



City of Portland

Racial Equity Steering Committee Meeting
January 14, 2021
5:00 PM

ZOOM

The Portland City Council will hold a meeting on Thursday, January 14, 2021 at 5:00 PM. This meeting will take place remotely using Zoom.

Virtual meetings are allowed using emergency legislation approved by LD 2167; 1 M.R.S. §403- A, that authorizes cities and towns to conduct meetings online.

Allow your computer to install the free Zoom app to get the best meeting experience. If you are not able to attend live, a recording will be uploaded to portlandmaine.gov/livestream the next day. For public comment, you will need to use the "raise your hand" feature. To raise your hand via the telephone, please hit *9. You will be un-muted by the host when it is time for public.

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86414548371?pwd=bVhZcHRZcTNtYlozTmR5aGtFRDJrQT09>

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- II. Review and accept minutes from January 7, 2021.
 - a. January 7, 2021 Minutes
- III. Public Comment
 - a. Resolve 1
- IV. Business Meeting
- V. Adjourn

Date: January 7, 2021

Attending: Ali Abdul, Niki Amaris, Suheir Alaskari, Deb Ibonwa, Kate Knox, Jerome Bennett, Lado Ladoka, Merita McKenzie, Peter O'Donnell, Jonathan Sahrbeck, Louis Pickens, Pious Ali (Co Chair), Lelia DeAndrade (Co-Chair); Samaa Abdurraqib (Facilitator)

Absent:

Meeting Goals:

- Review Public Comment
- Discuss plans for using written comment

Review of what we've done to date

Approved minutes from Dec 17 and Dec. 22

Update:

Ali and Abdurraqib attended City Council meeting on Jan 4 to request an extension. The extension was approved, and the councilors requested an interim report in February.

Discussion: Public Comment

In person comments:

- Next week, 1/17 we'll take public comment on charge "#1 the role of police in public safety
- We will use the same format as previously used- business meeting will follow public comment if there's sufficient time; to allow for maximum time to receive comments
- Abdurraqib will take notes, DeAndrade will manage time and facilitate
- Committee members are listing potential participants for public comment in a spreadsheet

Written comments:

- We created a form that has a few questions for people to complete to submit comment
- It will be posted and shared as a link in a press release
- Ladoka will review written comments and will present them to the committee.

Discussion: Work to date

- Charge #1- examine role of police with public safety
 1. Committee agreed that the PPD's role is too broad
 2. TBD: alternative recommendations for managing public safety
 3. We received models from Dr. Medford to review
- Charge #2- examine city interaction with other organizations
 - Created a group definition of public safety
 - Developed a proposal to establish a commission to further investigate this charge and make recommendations
 - TBD: the context/justification and specifying who should be on the committee.
 - Developed a proposal to create a department of racial equity and a director or commissioner with at least 2 support staff
 - We need description of the role/function of the office, the role of the director; with responsibilities and qualifications;
 - We can recommend the number of FTE positions (full time equivalent) and the specific roles of the support staff
 - Developed a proposal to address racial disparities among homeless people and access to HHS programs. Included
 - All social service offices collect and publicly publish racial demographics

- Create a racial equity task force
- Implement the framework for equity-based services for homeless people
- Committee discussed the distinctions between the commission, the task force, the office, and the director. We need to clarify the roles, responsibilities, functions and relationship to the city of these bodies. There is still a lot of confusion about what these various bodies might be.
- Abdurraqib summarized:
 - The office of Racial equity would be in the Dept. of HHS
 - Commission composed of experienced community members
 - Evaluating policies and relationships with the committee
 - Includes the director of the office on the commission
 - Continues the work of this committee
 - Ombudsman to mediate disputes
- Note
 - Any paid staff would be employees of the city
 - We should investigate the Emergency Shelter Task Force and use that as a model.
 - We want a model that attends to financial restrictions and simple, easy effective ways for the city to implement
 - We want to develop deliverables to ensure that task force will address needed and specific changes for the city.

Other points of discussion:

- Reminder that we're halfway through our work and the community is waiting for recommendations from us
- Returning to charge #1 and offering a recommendation might be relatively quick and should reference the research conducted by Dr. Medford
- Recommendation that because Charge #3 is so broad and involves ongoing work, we might make this the responsibility of the commission

The committee agreed to return to discussion of Charge 1, which hopefully will help us with the remaining charges. We will also discuss proposals by Bennet and Ladoka.

Committee adjourned at 6:35.

