



Mayor & Council Meeting Date: July 20, 2020
Agenda Item Type: Discussion and Instructions
Department: Housing and Community Development
Responsible Staff: Asmara Habte

Subject

Discussion of Social Justice, Racism, and Bias in Rockville

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Mayor and Council begin to design a strategy for community dialogue and action planning on social justice, racism and bias in Rockville, including directing staff to plan an initial community meeting after the summer recess.

Discussion

At the June 22, 2020 Mayor and Council meeting, Chief Victor Brito provided a presentation titled "Fair and Impartial Policing." It centered on the City's police practices, training, recruitment and hiring, operations, and efforts to continue implementing best practices. The Rockville City Police Department's efforts to date include hosting training on fair and impartial policing for its officers, City employees, elected official, and community members since 2019. The next session is scheduled for August 6, 2020.

The Mayor and Council's discussion of Chief Brito's presentation, along with the national conversation on race, equity, equality, racism, and bias, provides an opportunity for the City to engage in open discussions on the issue in a broader context, including policing. The Mayor and Council directed staff to help them design a discussion on race, social justice, racism, and bias in Rockville. With this report, staff proposes a strategy and discussions, to occur in segments over a 12-month period, that will include developing an action plan and implementing short- and long-term policy initiatives and tools that could further racial and social justice, equity in Rockville.

Sample Approaches to Racial Equity Discussion and Action Planning

Racial inequity is pervasive, and in recognition of this, some communities have developed and adopted various policies and tools and taken unique approaches to address racial inequality in their communities. For example, Montgomery County passed two bills addressing racial inequities and the City of Decatur, GA developed a Community Action Plan (Attachment A) to guide a community-wide effort to become more welcoming, inclusive and equitable. The City of Seattle created a Racial Equity Toolkit (Attachment B) that the organization uses to guide the

development, implementation and evaluation of policies, initiatives, programs, and budget issues to address the impact on racial equity. Below is a summary of the Montgomery County, Decatur, and Seattle examples.

Montgomery County

In 2018, Montgomery County adopted a resolution¹ to develop an equity policy framework in County Government. The policy framework was followed by developing a Community Engagement Toolkit titled "Racial Equity and Social Justice." This toolkit was designed over 18 months, with input from the community, and offered guidance on starting a community dialogue on racial equity and social justice. The County also passed a law² that created the Office of Racial and Social Justice and the following directives:

1. Establish a racial equity and social justice program;
2. Remove the Chief Equity Officer position in the Office of the Executive as a non-merit position³;
3. Require the Executive to adopt a racial equity and social justice action plan for the **County**;
4. Require each Department and Office to develop a racial equity and social justice action plan;
5. Require the Director of the Office of Legislative Oversight to submit a racial equity and social justice impact statement to the Council for each Bill;
6. Require the Executive to explain how each management initiative or program in the **recommended budget would promote racial equity and social justice**;
7. Establish a Racial Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee and set forth the composition, compensation, and duties of the Committee;
8. Require the Planning Board to consider racial equity and social justice impact when preparing a **Master Plan**; and
9. Generally, amend the law governing racial equity and social justice.

Decatur, GA

Born out of its ten-year plan, 2010 Strategic Plan, the City of Decatur adopted a Community Action Plan in 2015. The plan presents a comprehensive strategy that seeks to "...collaboratively identify specific actions for individuals, organizations, and local government to undertake together and independently. It would also encourage and empower individuals and community-based organizations to take a lead role in making Decatur a more welcoming, inclusive, and equitable place to live, work, and visit."

¹ Montgomery County Resolution 18-1095.

² Montgomery County Bill 27-19.

³ Removing this position from the Office of the Executive as a non-merit position and creating the Office of Racial Justice.

The plan includes six focus areas and the actions that could be taken by individuals, organizations, and local governments to address racial inequity under each of the focus areas. The focus areas include:

1. Support community participation and engagement among all members of the city's population;
2. Prioritize racially-just community policing by improving relationships between community members and law enforcement and ensuring all community members are treated in a just way with equity and respect;
3. Ensure the availability of diverse and affordable housing in order to prevent the displacement of existing residents and provide for a variety of housing types and prices;
4. Cultivate a welcoming and inclusive retail environment for serving a diverse clientele;
5. Maximize the use of public spaces for the enrichment and well-being of all Decatur residents, workers, and visitors; and
6. Facilitate low-cost transportation options for people of all ages and abilities.

Seattle

The City of Seattle has taken the approach of addressing racial inequity by seeking to eliminate individual racism, institutional racism and structural racism. The city developed The Racial Equity Toolkit, which lays out a process and provides a set of questions to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, initiatives, programs, and budget issues to address the impacts of racial equity. A copy of Seattle's Toolkit is can be found in Attachment B.

Proposed Strategy for Rockville

Short Term Action Items

Some of the feedback and input that the Mayor and Council could consider for potential implementation in the near term, include:

1. Designation of Juneteenth as a City holiday and day of reflection (scheduled for Mayor and Council discussion this evening);
2. Establish a Police Advisory Commission (scheduled for Mayor and Council discussion on September 14, 2020);
3. Examine City hiring strategies to support increased diversity in the workforce (scheduled for Mayor and Council discussion on September 14, 2020);
4. Gather and report data from RCPD and other departments that inform the Mayor and Council about injustice, racism, and bias, and track the effectiveness of efforts to address identified needs; and

5. Restructure the purpose, goals, and role of the Human Rights Commission to increase awareness and help advise on matters of social justice, racism and bias.

