



Mayor & Council Meeting Date: January 25, 2021
Agenda Item Type: Work Session
Department: Housing and Community Development
Responsible Staff: Asmara Habte

Subject

Social Justice, Racism and Bias Follow-Up Discussion

Recommendation

Staff recommend that the Mayor and Council discuss the items in the attached material and provide instructions to staff on next steps.

Discussion

This work session is a continuation of an on-going Mayor and Council discussion. The Mayor and Council have discussed this topic at previous Mayor and Council meetings, including June 22, July 6, July 20, September 21, and December 14, 2020.

At the September 21 Mayor and Council meeting, staff provided a collective and raw summary of potentially actionable ideas supplied by members of the Mayor and Council, the Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC), and the Human Rights Commission (HRC), and the community residents through Community Forum. The Mayor and Council provided their input during three Mayor and Council meetings, including June 22, July 6, and July 20. The HSAC and HRC provided comments to staff at a July 6 WebEx meeting.

Following the September 21 meeting, the Mayor and Council provided staff with the following instructions:

1. Refine the potentially actionable items and implementing strategies by combining similar items. The Mayor and Council directed staff to consolidate the more than 75 potentially actionable items and recommend implementing strategies. *It is important to note that while staff edited these actionable items and implementation strategies for improved readability, staff made best efforts to maintain the context, content, and voice of those who provided them, including M&C members, community members, commissioners, and employees.* The original list of comments, goals, aspirations, and potential action items provided at the September 21 meeting is attached to this report for reference in Attachment A.
2. Recommend implementing strategies for those potentially actionable items that may be implementable in the short term, which are identified by staff in **bold**.

3. Conduct an employee survey on racial equity and inclusion, incorporate potentially actionable items and implementing strategies identified in the survey. The survey results were shared and discussed with the Mayor and Council at the December 14, 2020, meeting.

This staff report includes a refined list of potentially actionable items and/or implementing strategies derived from the Mayor and Council, HSAC, HRC, resident input via the Community Forum segment of the Mayor and Council meetings, and the recently-completed employee survey.

Below are consolidated implementing strategies for potentially actionable items, which are grouped into five focus areas.

Focus Area 1: Support Community Participation and Engagement

Implementing Strategies

1. **Compile and provide for the public a list of anti-racism and bias reading material/resources on a dedicated City website page. Consider hosting a speakers/training series on racial equity.**
2. **Provide a public opportunity (virtual for now) such as a roundtable, community forum, web meetings, movies and documentaries, listening sessions, or other format to engage community members in dialogue for healing, training and expression.**
3. **Produce diversity training with special focus on microaggression and implicit bias, as well as Fair and Impartial training, for community members, City leaders and City employees.**
4. Restructure the purpose, goals and role of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) to assist with City efforts to address Social Justice, Racism and Bias.
5. **As a part of Rockville's newly-designated Juneteenth Celebration, create a meaningful day of reflection and public-service action.**
6. Provide better access to City materials, public information and services for non-English speakers and people with disabilities; provide cultural competency training for all City employees; provide better opportunity for low-income residents and residents of color to civically engage (translations; childcare; more options for participation in Mayor and Council meetings).
7. **Provide new and current employees with information about Rockville services, such as accessing translation services, and departments, so that they can better direct customers for needed assistance. Survey customers for feedback.**

Focus Area 2: Promote Diverse and Affordable Housing and Livable Communities

Implementing Strategies

1. Consider and provide incentives such as tax exemptions, subsidization, tax credits for seniors, and reduction or waiver of certain development fees.
- 2. Extend affordability restrictions of rental MPDUs (i.e, from the current 30 years to 99 years)¹.**
3. Review City's zoning code, moratoria and other regulations that can affect housing, in order to identify barriers and exclusions to affordable housing.
4. Improve transportation options for all residents by encouraging residential developments near transportation. This could include regulatory flexibility, tax relief, expedited plan review/approval, density bonus, etc.
- 5. Explore and create opportunities for social mobility of residents through the provision of wrap-around services; and combining housing with social and other supportive services such as food distribution.**
6. Explore partnership opportunities with County government and other housing providers to address the housing needs of those who are unhoused (homeless) and in securing transition to permanent housing.
- 7. Improve the City's understanding of the dynamics and needs of the lower income communities by maintain consistent standards for code enforcement, beautification, and other City services throughout the city.**
- 8. House social service programs on one webpage so it's easy to access** by conducting ongoing user testing to ensure social service programs are easily accessible on the City's website.
9. Open up zoning to make development, modifications to existing structures, and redevelopment more equitable for people of diverse incomes to live in any Rockville neighborhoods.

¹ This strategy will be discussed in a work session at the February 22nd Mayor and Council meeting.

Focus Area 3: Policing

Implementing Strategies

- 1. Provide more and targeted appropriate training such as Fair and Impartial Policing to all officers and Police staff, with an emphasis on emotional intelligence and unconscious bias.**
- 2. Provide the Police department with mental health training and services as resources for our officers. Consider adding personnel to the department who can assist officers as they confront situations involving mental health, homelessness and other social service needs in the community. This would allocate new resources for the Police Department to non-traditional purposes in order to better address these growing concerns.**
3. Partner with Montgomery County services, non-profit care-giving organizations, the courts, and others to appropriately respond to social service and non-crime related calls that are now handled by the Police, with the goal of Police handling fewer of these types of calls in the future.
- 4. Investigate to what extent the City or County can track usage of the County 911 Emergency call system for potential abuse of that tool by callers, reflecting racism or bias, and develop municipal-level penalties for any such proven misuse.**
- 5. Investigate launching a Police Athletic League (PAL) for Rockville youth to help build a positive relationship with officers.**
6. Host a Police appreciation day. (Perhaps broaden to Public Safety or City Essential Workers day or other type of recognition).
- 7. Encourage more “Meet and Greet” opportunities between officers and the community.**
8. Better integrate Police officers within the communities in which they serve by creating housing initiatives that would enable them to live in Rockville.

