

Date: June 22, 2021

To: Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

Subject: **Update on the Human Relations Commission**

On January 19, 2021, City Council directed the City Manager to work with the Human Relations Commission (HRC) to update and expand its mission and scope and change its title to the Long Beach Equity Commission in line with recommendations from the Racial Equity and Reconciliation Initial Report. This memorandum serves as an update on progress to date, including an overview of the process, a description of community engagement, recommendations approved by the Human Relations Commission, and next steps for City Council action.

Overview of the HRC Update Process

Since receiving City Council's direction to update the HRC in January 2021, the commissioners have been actively engaged in shaping the process and recommendations included in this memorandum. In February 2021, the commission formed an ad hoc committee that met on a regular basis to work with staff from the Office of Equity, Department of Health and Human Services, and City Attorney's Office to understand the process of updating the City Charter and the parameters of advisory commissions.

On March 24, 2021, the Office of Equity held a Community Stakeholder Visioning Session (Session) to engage Long Beach community stakeholders in a brainstorming discussion about the potentially updated name, roles, and functions of the HRC. A total of 35 community stakeholders participated in the Session, including local nonprofits and community leaders from varied backgrounds and areas of focus. The Session was facilitated by a third-party consultant and centered around the following discussion questions:

- **Role:** What should the Commission do differently, or be tasked with, in order to be more effective at advancing equity and justice?
- **Internal:** What are ways the Commission could influence internal City culture, programs, and systemic policies and procedures that impact the community?
- **External:** What are ways the Commission could support external community needs around equity and engage with the community more effectively?
- **Accountability:** How should the Commission hold the City accountable for internal and external equity efforts?
- **Responsiveness:** How should the Commission be more responsive to our diverse community's needs in Long Beach? What would be different?

A summary of the stakeholder session and responses is included in Attachment A.

Recommendations Developed and Approved by the HRC

At its meeting on April 14, 2021, the HRC reviewed the community stakeholder responses, continued drafting and discussing the recommendations, which they voted to approve on May 5, 2021. These recommendations include amendments to the name, purpose, duties, and members. Additional recommendations include the commission's resources, placement within the City organization, and ways to address membership barriers. These recommendations are included in Attachment B.

Next Steps

On July 20, 2021, an item will be brought before the City Council to request the City Attorney to prepare an Ordinance amending Long Beach Municipal Code Chapter 2.44 to revise the title of the HRC and amend the purpose and duties of the Commission.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Deputy City Manager Teresa Chandler at (562) 570-5116 or Teresa.Chandler@longbeach.gov.

ATTACHMENTS

CC: CHARLES PARKIN, CITY ATTORNEY
DOUGLAS P. HAUBERT, CITY PROSECUTOR
LAURA L. DOUD, CITY AUDITOR
LINDA F. TATUM, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER
KEVIN JACKSON, DEPUTY CITY MANAGER
TERESA CHANDLER, DEPUTY CITY MANAGER
REBECCA GUZMAN GARNER, ADMINISTRATIVE DEPUTY CITY MANAGER
MONIQUE DE LA GARZA, CITY CLERK (REF. FILE #[21-0053](#))
DEPARTMENT HEADS

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER VISIONING SESSION

Session Recap and Summary of Participants' Feedback

Prepared for

Human Relations Commission
City of Long Beach, California

March 30, 2021



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APPENDIX

I. INTRODUCTION

This Report recaps a 2-hour “Community Stakeholder Visioning Session” (the “Session”) that took place via videoconference on March 24, 2021 and was organized by members and staff with the City of Long Beach Human Relations Commission (“HRC”) and staff from the Office of Equity. Discussion during the Session was facilitated by Rhonda M. Bolton, Esq. and Melissa Morgan of IncludeMe LLC, who also collaborated with HRC Commissioners and Office of Equity staff to help plan the event.

The report begins with a brief description of how the Session was conducted followed by a summary of participants’ feedback. Feedback has been categorized by topical “themes” to aid in analysis. Also described are overarching sentiments participants expressed during the Session. The report concludes with a list of questions participants raised during the Session.

