Human Rights Commission (HRC)

Meeting Minutes

November 12, 2020 via Zoom

Attending: Ravi Koil; Colleen Turner-Jones; Pedro Vazquez; Erick Giles; Margaret Brownlee; Adele Edelman; Jill Barkley Roy; DC Amy Berry; Stephanie Weaver; Jodi Mezzanotte

Absent: Milan Nevajda, Planning Dept Representative (City Council meeting conflict); Alma Ogweta

Stephanie Weaver facilitated the meeting as the City Staff Liaison and provided information on public meeting process.

Agenda (see attached) drafted by Pedro with input from members via email.

- Minutes of the Nov 4, 2020, meeting were approved unanimously.

- New member JadeRose SanGiovanni (Youth Representative) introduced themselves and gave a brief statement.

- Stephanie Weaver volunteered to take minutes for this meeting until a Secretary was determined, which was discussed later in the agenda.

- The discussion on meeting process was resumed to consider the Circle Way information that was provided to members following the last meeting. The members agreed to a hybrid model, with the roles identified in the City’s HRC ordinance implemented alongside the following elements (which may evolve over time) of the Circle Way process being incorporated during each meeting: introductions; check-ins; rotating Facilitator per meeting (Chair oversees process to ID the Facilitator); development of shared agreements on meeting protocols/norms (which may evolve over time); and check-out.

- The discussion of organizational structure was resumed, concluding with the nomination of Margaret Brownlee as Vice Chair and the unanimous vote in support.

The role of Secretary was discussed as posting minutes to the webpage and possibly taking minutes during meetings, and also managing the HRC’s repository of documents. The possibility of having a City staff person hired to take minutes was discussed, with Stephanie following up on any interest among staff. Voting someone to the role of Secretary was tabled, following agreement that taking meeting minutes also could be rotated among members.
• Discussion about how to include Public comments in the meeting process followed. The HRC agreed that: 1. the HRC meeting process should include a public comment period at the start of and at the end of each meeting, with a per person opportunity to speak on any topic for three minutes potentially; and 2. for HRC members to sponsor agenda items from the Public for consideration, possibly via a Google form that can be shared.

• Housekeeping items were reviewed briefly. City emails for the HRC members are underway and will cost $80/ea, or $720 for all 9 members with no current City email. Once those emails are active, it looks promising for members to be able to use the City’s Google Access. A question was raised about the requirements for getting approvals to spend the HRC budget, with Stephanie following up on getting the HRC the relevant information to share, as well as offering to track expenses ongoing for HRC.

• A lengthy discussion followed about the agenda item Priorities. Key points included:
  - equity audits of the City organization as proposed by the HRC to be done by a consultant could be costly;
  - the Pubic Services Working Group is addressing a review of City policing policies and procedures;
  - getting out in the community to understand needs and undertake the envisioned community celebrations is hard under COVID circumstances and will require information gathering by other means, including: city and school surveys already underway or completed, through school audits undertaken with assistance from Jodi and JadeRose, with information from city departments (Fire, Police, Social Services), from service organizations such as the Food Bank and religious groups; and
  - historical information about the city of South Portland, especially as it impacts systemic inequality issues, should be studied by the group, as well as provided to the public as possible, such as through articles in the local press and through educational opportunities at the schools.

Members agreed on the following actions to undertake: start with the HRC doing at least a partial or informal equity audit on the City’s Human Resources Dept to see how much the HRC can do itself before seeking a consultant; initiate some educational opportunities with K DiPhillipo, local historian, for the HRC and then with the public as possible; and start to look at existing data on community needs to determine future actions.

NEXT MEETING: 12/10, 7pm, via Zoom

Meeting adjourned.