Focus Area 4: Diversity in hiring and Boards & Commissions

Implementing Strategies

1. Develop strategic outreach plan to recruit more diverse community members to City Boards and Commissions when vacancies occur.
2. Review the City’s recruitment process with the lens of racial equity and outreach for recruitment of new employees, in order to seek more diverse applicant pools. Review and implement best practices in diversity recruitment, hiring and promotion.

3. **Consider hiring a racial equity professional. This function would reside in the City Manager's Office to encompass a greater impact on racial equity in the organization, broader than recruitment practices alone.**
4. Hiring more persons of color and women in Recreation and Parks and the police departments in management/supervisory roles as vacancies occur.
5. **Attract and promote more diversity in leadership positions organization-wide. For recruitment, the City could do more intentional outreach and networking with professional/trade organizations whose membership are largely comprised of people of color and women. To increase promotion within, the City could create more career path, training, and mentorship programs and other opportunities.**
6. Hold employee engagement events that highlight employee diversity and cultures.
7. Create a customer service committee to spearhead consistency across all departments and provide/coordinate education and training.
8. Provide opportunities to engage older and institutionally experienced individuals in decision making.
9. Provide opportunities that offer the ability to empathize with others who are different, learning different perspectives, etc. Get leaders who are truly progressive and not afraid to tackle a complex and difficult subject.
10. Promote from within and have more leaders from different generations to showcase the strength and values of the City.
11. **When employees resign or retire from employment with the City, use exit interview information to gain insight on how to improve the position.**
12. **Have an open-door policy where employees feel they have a place to talk and discuss issues without fear of retaliation. Have higher level managers, HR, etc. regularly check in on employees and investigate problems, complaints and issues. Insist that superintendents and managers not show favoritism towards some nor treat others unfairly.**

Focus Area 5: Budgetary, Policy and Planning Considerations

Implementing Strategies

1. Incorporate a Racial and Social Impact Assessment on policy and items that are brought before the Mayor and Council, including City code amendments, the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and ordinances.
2. Partner with other county municipalities towards the development of a Racial Equity and Social Justice handbook.
3. **Create an employee intranet to promote and improve communication within the City will help. An example: more updates on Mayor and Council initiatives or staff successes through periodic emails to all City employees.**
4. Many of the actionable items and implementing strategies suggested by employees through the employee survey fell into one of the five categories noted above. However, other actionable items and implementing strategy suggestions did not fit into the five categories. As such, staff has created a separate “other/general” category and listed those items below.

Other/General: Other Actionable Items and Implementing Strategies from Employee Survey for Consideration

1. **Continue to engage employees for specific feedback regarding making employee workspaces more equitable, safe, and of higher quality.**
2. Create opportunities for more celebration and highlighting of staff as a diverse group of individuals at City events and in publications.
3. **Create additional opportunity for interactions between people of various cultures, and races, especially amongst City staff, which could include virtual events in the immediate to be followed by in-person events post COVID.**
4. Provide programs that are affordable for all backgrounds. We currently do great with this, but we can always do better. Our programs aren't diverse enough to be proud of and we as the City need to do better at that. We need to do better with our youth. They are our future and we spend a lot of time on the senior community. If we can spend the same time and money on the youth, Rockville will be a great place for families to raise their children.

Mayor and Council History

The Mayor and Council have discussed this topic at previous Mayor and Council meetings, including June 22, July 6, July 20, September 21, and December 14, 2020. This work session is a continuation of an on-going Mayor and Council discussion.

Next Steps

Staff recommends that the Mayor and Council discuss these potential action items and implementation strategies and provide direction. This can include more specificity, research or analysis of a topic that the Mayor and Council would like to further consider.

In consideration of the wide scope of each focus area, the Mayor and Council could concentrate on a specific area or areas, and direct staff to deploy the suggested implementation strategies for a particular Focus Area(s). For example, the Mayor and Council could select Focus Area 4 (Diversity in hiring and Board & Commissions) and direct Staff to implement the recommended strategies or request alternative other implementation strategies. Following Mayor and Council discussion and direction on this agenda item, staff will develop and populate a tracking chart with which to monitor activity and progress of each action.

In responses to the request from the Mayor and Council and as expressed by the Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC) and the Human Rights Commission (HRC) for the desire of a community-wide survey, the HRC and HSAC are jointly developing and finalizing the survey instrument with an anticipated survey deployment in February and March. The HRC/HSAC anticipates keeping the survey open for one month. The HRC/HSAC will provide the Mayor and Council with an overview of the survey before deployment.

Following the survey, the HRC and HSAC anticipate presenting their findings to the Mayor and Council for discussion. Staff will incorporate the community-wide survey results and the directions from the Mayor and Council into this list of implementation strategies in a comprehensive document for potential direction on implementation. Once the Mayor and Council eventually discuss the near-future community-wide survey, that direction will also be reflected in that chart.

Attachments

Att_A_Potential_Actionable Items_9.21.20 (PDF)



Rob DiSpirito, City Manager

1/20/2021