II. BACKGROUND

The Session’s purpose was to engage Long Beach community stakeholders in a “brainstorming” discussion about potential modernized roles and functions of the HRC. This effort was prompted by the Long Beach City Council’s January 19, 2021 [directive](#) that the City Manager work with the HRC to update and expand the HRC’s mission and scope and change its name in light of the goals articulated in the City’s [Racial Equity and Reconciliation Initial Report](#) (“Racial Equity and Reconciliation Report”), which the City Council adopted on August 11, 2020.¹ The HRC was directed to return to the City Council regarding this matter within 90 days.

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE VISIONING SESSION

Invitations to the Session were sent via electronic mail by City staff to more than thirty members of the Long Beach community, described as Key Community Stakeholders—mostly local nonprofits and community leaders from varied backgrounds and areas of focus. The invitations included links to background material to ensure that invitees had an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the HRC, its history and recent work, and the City’s Racial Equity and

¹ As observed in the City Council’s January 19, 2021 directive, two of the recommendations in the Racial Equity and Reconciliation Report include: “reevaluating the role and function of the City’s Human Relations Commission, and creating an Equity Commission by shifting the current Human Relations Commission to focus on equity and oversight of the Reconciliation Process.” See City Council’s January 19, 2021 Motion at 2.

Reconciliation Report, in advance of the Session. RSVPs were received from more than thirty individuals.

Forty-five persons attended the Session. The HRC's Chair, Alyssa Gutierrez, and Vice Chair, Amy Eriksen, attended the Session as well as Deputy City Manager Teresa Chandler, Human Relations Commission staff Teresa Gomez, Equity Officer Katie Balderas and other members of Office of Equity staff.² Each community stakeholder was asked to introduce themselves³ and participated in a few ice-breaker activities including volunteering what their hopes or fears were about the process.⁴ Participants were advised that the Session was being recorded to enable other HRC members to view it at a later date.

The Session's agenda provided a brief overview of the HRC's history, its activities, and its current authority and duties as prescribed by the City's municipal code. To explain the purpose of the Session and offer relevant context, the City's Racial Equity and Reconciliation process was also briefly described. The facilitators reviewed guidelines to govern the conversation, definitions of terms that might be frequently used throughout the conversation (e.g., "equity," "equality," "social justice"), and ensured that participants had opportunities to ask any questions they had about the materials provided before or during the Session.⁵

Participants were then divided into two break-out groups for the "brainstorming" portion of the Session, each led by an IncludeMe facilitator. To offer direction and keep the discussion on track, the facilitators provided a series of prompts and served as timekeepers.⁶ To ensure that all feedback was gathered, participants were also provided with a place to document any comments they had that were relevant to matters other than the prompts.

² While the HRC's leaders and staff provided information and answered factual questions from participants, they did not actively participate in the "brainstorming" portion of the Session to avoid inadvertently influencing stakeholders' feedback.

³ As a consequence, the feedback during the Session was not provided by participants on an anonymous basis. However, participants were advised that anonymous feedback could be provided via a post-Session survey that would be sent to participants.

⁴ View participants' description of [hopes and fears](#) regarding this process.

⁵ View the [slides](#) shared during the Session.

⁶ The prompts generally covered areas involving the future role of the HRC, suggested measures it could undertake internally and externally, accountability measures, and measures to enhance its responsiveness to the community. The prompts were developed by the facilitators based on a study of the matters raised in the Racial Equity and Reconciliation Report, the City Council's January 19, 2021 directive, and discussions with HRC leaders and staff, and are listed in the attached Appendix.

Feedback was documented through the use of a cloud-based [shared document](#). Each break-out group participant could type their own thoughts into the document or have the facilitator do so. The facilitators also made notes on the document regarding discussion among the break-out group members. In addition, participants offered some comments utilizing the videoconference “chat” function.

Participants were offered a chance to weigh in on a new name for the HRC through use of an electronic poll. Four possible options⁷ were offered including “Equity Commission”⁸ and participants could vote for their top two choices. Participants were also welcomed to provide other ideas using the chat function. The name “Commission on Equity and Social Justice” received 70% of the votes cast.

Closing remarks advised participants of the anticipated next steps for this process, including an opportunity to provide public comment during the HRC’s Special Meeting scheduled for March 31, 2021 and its meeting scheduled for April 14, 2021. Participants were advised that the HRC plans to vote on May 5, 2021 on recommendation to be submitted to the City Council, and that a City Council vote on those recommendations is expected in late May/early June. Participants were provided with links to a “take-home” version of the Session slides. And a post-Session [survey](#) was sent to participants on March 28, 2021 offering another opportunity to provide feedback.