Resolve 1-20/21

Amended to add language from Councilor Thibodeau (No. 1 in packet) for a third-party to receive complaints concerning the June 1 into 2 protests: 9-0 on 7/13/2020

Amended to add language from Councilor Ray (No. 2 in packet with additions) narrowing the focus and speeding up the timeline for the report: 7-2 (Mavodones, Snyder) on 7/13/2020

Amended to add language from Councilor Ali (No. 3 in packet with additions) for an independent review of the June 1 into 2 protests (final two "be it further ordered" paragraphs, and additional "whereas" paragraphs: 9-0 on 7/13/2020

Passage as amended: 8-1 (Mavodones) on 7/13/2020

KATE SNYDER (MAYOR)
BELINDA S. RAY (1)
SPENCER R. THIBODEAU (2)
TAE Y. CHONG (3)
JUSTIN COSTA (4)

**CITY OF PORTLAND
IN THE CITY COUNCIL**

KIMBERLY COOK (5)
JILL C. DUSON (A/L)
PIOUS ALI (A/L)
NICHOLAS M. MAVODONES, JR (A/L)

**RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING A RACIAL EQUITY STEERING COMMITTEE TO
DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPONSE TO SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES**

WHEREAS, during its years as both a part of the state of Massachusetts and before that as a colonial territory of Great Britain, and continuing in the first 45 years of statehood, the State of Maine was governed by rules that allowed slavery, and it had residents who were slave owners, slave traders and slaves; and

WHEREAS, the practice of slavery does violence to the dignity of the human beings made into property, and that violence continues to haunt American society to this day; and

WHEREAS, almost all of the 400 years of Black America's experience was under slavery and Jim Crow laws, both of which allowed preferential opportunity to some while at the same time subjected Blacks and people of color to hardship and disadvantage in all areas of life; and

WHEREAS, during the Civil War, Maine sent its soldiers to fight with the Union against the Confederacy and their courage and sacrifice helped make possible an end to the practice of slavery in the United States; and

WHEREAS, on June 19, 1865, Black slaves in the City of Galveston, Texas, finally learned that the Civil War had been won and they were free and slaves no more; and

WHEREAS, June 19th has been recognized around the country as "Juneteenth," in honor of this historic day and all that it promises all of us as free citizens of the United States; and

WHEREAS, the tragic murder of George Floyd on May 25th, 2020 by the Police in Minneapolis Minnesota created outrage that resulted in Americans from all walks of life across the country protesting police brutality and systematic racism; and

WHEREAS, residents of Portland from diverse backgrounds came together to organize many marches and rallies to protest George Floyd's murder, police brutalities, systematic racism, and call for change; and

WHEREAS, these protests and rallies in Portland were organized and led mostly by young black women and femmes from different groups and attended by cross-generational residents of Portland and across Maine; and

WHEREAS, during two such protests on June 1 and 2 tensions ran high between the police and protesters that led to people throwing water bottles at police officers and 23 protesters were arrested for failing to disperse;

WHEREAS, the protesters used the words, Black Lives Matter, to confront invasive and persistent racial injustice, and they made demands that police forces around the country cease to allow the chokehold and cease to confront Black suspects with escalated violence; and

WHEREAS, the citizens of Portland are rightly outraged by the devaluation of Black lives and humanity; and

WHEREAS, these recent events have illuminated that certain public policies have created inequities and wide disparities of well-being and opportunity among the Black community within Portland, the State of Maine and the United States ; and

WHEREAS, the enormous consequence of systemic racism in our society is that opportunities for employment, housing, health care, safety, wealth, and education have been denied or diminished for Black people and other persons of color; and

WHEREAS, the World Health Organization defines "public health" as "the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts of society" and those efforts "aim to provide conditions under which people can... be healthy, improve their health and well-being, or prevent the deterioration of their health; and

WHEREAS, the United States Office of Disease Prevention recognizes that discrimination negatively impacts health outcomes; and

WHEREAS, the Portland City Council believes that the time is *now* to declare systemic racism a public health crisis in our community; and

WHEREAS, racial disparities and resulting socioeconomic conditions have contributed to a public health crisis among Black people that has been recently highlighted by the

disproportionate number of Covid-19 cases in Maine among Black people, and People of Color; and

WHEREAS, available data shows that Black people in Maine are arrested and incarcerated at a much higher rate than others; and

WHEREAS, there are documented racial disparities in school discipline; and

WHEREAS, we cannot continue to ignore the widening gap locally and nationally of the trust between people who work in government and the people in the community they serve; and

WHEREAS, closing this gap requires that we address the underlying inequities that continue to divide our community along racial, social and economic lines, and work to build pathways for healing; and

WHEREAS, we recognize that we are at the beginning of a new nationwide and community conversation regarding race and the system that has been in place since 1615 which has created disequity and disadvantage; and

WHEREAS, all citizens of Portland deserve justice, fair treatment, and recognition of their valuable contributions to the community; and

