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City Council

Briefing on the Process to Form a Social Justice & Equity Commission and Public Engagement Process to Reimagine Public Safety

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Title

Briefing on the Process to Form a Social Justice & Equity Commission and Public Engagement Process to Reimagine Public Safety

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

In June 2020, the General Government Committee received a referral to request from the City Council to develop a Human Rights Commission. At the July 22, 2020 General Government Committee meeting, the Committee agreed to using a Participatory Leadership approach in forming the Human Rights Commission. Before being brought back to the full Council, community members raised concerns about the proposed approach. At that time Council and staff took an “equity pause” to identify a different approach based on those concerns.

City Manager Recommendation:

Recommend using the approach outlined by staff to form a new Advisory Commission to address social justice and equity issues and approach to engage the community to reimagine public safety.

Report

Issue:

Whether to approve the approach outlined by staff to form a new Advisory Commission to address social justice and equity issues and the approach to engage the community to reimagine public safety.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Stacey Ray, Strategic Planning and Performance Manager, Office of Performance and Innovation
Olivia Salazar de Breaux, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator, Human Resources

Background and Analysis:

In June, the City Council forwarded to the General Government Committee (Committee) a referral to request the development of a Human Rights Commission. Staff shared several approaches about how to form the Commission with the Committee, and ultimately agreed to using a Participatory Leadership approach.

However, in the lead-up to a discussion with the full Council on August 11, community members raised significant concerns about the proposed approach. In response, staff and Council took an “equity pause” to identify a different approach based on those concerns.

On September 29, Council held a work session to discuss public safety. Council discussed a desire to engage the community to “re-imagine public safety” in a way that meets the needs of Olympia residents. At that same work session, Council also established an Ad Hoc Committee on Public Safety to help deepen the Council’s understanding of the City’s public safety system and identify short-term actions the City can implement that are in accordance with known best practices.

In response to input from the community and Council’s subsequent discussions, the purpose of this agenda item is for staff to share a process for establishing the Social Justice and Equity Advisory Commission, including a timeline and relationship to the Ad Hoc Committee, and a process to engage the community on Re-imagining Public Safety. Included below are summaries each approach, while Attachment A includes additional detail.

Social Justice & Equity Advisory Commission

Staff is proposing that the process to establish the Social Justice & Equity Advisory Commission be led by a Founding Members Work Group, made up of five marginalized community members, with an emphasis on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. This group will host a series of Community Conversations to elevate the voices of marginalized community members, and use the input gathered to recommend to Council the new Commissions’:

- make-up and terms;
- formal name;
- scope of work; and
- first year work plan

Staff proposes this approach because it emphasizes seeking out and elevating the voices of typically underrepresented and marginalized groups, as well as fostering the dialogue, trust, and relationships needed to form a Commission that can best represent and respond to the needs of those community members.

This approach will be led by the City’s Equity & Inclusion Coordinator and Founding Member Work Group and be supported by a consulting team with members who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. This process is proposed to launch in November and end in June 2021 with the appointment of nine permanent members and an approved 2021-2022 work plan.

Public Engagement Process to Reimagine Public Safety

Staff is proposing using a Participatory Leadership approach to engage community members in 'reimagining public safety.' This approach will be led by a Community Work Group made up of 8-10 community leaders and emerging leaders. The Work Group will be charged with shaping and shepherding a broad and inclusive process to learn about the complex public safety system in Olympia and identify community-based solutions.

This approach emphasizes facilitated and structured opportunities for participants to learn and engage with dialogue among one another. It will be implemented in phases to allow for adapting the process based on what is heard and learned. It will be designed to include a variety of different conversation types and sizes, such as community conversations, public workshops, focus groups, and online engagement, so the work group can gather input and co-create solutions from a diverse and inclusive spectrum of perspectives.

The Community Work Group will use what they learn and hear from participants to develop a community-based path forward. The Work Group will work closely with City staff and a consultant team to also develop recommended City-led actions, and metrics for tracking and sharing progress. Council's role will be to support the process by upholding its authenticity, encouraging broad participation, and listening throughout.

This approach was used to develop the *One Community Plan*, which is a community-based plan for how to address homelessness. Staff is recommending it be used again, because it proved successful in identifying shared goals and solutions for an incredibly complex problem. Reimagining Public Safety is a similarly complex and wicked problem with no easy or commonly agreed upon solutions. Broad community engagement and authentic dialogue and learning are critical to fostering community-wide investment in a path forward that results in systemic, long-term and sustainable impact.

This approach will be led by the City's Strategic Planning and Performance Manager and a Community Work Group, with support from City staff and a consulting team. This process is proposed to launch in February 2021.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

There is significant interest to address systemic racism and inequality. Input that staff and the City Council are receiving from citizens strongly supports processes for developing the Commission and reimagining public safety that are highly inclusive, pay specific attention to the concerns and experiences of marginalized community members, and foster and repair trust amongst the City and citizens.

Options:

1. Direct staff to move forward with the recommended approach for developing a new Advisory Commission to address social justice and equity issues and engaging the community in reimagining public safety.
2. Direct staff to use a different approach(es) and/or timing for developing a new Advisory Commission to address social justice and equity issues and engaging the community in reimagining public safety.
3. Direct staff to return to a Council Committee for additional discussion on the proposed approach.

Financial Impact:

Council has allocated \$60,000 in Council goal funds to support development of a new Advisory Commission to address social justice and equity issues. Funding will primarily be used to enter into a contract with a consulting team with majority representation as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The consultant team will provide additional support in meeting design and facilitation, and community input analysis and organization.

Attachments:

Process Methodologies and Deliverables