Human Rights Commission (HRC)  
Meeting Minutes  
January 14, 2021 via Zoom

Attending: Ravi Koil; Colleen Turner-Jones; Pedro Vazquez; Erick Giles; Margaret Brownlee; Adele Edelman; Jill Barkley Roy; Amy Berry; Stephanie Weaver; Jodi Mezzanotte  
Absent: Alma Ogweta; Milan Nevajda  
Reviewed (mtg conflict)

Meeting called to order at 7:03pm. Chair Pedro Vazquez facilitated the meeting.

• The meeting rules were read.  
• Informal check-ins with members followed.  
• Minutes of the Dec 10, 2020, meeting were approved with Adele moving for approval and Ravi seconding.  
• The formation of a subcommittee to undertake the hiring of a Minute Taker/Scribe was briefly discussed. Margaret volunteered to serve, along with Stephanie.  
• The formation of a subcommittee to undertake creating the FY22 HRC Budget was discussed. The need for goals, objectives and activities of the HRC to determine budget needs was noted. Pedro, Ravi, Erick and Stephanie all agreed to serve.  
• The formation of an additional subcommittee to provide a review of the City’s proposed capital and operational budgets (noted as entire, so including schools), which will be ready electronically on March 16 (posted to the City website, school info availability is TBA), and provide an up to 30 minute presentation to the City Council at their Public Hearing (April 6) of the HRC’s assessment of the proposed budgets was discussed. It was noted that the Council would accept written comments. The short time frame to turn this around was noted. Jill, Adele, Pedro and Erick all agreed to serve. Jill noted her conflict of interest due to spouse being a City employee, and Stephanie noted that Jill should not review or comment on any areas that impact her spouse, such as wages or spouse’s department’s operational and capital proposed expenses. Jill suggested each person serving would take sections of the budget and report out to the subcommittee, then the subcommittee would report out to the HRC for a final consensus report, which several members informally supported. Erick suggested the HRC provide guidance to the subcommittee, and Pedro suggested the focus be on how the budget reflected on equity, social justice, homelessness, and low income areas of the City.  
• There was a discussion about the need to develop HRC promotional materials, such as a logo, letterhead, vision statement and monthly column. It was suggested by Pedro that a local graphic artist could be sought, and the then idea of a contest, either among students or low income artists, for the logo design was discussed. Interest for having articles in local papers, such as in the Forecaster, GPCOG newsletter (?) and the Amjambo Africa paper, was discussed. No formal action was decided upon.  
• The submission by Pedro and Margaret for funds from the annual Community Development Block Grant allocation was noted. The proposed project would provide STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) educational opportunities for
children, especially low and middle income. The creative and comprehensive submission was recognized by all, especially in light of the short turnaround they had from the time the grant opportunity was noted and the deadline to submit. Activities envisioned in the submission include 3-4 hour events with subject matter experts, such as rocket launches, robotics, Mad Science, forensics with the PD, and a Library related event.

- **Public comment** followed with Jane Eberle (38 yr resident, no address provided, former school dept employee, community educational leader) speaking on a response to recent hate mail received by community members. Her suggestion was the purchase and resale by HRC of rainbow flags, yard signs, or decals that residents could purchase and display in support of LBGTQ+ members of the community. A lengthy discussion followed including comments by Councilor Leighton in support of the idea and thanks to the HRC, concern over further targeting of community who displayed the flags, what the best item to have on display might be, and questions arose on how this would work and the amount of money the HRC might expend. The need for the HRC to develop a plan with priorities for spending and activities was also discussed. The question of if any excess funds from FY21 HRC budget would carryover to FY22 was raised, and it was noted that the City Manager must approve all carryover of funds and has strict guidelines on what is an allowable carryover. A motion was made to have an ad hoc committee develop a plan related to the flag idea and including education and awareness training on LGBTQ issues with costs for the Jan 28 meeting. JadeRose, Jill and Jane all agreed to serve. The motion passed unanimously.

- Initial but lengthy discussion was held about some of the information on the City’s **Human Resources (HR) Department for the Equity Audit** provided to the group in the shared Google Access folder in late Nov/early Dec. The HRC stated objective from an earlier meeting to do an equity audit on the City had led to the suggestion that the work start with HR, which was informally agreed to at that time, as a way to determine what an equity audit might entail and to develop a work plan. The information provided online included policies, summary of processes, employee demographic information and the current employment application. Jodi noted the school dept is in the middle of an equity audit with an outside consultant, so she can advise on that process as it goes. Stephanie provided a brief summary of the materials that had been provided and noted the actual process to undertake an equity audit is not yet understood, so there may be other information needed.