Longer-Term Strategy and Preliminary Action Items

Continued community dialogue can lead to a baseline and a more in-depth understanding of racial equity. An ongoing community dialogue could be a core component of the Mayor and Council's strategy to address injustice, racism and bias in the City. The initial dialogue could be scheduled in the fall to hear from the community, share experiences, connect with each other and identify focus areas. Follow-up community gatherings could be used to get feedback on proposed action items and report on accomplishments. Community members could also be involved in work groups that implement action items adopted by the Mayor and Council.

Other aspects of a strategy that the Mayor and Council could consider include:

- a. Naming the initiative to facilitate promotions and conversations,
- b. Establishing a purpose statement as a foundation on which to build the initiative and serve as a guidepost during implementation,
- c. Selecting priority action items based on the community conversation,
- d. Developing implementation plans for the action items,
- e. Receiving written and verbal updates on the implementation plans,
- f. Holding additional community dialogues for receive feedback, share updates and identify additional action items.

The Mayor and Council have received preliminary input from representatives of the City's Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC), who have both provided short- and long-term action items towards recognizing and addressing racial inequity. Through the Mayor and Council Community Forum and written correspondence, the public has provided input and shared its ideas for creating a better Rockville. Members of the Mayor and Council also provided staff a list of action items to explore for potential implementation.

A compilation of the suggestions shared to date is provided in Attachment C. These preliminary action items can serve as the basis for in-depth discussion towards the development of an action plan to establish policies and initiatives to address inequities, racism, and bias in the City in the short term and long term. City staff has organized and summarized the suggested action items into the following four topic areas:

1. Support community participation and engagement among all members of the City's population;
2. Ensure the availability of diverse and affordable housing and provide for a variety of housing types and price points, and with access to amenities—retail, transportation, complete sidewalks, and parks;

3. Continue to build on the City's best practices in policing for racially just policing by building relationships between community members and law enforcement and ensuring all community members are treated with equity and respect; and
4. Promote diversity in City staffing and Boards and Commissions membership.

Proposed Timeline

The City recognizes that addressing racial inequity requires a comprehensive approach in terms of timing and strategies. As an initial step, City staff hosted a meeting with representatives of the City's Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC) to solicit members' thoughts on the agenda item. The Commissions provided insightful issues to consider and action items, which are captured in the list in Attachment C. Staff across all of the City's departments will also have valuable input about how operations citywide can be enhanced and adjusted to support the Mayor and Council's goals around racial inequity.

Staff recommends that the Mayor and Council consider the following potential timeline to begin a meaningful and comprehensive discussion and approach to addressing racial inequity towards the implementation of short and long- term policies and tools.

July 20, 2020—Present a summary of preliminary action items to Mayor and Council for discussion. Mayor and Council provide input on a strategy for the initiative, the first community conversation, and short-term action items.

August/September 2020—Staff work with Mayor and Council to plan the first community forum; begin developing a longer term strategy based on Mayor and Council's July 20 feedback; begin implementing any initial shorter term action items directed on July 20; and begin gathering data to support the initiative.

October 2020— Mayor and Council host first community forum for an open public dialogue to allow community members to share experiences and provide input for tools and policy discussion. Continue gathering data to inform and support the development of an action plan.

November 2020 - January 2021 – Work with the Mayor and Council to adopt a strategy and to transform the community forum input and preliminary action items into a draft action plan. Continue implementing shorter term action items directed on July 20.

February 2021 — Hold a second community forum to receive feedback on the draft action plan.

March 2021 – Mayor and Council adopt an Action Plan and begin establishing working groups to be led by a department head or designee for each focus area/sub-area. It would include staff from various departments, Board and Commission members, and members from the

community and others. A Mayor and Councilmember may wish to sit on these working groups. Continue gathering data to inform and support the action plan.

September 2021— Mayor and Council host another community forum to update the community on the working groups' implementation of Action Plan items and revisit the content of the Plan.

Mayor and Council History

This agenda item is part of the on-going discussion on racial equity following the murder of Mr. George Floyd by a Minneapolis Police Department officer. The last discussion on this matter was held at the June 22, 2020 Mayor and Council meeting.

Boards and Commissions Review

City staff hosted a WebEx meeting on July 7, 2020 with representatives of the City's Human Rights Commission and Human Services Advisory Commission to solicit members' thoughts on the agenda item. All City Boards and Commissions would be invited to participate in the ongoing initiative, including the fall community forum.

Next Steps

The next steps are for staff to work with the Mayor and Council to plan the first community dialogue in the fall. Staff will also begin implementing any action items that the Mayor and Council select to proceed prior to the first community dialogue.

Attachments

Attch. A. Decatur_CommunityAction Plan (PDF)

Attch B. Seattle_RacialEquityToolkit_FINAL_August2012 (PDF)

Attch C. Racial Equity_Suggested Actions-071420v2 (PDF)



Rob DiSpirito, City Manager

7/15/2020