuals to provide technology training who might need an extra to be able access the programs.
- McDonald asked if there will be a subcommittee to review and work the EAC workplan?
 - Co-chair Gonzalez: it was decided that that would be handled at the co-chair level, then brought to the committee for input. It hasn't been decided yet, however the EAC is talking about their workplan during tonight's meeting.
 - Co-chair Gonzalez: The Council is still working on adapting their own plan regarding budget, operations, etc. relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and things are very fluid. The EAC should definitely move ahead with our work.
- Co-chair Sitati-Munene: would be a good idea for the committee to draft some recommendations for the Council, given how the pandemic is impacting our communities for the Council to take into account as it is re-working budgets and plans going forward.
 - McDonald agreed. Especially from an equitable standpoint, so we don't slide back to where we were in December. There will be Federal dollars coming around the election – from an operational level.

COMMITTEE'S WORKPLAN IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- Co-chair Gonzalez opened the floor for discussion regarding revisions the committee would like to make to the existing priority areas in lights of the COVID-19 pandemic: affordable housing, public transportation, accessibility and Council operations.
 - Co-chair Gonzalez explained the background: Subcommittees were set up to investigate each priority area. and come up with recommendations to bring back to the full committee.
 - Boland added: Region has a very serious affordable housing crisis, therefore one thing I would recommend the committee does is focus more energy into affordable housing because people are having a hard time. May be wise to heavily prioritize this going forward.
 - Question: how are people assigned to groups?
 - People can volunteer for subcommittees they are interested in.
 - McDonald mentioned: We have to think of ways to eradicate disparities and close gaps and stop the thinking that there are losers and winners. Challenge ourselves around the priorities to make permanent solutions, not temporary actions. Do we go back to the Council with an updated purpose statement? And does the committee get to take a look at the statement before it goes back to the Council?
 - Co-chair Gonzalez responded: We can revisit our bylaws or the scope of the EAC if we want, nothing is off the table.
 - Paul asked: Can the EAC missions be revisited on the equity discussion on resources in the colors and empowering youth populations? Affordable housing is one of the worst issues in the Metro area, this is one most pressing issues of our times.

