

**EQUITY STEERING COMMITTEE**

City Hall: Community Room

**NOTES**

January 25, 2024

- The meeting began at 6:04 p.m.
  - In attendance were Liz Start, Seyon Belai, Aneesa Turbovsky, Shian Gutierrez, Nikki Storm, Sara Vasquez, Dennis Ward, and Cameron Ruen. Staff present included Gabriela Santoyo Gutierrez (Equity and Inclusion Coordinator), Emma Sagor (Assistant City Manager), and Daniel Harris (Events and Emergency Management Coordinator).
  - Three community members were present.
  
- Emma Sagor provided the following updates:
  - City Council unanimously adopted [Resolution 60-2023](#), affirming their commitment to the equity, inclusion, and justice goal and their support of the multi-year equity plan for the city.
  - On January 2, 2024, Council President Desi Nicodemus resigned from City Council. A process is underway to appoint an interim member to City Council. The details of this process can be found on the [city's website](#).
  
- Dan Harris shared that the city is currently gathering community feedback to inform its annual events program and budget. Through [a survey on Engage Milwaukie](#), the city is collecting input about whether they should continue to produce its current calendar of annual events or consider replacing the biannual Carefree Sunday event with an annual summer festival (similar to Milwaukie Daze, a downtown/waterfront celebration last held in 2013) and increased funding for multicultural events.
  - ESC members said they would weigh in via the survey and share it with their networks. Several mentioned they felt shifting to an annual, smaller scale summer event and increasing funding for other multicultural celebrations was a good direction for the city to pursue.
  - One member said the city should encourage active transportation to and at all city events.
  - One ESC member shared that the very binary nature of the choice was understandable given budget planning needs and timelines, but wished there could be more nuance. They recommended that over the next biennium, the city make an intentional effort to gather feedback on this topic throughout the year, so the next budget proposal can be informed by more robust feedback.

- The group also discussed a desire for the city to support more multicultural activities, but also not co-opt identities. Some pointed out that the city's other signature events (Umbrella Parade/Tree Lighting and Winter Solstice) celebrate Christian traditions and holidays at the expense of other cultural or secular celebrations.
- One ESC member asked if the city fundraises to support its events. Dan explained the city does attempt to raise funds and seek sponsorship for its event activities, but noted the city wants to ensure it budgets adequately to put on reliable quality events so that it doesn't risk cancelling an event if a funder backs out. Fundraising is then focused on making events better, rather than making them happen at all.
- Dan also shared that Milwaukie Leadership Academy is kicking off next week. This program educates a cohort of community members on how local government works, with the goal of preparing them to serve on city boards and commissions. ESC members are invited to attend the May 22, 2024, leadership academy session to share with academy participants about their experience on the ESC.
- Emma reminded the group that [nominations for Milwaukie Volunteer of the Year](#) are being accepted through February 14, 2024.
- Gabriela led the ESC in a roundtable reflection on members' experiences being a part of the ESC, including what they feel is going well and what they feel could be improved.
  - Themes of what is going well included the following:
    - Lots of pride in this group and the initiatives the city has taken around equity
    - Members have learned a lot about Milwaukie
    - Members have gained new ways of seeing things
    - Members appreciate being able to learn and hear from leadership what is going on
    - Members appreciate the support from staff
    - Members are glad we have shifted from the "drink from a fire hose" approach of long presentations and little discussion
    - Members enjoyed working on the police reform work, which felt very tangible
  - Themes of what could be improved included the following:
    - The process can feel slow, and it can feel unclear what we are accomplishing or what success looks like
    - The goals of the committee are not very clear
    - There is a lack of clarity about how decisions are made/how to come to consensus