IV. SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

A. Feedback Review Methodology

Session facilitators reviewed the shared feedback document that was used during the Session as well as comments participants made using the videoconference “chat” feature. The feedback was grouped into thematic areas and then arranged roughly according to the frequency that a particular theme/topic was raised by participants. These themes are summarized below.

⁷ The options are listed in the attached Appendix.

⁸ The City Council’s January 19, 2021 directive suggested changing the HRC’s name to the “Equity Commission.”

B. Feedback Themes

The participants' comments can be grouped into major themes⁹ concerning:

- Communication/Interaction
- HRC Authority
- HRC Structure
- Mission/Values
- Training/Education
- Processes
- Other Suggested Internal Measures

Below, specific sub-themes are listed under each major theme, both in roughly descending order of frequency of mentions.

| MAJOR THEME | SUB-THEMES |
|--|---|
| ○ COMMUNICATION/ INTERACTION (32) ¹⁰ | ○ HRC should interact/connect/work with community organizations; work with the arts community (7) |
| | ○ Expand public relations activity so people are aware of the HRC/aware of the city's diversity; use internet for public engagement (7) |
| | ○ Note missing voices, including youth, seniors, Black men, indigenous elders, intersectionality, the Cambodian community, and community organizations not in attendance at the Session (7) |
| | ○ Create a safe space for community discussion (3) |
| | ○ Increase opportunities for public comment; current public comment system does not work (3) |

⁹ Though the discussion prompts were arranged to address the areas of HRC Role, Internal and External measures etc. as described above, participants' feedback did not always correspond to the prompts. The review process accordingly sought to organize feedback in a way that most closely describes the nature of the comments.

¹⁰ The number in parentheses roughly indicates the number of times a particular topic was mentioned by participants. Please note that: 1) the number is approximate, given the challenge of tracking and categorizing simultaneous verbal and written interaction of 30+ individuals; and 2) the number is not intended to be a reflection on the merits of any particular point, but is provided to offer a relative sense of the direction of participants' conversation. Finally, note that this report contains a few examples drawn from participants' comments solely to illustrate or help explain the recurrent themes or sentiments identified in the Session. Real-time documentation of participant comments from break-out sessions are contained in the shared [feedback document](#) mentioned above.

| | |
|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make HRC meetings more accessible (2) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HRC should be liaison between the city government and community (1) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hold events to “uplift communities and their diverse backgrounds” (1) |
| | |
| HRC AUTHORITY (31) <i>SHOULD BE REVISED TO ALLOW IT TO:</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be a charter committee/not solely an advisory committee (6) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have oversight of city departments/other commissions/create equity blueprint entire city government must follow (5) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have investigation/enforcement authority (4) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have grantmaking or grant review authority (3) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engage in policy-making (3) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conduct hearings (2) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Needs a budget (2) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have a say on who is on committees (2), “e.g., budget oversight committee” |
| | <p>(1 mention each):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be “independent” ○ Perform “advisory and accountability checks” ○ Have oversight of project labor agreements ○ “Community benefit agreements” |
| HRC STRUCTURE (26) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Membership eligibility changes for HRC (19) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ concerns about Livescan requirements and whether those exclude certain community members from being on HRC (9) ▪ allow community to select some HRC members (4) ▪ make HRC more diverse/reflective of community (3) ▪ expand number of HRC members (3) |

- Establish other bodies/subcommittees for specific communities such as LGBTQIA+, women (3)

- Have “equity audit” conducted by City Auditor’s office (2)

(1 mention each):

- Change HRC Commissioner terms
- Increase stipends to ensure community involvement

MISSION/VALUES (23)

- Do not silo equity considerations, they cut across all areas (4)

(1 mention each):