WHEREAS, the City Council desires to provide an alternative path for residents to report concerns or complaints related to policing during the protest on June 1, 2020 in Portland, Maine; and

WHEREAS, engaging the community is in the best interests of the City Council since such engagement will help the healing process to commence, and will help the Council develop policies and budgets that support and serve all Portland citizens;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Mayor Snyder and members of the Portland City Council hereby establish a Racial Equity Steering Committee to examine City systems, policies, and procedures and make recommendations to address and respond to systemic racism; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Racial Equity Steering Committee will be charged with: reviewing the City's approach to public safety, including but not limited to:

1. an examination of the ever expanding role we, as a City, have asked the police to play in our community — ranging from responding to noise complaints, traffic violations, and violent crime to conducting wellness checks and responding to behavioral health calls and drug overdoses — and whether we have provided them with the appropriate resources to accomplish this work;

2. the way in which the City interacts with area agencies, organizations, and non-profits in the name of public safety and how these partnerships can best work to enhance public safety in the City; and
3. recommending changes, as necessary, to various policies, structures, and procedures related to public safety that may disproportionately impact Black people and other persons of color with the specific aim of improving community relations, establishing mutual trust and respect, and rooting out and ending systemic racism; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that in addition to the Racial Equity Steering Committee, the Mayor, with input from the City Council, will appoint a working group of not more than three members to select a neutral convener to begin the planning for, and execution of a series of Community Conversations designed to illuminate issues of systemic racism in Portland, and engage community members in a robust dialogue to educate, inform, and foster positive change. These Community Conversations will inform the work and recommendations of the Racial Equity Steering Committee, and will be convened and facilitated by a neutral party in collaboration with local groups, organizations, and individuals, and be supported with funding from the City; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Racial Equity Steering Committee will consist of no fewer than 9 members and no more than 13 members, all of which will be appointed by the Mayor, with input from the City Council, and shall include a range of stakeholders from the Portland community who are doing racial equity work, such as representatives from the City Council, Portland Public Schools, public safety, housing, healthcare, employment, education, homelessness, the faith community, youth, and community organizers; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Racial Equity Steering Committee will elect leadership from among its membership, either a Chair or Co-Chairs, who will develop meeting agendas, and who will work closely with an independent facilitator paid for by the City of Portland, and a member of City staff assigned by the City Manager; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Racial Equity Steering Committee will meet over the course of five (5) months, from September 2020 until January 2021, and will submit their final written report and recommendations to the City Council regarding the ways in which city government should address and respond to institutional racism and structural inequities. The final report shall be submitted to the City Council in the form of a communication on or before January 22, 2021; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that while the Council has charged the Racial Equity Steering Committee to initially focus on the realm of public safety, it is the intention of the Council to comprehensively examine other City systems, policies, and structures as we seek to eradicate institutional racism and bias across all facets of our

municipal government, either through a continuation of the work of the Racial Equity Steering Committee after it completes the work of its first charge, the appointment of additional task forces or steering committees, the hiring of consultants or City staff, or other appropriate means; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City Council hereby requests that the Portland Public Art Committee, which is responsible for administering the Public Art Program collection, and reviewing potential gifts of art to the city's collection according to the Guidelines for the Public Art Ordinance, engage in a public process in order to determine the best way(s) in which to respond to community offers of public art in support of racial equity either through a mural, banner or other form of public art within the City of Portland; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Mayor Snyder and the City Council, request that the City Manager appoint a neutral third-party, with input from the City Council and to be paid for by the City, to (i) compile written concerns or complaints from individuals and (ii) conduct interviews/conversations with individuals who would like to submit testimony and/or complaints, both (i) and (ii) as a result of their participation in the events associated with the June 1 into June 2, 2020 protest in Portland, Maine. The period for individuals to submit complaints and for the neutral third-party to conduct interviews shall be for a period of three (3) weeks and shall be well publicized. The neutral third-party shall submit a confidential work product, consisting of a compiling of the complaints and concerns, to the Portland Police Chief to be investigated further, if applicable. The purpose of the neutral third-party will be to provide individuals, particularly those not comfortable going through traditional channels, the opportunity to share their perspectives and interactions with the various policing parties during the June 1st into June 2nd protest; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Mayor and City Council, do hereby request that the City Manager appoint an independent third-party to conduct a thorough review of the June 1st into June 2nd protests including the City's response plan for protests and large demonstrations, addressing policing actions of all responding law enforcement agencies and make a full report of the same to the City Council; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Mayor and the Council are in no way indicting the Portland Police Department, but the purpose of this resolve is to establish a full picture of events and response to the unprecedented protests, to learn from these events, build trust, and be transparent with the communities affected and our community at large.