She and Bryan (also in HR) then provided a brief overview summary of the hiring process as a starting point for discussion at Pedro’s request. Pedro asked if a Driver’s License is required, and it was noted as dependent on the position. Pedro asked where the City currently advertised. The standard places for advertising municipal positions were reviewed: City website, Maine Municipal Association Jobs website, Indeed.com, jobsinme.com, and City facilities’ bulletin boards with emails to all employees, as well as the job specific places the City has advertised (such as related professional associations) and the other efforts undertaken, including specific efforts to reach diverse candidates, to expand the outreach (summary of this information that was archived in Google
Access for the HRC was reviewed as a screen share. Ravi asked about who reviews applications, and the hiring team process was discussed: a group of people rate and rank applicants based on the required qualifications of the position listed in the vacancy posting, which in turn is based on the Job Description, to determine which applicants to interview. How to improve recruitment of diverse candidates was briefly discussed as a way the HRC can assist the City. The separate recruitment process and team at PD was noted by Amy and their use of FaceBook (as do some other departments), as well as the other ways they do outreach, were noted. Ravi asked about the PD process to find diverse candidates. Some further examples such as relationship being built with Portland Adult Ed were discussed.

The purpose of much of this inquiry was noted by Pedro as ways to identify deficiencies in order to make recommendations to the Council. Starting with the hiring process may help the City to recruit more diverse candidates. Pedro asked if the websites the City uses has algorithms that identify candidates, and the answer was no. The City does not use software that selects candidates and the sites the City uses to advertise vacancies on are only places to promote a vacancy. On the more comprehensive of those sites (such as Indeed with a national reach), the candidate selects the type of position they seek, or the employer they wish to work with, or the wage they wish to make, or the location they seek to work in, etc., or a combination of the above, and then available positions posted on that site will be presented. The candidate then decides to apply or not, and the host site does not select candidates for the City to consider.

Pedro asked about the City’s pay scale. The wage scale is either published in a collective bargaining agreement, with advancement based on years of experience, or the nonunion pay plan, which is set up with grades (1-19) that positions are placed in based on criteria such as complexity and responsibility, and the rates of pay in each grade are based on education and experience for starting pay and then awarded on a merit based approach during employment.

The HRC also discussed the one page document that reports on the demographics of the City’s employees that is summarized and tracked by HR and was provided to the HRC, and that had been mentioned and provided to the group. The definition of diverse for the just over 4% percent of regular employees listed as diverse was sought. The City relies on the employees to self-identify at the time of hire and uses that information. It was noted that diverse in this case is exclusive of an individual who may wish to be considered diverse based on being LGBTQ. It also was noted that having one label of diversity is done so as to not highlight an individuals’ self-identification, given the small number of total employees. There was some interest in having the list of employees reviewed by the HRC in an Executive Session to understand positions held and rates of pay for those who identify as diverse, if possible.

The City’s Equal Opportunity Statement on the employment application was then discussed. Pedro noted the language in that statement is too concise and the wording
of “undue burden” (actual language is undue hardship), while the language of the law, was offensive to people with disabilities and a more thoughtful and thorough statement should be developed. Pedro then showed a video from the NAACP on the issue of “ban the box” – about the removal from an application for employment of the question about a criminal record (often just a check box, hence the name) in order to ensure people with a criminal record do not decide to not apply because of the inclusion of that question and the adverse impact that question has on many. On the City’s application, the question appears on the City’s employment application on page 2 and is not a check box but a qualified question with space for an applicant to provide information on their reply. Pedro noted that the HRC should recommend to the City to remove that question from its application. Stephanie noted that the City does not seek an application until after the decision has been made about which applicants to offer an interview to – the decision about who to interview is made based on the information about relevant qualifications from the applicant’s letter and resume, unless the applicant choses to submit an application initially. It was also noted that background checks including information about criminal history are not done by the City until after a conditional offer of employment is made. A brief mention followed about the process the City undertakes with an applicant when a criminal record does exist. Jill noted that more information on the background process was needed. Pedro noted that the HRC would support removal of the question.

Pedro moved and Adele seconded to end the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9:35pm.

NEXT MEETING: 1/28, 7pm, via Zoom