- “Be clear about goals,” this will dictate what tasks HRC should tackle
- “Have intersectionality as a lens to view equity”
- “Be bold with this”
- Be action-oriented
- “Be explicit about issues impacting Black folks”
- “The HRC was formed because of police brutality, so in light of that, the mission of the HRC seems watered down”
- Align with community organizations on advocacy
- Increasing criminalization in the city negatively impacts different populations
- Use a collective impact, racial equity lens to guide selection and engagement efforts
- Need to mention racial equity, re-evaluate mission statement to add the word “race”
- “History and background of Mexican communities in local communities’ education and acknowledgement needed, elevate this unique history here”
- “White supremacy is part of the current structure”
- “Long Beach has always had a problem with addressing the harm that has been done to communities”
- Economic equity is important
- Tie intentionality to equity, access, and justice into effectiveness measures
- Value art
- Look at equity amongst how city interfaces with other organizations
- Work hand-in-hand in creating culture with residents
- Push the city toward “Empowerment” level of public engagement, place final decision-making authority in public’s hands
- “Weed out racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and xenophobia in employees would be a dream”

| | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “See the entire way city council is run, staff need to see how all the issues are related, need community voices heard” |
| TRAINING/EDUCATION (10) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For departments/city employees (3) ○ For “leaders” (2) |
| | <p><i>(1 mention each):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fund training created by community members rather than trainings created en masse by corporations ○ Have training on racial equity ○ Have workshops to empower community members in proposing ordinances ○ Work with schools to develop curriculum ○ Training (not specific) |
| OTHER SUGGESTED INTERNAL MEASURES (7) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use existing Equity Toolkits (2) <p><i>(1 mention each):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ HRC members should attend City Manager meetings ○ Joint hearings with other city commissions ○ Ensure that each city meeting starts with a land acknowledgement ○ Increase initiatives to promote diverse city staff ○ Abolish City Manager and re-design city structure |
| PROCESSES (6) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ More conversations with small groups (2) <p><i>(1 mention each):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need full transparency ○ Need benchmarks to ensure equity is carried out and met along specific timeline ○ Can City Council provide formal responses, easily accessible to the public on what is presented to them? And a way for the public to work with the HRC to respond to that? ○ “The Commissions have been examined before, the report is in some black book;” reviewing this report will help the HRC involve more of those stakeholders who should be part of this process |

C. Overarching Sentiments

General observations about frequently repeated sentiments or the tenor of the feedback as a whole are as follows:

- The participants wholeheartedly embrace the City government enhancing its focus, efforts, and results around equity
- Concerns expressed for transgender community
- Need to ensure this work is connected to critical decisions being made city-wide
- Engage the community more during your work, not afterward
- Concerns that elected City officials and department heads may not really buy in to real equity (internally and externally)
- HRC should not be under City Manager’s office or any other political official; sentiments contrary to this were also expressed
- Concerns related to policing:
 - the HRC was originally started, and re-started, in response to police brutality
 - concern about “situation with the Police Department”
- Duplication of work:
 - use the community and do not re-create the wheel regarding work that has already been done
- Skepticism:
 - this is not the first time the community has come together to make recommendations
 - “nothing happens” after community provides the government with feedback
 - concerned with how to ensure that “something meaningful happens this time”
 - concern about cooperation from the City Council

D. Questions Asked

Participants asked the following questions during the Session which were not answered by staff:

- Can HRC focus on holding Police Department accountable?
- Why was the HRC disbanded in the early 1980s?
- Why is there a requirement to “pass” a Livescan screening to become a member of the HRC? What is meant by “passing” the screening? Does this requirement exclude some community members from being eligible to serve on the HRC or other Commissions?
- Does having certain immigration status preclude serving on the Commission?
- How does all of this relate to the Recovery Act funding?
- Should the HRC be under the City Manager’s Office?

APPENDIX

Break-out Discussion Prompts

- Role: What should the Commission do differently, or be tasked with, in order to be more effective at advancing equity and justice, and valued (i.e., have "teeth" and not just "gums" like 1989 LA Times article referenced)?
- Internal: What are ways the Commission could influence internal City culture, programs, and systemic policies and procedures that impact the community?
- External: What are ways the Commission could support external community needs around equity and engage with the community more effectively?
- Accountability: How should the Commission hold the City accountable for internal and external equity efforts?
- Responsiveness: How should the Commission be more responsive to our diverse community's needs in Long Beach? What would be different?

