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City Council

Approval of the General Government Committee Recommendation to Establish a New Social Justice and Equity Commission

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Title

Approval of the General Government Committee Recommendation to Establish a New Social Justice and Equity Commission

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

The General Government Committee met on October 27, 2021, to hear the Founding Members Work Group recommendation to establish a new Social Justice and Equity Commission. The Committee unanimously recommends establishing a Social Justice and Equity Commission as presented by the Founding Members Work Group

City Manager Recommendation:

Move to approve the General Government Committee's recommendation to establish a new Social Justice and Equity Commission.

Report

Issue:

Whether to approve the General Government Committee's recommendation to establish a new Social Justice & Equity Commission

Staff Contact:

Debbie Sullivan, Assistant City Manager, 360.753.8499

Presenter(s):

Olivia Salazar de Breaux, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator
Megan Matthews, Founding Members Work Group Member
Anthony Markland, Founding Members Work Group Member
Joslyn Nelson, Founding Members Work Group Member
Rusty Shekha, Founding Members Work Group Member
Debbie Sullivan, Assistant City Manager

Background and Analysis:

In June 2020, the City Council (Council) forwarded to the General Government Committee

(Committee) a referral to develop a Human Rights Commission to support the City in dismantling institutional racism and all forms of oppression while helping build a more equitable, just and thriving community.

On November 2, Council approved a process to establish a Social Justice & Equity Advisory Commission (Commission), including that the process be led by a Founding Member Work Group (Work Group) made up of community members representing marginalized populations, with an emphasis on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

The Work Group hosted a series of conversations and an online survey to intentionally elevate the voices of marginalized community members. These sessions included hearing from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, LGBTQ+, Immigrant, Disabled, and Neurodivergent community members. Participants talked with one another about what the City can do to make Olympia more equitable and inclusive.

After the conversations and surveys were done, the Work Group analyzed and summarized the community input received. With support from the consulting firm Communication Resources Northwest, the Work Group reviewed extensive research on how other cities and counties structure and support similar commissions.

On August 31, 2021 the Work Group shared a proposed recommendation for discussion with the Committee at a special work session. The Work Group used input from community members and the findings from their research to craft a proposal that included a Commission name, jurisdiction, scope of work, and a role for the Work Group in the recruitment and appointment process.

On October 27, 2021 the General Government Committee unanimously approved the Founding Member Work Group's final recommendation for establishing a new Social Justice and Equity Commission.

The purpose of this agenda item is for the Work Group to present to the Council their final recommendation for establishing a new Social Justice and Equity Commission and discuss next steps.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

There is significant interest in the community to address systemic racism and inequality. Input that staff and City Councilmembers are receiving from community members strongly supports establishing a more inclusive way in which to listen, understand, and respond to the needs of historically marginalized community members. Community members have also shared that the City needs to take intentional actions to foster and repair trust amongst the City and community members.

Options:

1. Approve the General Government Committee recommendation to establish a new Social Justice and Equity Commission as recommended by the Founding Members Work Group.
2. Approve the General Government Committee's recommendation to establish a new Social Justice and Equity Commission and direct staff to amend the recommendation based on feedback from the City Council.
3. Do not approve the General Government Committee recommendation to establish a new Social Justice and Equity Commission.

Financial Impact:

Establishing a new Social Justice & Equity Commission will require dedicated staff to support Commissioners in carrying out their duties and an annual budget to fund outreach and mediation. The City Manager is accounting for these anticipated costs in the 2022 budget process.

Attachments:

Founding Member Work Group Recommendation
Social Justice & Equity Commission Engage Olympia Page