- There's a desire to be more realistic about what is feasible and where we can have impact
  - To date, we haven't been clear about how we are creating a safe space
  - Members spoke about the tension of trying to do equity work within a structure not built to support equity
  - Members spoke to feeling disjointed when we miss meetings
- Gabriela proposed the group consider developing a set of shared group agreements to ensure all have shared expectations of the group's purpose, meeting norms, and values.
  - An ESC member shared examples of group agreements used in other similar spaces. These are appended to the meeting minutes.
  - Gabriela and Emma shared a starting list of potential group commitments brainstormed by staff, including:
    - City staff commitments:
      - Staff will email the agenda and meeting materials one week in advance.
      - Staff will post notes from each meeting one week following each meeting. Notes will be high level and not attribute specific statements to specific people but will capture action items and summarize discussion points.
      - Staff will clarify the purpose and action to be taken for every item on the agenda (decision, feedback, discussion, etc.)
    - ESC commitments:
      - Members will communicate with the Equity and Inclusion Coordinator if they are unable to make a meeting. If a member misses a meeting, it is their responsibility to review the minutes of the meeting.
    - Shared commitments:
      - ESC and staff will collaboratively craft an annual workplan for the ESC, with clear responsibilities of each party to help move the work forward.
  - The ESC then discussed the following questions:
    - **What is the committee's role/relationship with the city? Does the group want to provide advice? Plan and lead initiatives. Review and help develop policies?**
      - The group agreed they want access to decision makers and ability to advise and influence power. They suggested Council members attend ESC meetings.
      - The group agreed they are not interested in being a "check box" for city staff to say they have completed equity engagement.

- The group said they want to be able to point to tangible examples of success and accomplishment.
  - The group wants to take on realistic and feasible goals.
  - The group discussed wanting to be forward looking.
  
- **Should committee members take roles during and/or outside of meetings (timekeeper, notetaker, communications (preparing articles for *The Pilot*)?)**
  - The group discussed appreciation of the current facilitation and notetaking responsibilities.
  - The group agreed to pilot a process where small groups volunteer to “take on a topic,” develop agenda (with staff liaison), and do research in preparation for each meeting.
- **Are there meeting norms the group wants to agree to related to active participation, respectful discussion, and decision making?**
  - The group agreed that they would collaboratively work on a list of agreements to bring back to the next meeting for discussion and adoption. Some potential agreements people said they’d like to see include:
    - “Purple flag” – having a process to ensure a safe space and comfort “calling in” when something offensive has been said.
    - Be willing to make mistakes and forgive people for trying.
  - The group discussed how it wants to handle decision making:
    - The group agreed to use fist to five voting:
      - If anyone is at a 0-2, we continue discussing
      - If everyone is a 3 or above, we proceed
    - The group agreed that decisions must be made at meetings, not offline or in between.
      - People who haven’t been able to participate will have an opportunity to weigh in on the decision by the next meeting.
      - Decisions must be finalized at start of next meeting to avoid losing momentum.
    - Decision points, to the extent possible, will be called out on the agenda by staff.
- **How much time do members want to spend outside of meetings on committee work (reviewing materials, advancing initiatives, attending events)?**
  - Several members noted wanting to remain flexible to respond to changing levels of capacity. There was general agreement to pursue a mixture of opportunities to engage/lead work between meetings AND the option to just show up and discuss when needed. In general, we will target 2 hours of meeting time and 2 hours between meeting .
  - Members want to be prepared and have materials in advance and devote the majority of meeting time to ESC discussion, advice, and collaboration.

- The group discussed its calendar of meeting topics for the rest of the year. They agreed to the following:
  - February: Improving the City's annual events program
  - March: Telling Milwaukie's Equity Story
  - April: Measuring Success and Building Accountability
  - May: Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention: Data review
  - June: Work culture and retention strategy
  - *[July Break]*
  - August: Advertising work opportunities
  - September: Youth Engagement
  - October: Youth Engagement
  - November: Goal setting for next year – when to take on naming, procurement, and accessibility
  - *[December Break]*
  
- The meeting concluded at 8:07 p.m.