HRC Re-naming Poll: Name Options

- Equity Commission
- Equity & Human Rights Commission
- Commission on Equity and Social Justice
- Commission on Human Relations & Equity
- Other (list suggestions in chat box)

Human Relations Commission Change of Scope Recommendations

Voted on by Human Relations Commission May 5, 2021

Amendment to Long Beach Municipal Code Chapter 2.44

Revised Title - Equity and Human Relations Commission

Amended Purpose

1. To make advisory policy recommendations to the City Council on equity, human relations, and social justice issues, including racial equity and reconciliation, to serve as a forum for community discussion on equity and social justice policy issues, and to encourage input and participation from groups most impacted by such issues.
2. Consider and recommend programs that foster a more equitable and socially-just Long Beach at the individual, community, and systems level, and to evaluate and provide recommendations regarding such programs, information, and services relating to advancing matters of equity, human relations, and social justice in the City of Long Beach.
3. Cultivate and sustain equity, diversity and inclusion in the City of Long Beach through accountability, measurable outcomes, and civilian oversight to provide accountability and transparency in government in the City of Long Beach.

Amended Duties

1. Provide a public forum where matters of equity, human relations and social justice may be presented, discussed, and evaluated for the purpose of submitting recommendations to the City Council.
2. Recommend policies and programs to the City Council in matters affecting human relations, equity, and social justice issues, and recommend legislation for the implementation of such policies.
3. Collaborate on project development with community groups, City commissions, and other related institutions, including but not limited to the Human Dignity Program to foster a more equitable and socially-just Long Beach at the individual, community, and systems level.
4. Review and make recommendations on the Equity Action Plans implemented pursuant to the City's Framework for Racial Equity and Reconciliation and any other similar equity- or social justice-related plans or programs required by the City Council regarding the same.
5. Submit a report to the City Council biannually that details the status and progress on equity measures in the City, including but not limited to progress on the action items in the City's Racial Equity and Reconciliation plan.
6. Any other areas or topics relating to equity, human relations and social justice as directed by the City Council.

Amended Scope - Members

1. Recommend expanding the number of members of the new commission to a total of 15 members.
2. Members of the Commission should be broadly representative of those persons and groups impacted by inequity at the individual, community, systems level. An equity lens should be applied to commissioner appointments to ensure accurate representation.
3. Members of the commission should possess experience, either, personal, professional or academic, related to equity, human relations, and social justice, including, but not limited to, one or more of the following areas related to equity, human relations, and social justice: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI), Anti-racism, and redressing Anti-blackness, intersectionality, re-entry, domestic violence, social services, early childhood, labor rights, hate crimes, or related fields.
4. Members must attend an Implicit Bias/Anti-racism training upon being appointed to the commission.

Other Recommendations:

1. **Budget and Resources:**
 - a. Conduct a cost analysis to determine resources needed to effectively carry out the revised purpose and duties, including but not limited to: resources for additional staff in the Office of Equity that can support the commission with research, reports, etc., communications and marketing budget to reach impacted communities, evaluation consultant, and trainings.
 - b. Recommend five years of funding based on the highest possible need as determined by the cost analysis, with the possibility of renewal.
2. **Commission Placement:** Move the revised commission under the Office of Equity in the City Manager's Office, while continuing placement of the Human Dignity Program in the Health and Human Services Department.
3. **Address Membership Barriers** that would prohibit previously incarcerated individuals from participating as Commissioners.
 - a. While a criminal background check will be required due to the commission's affiliation with the City of Long Beach, the Commission recommends that the Mayor's Office consider qualified candidates with criminal histories in a manner consistent with State and local laws that provide a fair chance for employment to people with criminal backgrounds.
 - b. Conduct outreach and education around background check requirements that explains the purpose and communicates that a background check does not necessarily limit previously incarcerated community members from serving as Commissioners.

Additional Recommendations from Community Visioning and other forums to be voted on at subsequent meetings:

1. Advocate for the establishment of a Women’s Commission

- a. Next Steps: Summer 2021 conduct a study session to learn more about the benefits of a Women’s Commission
- b. Draft a recommendation letter for the establishment of a Women’s Commission
- c. Vote on recommendation; advocate to the City Council

2. Advocate for a Chartered Equity Commission

The following duties would require a change to the City Charter:

It is the intent that the Commission shall be constituted to provide a representative balance of members based on the demographic makeup of the City; and, that the Commission-selected and Community-selected appointments will be made to achieve this balance. Commissioners shall be selected by:

- 9 commissioners shall be representative of each Council District- appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council
- 6 commissioners shall be nominated by the Commission

3. Advocate for staff reports and City Council items to include an equity impact analysis and that the Equity Toolkit is being applied.

4. Advocate for an “Equity Audit” to be conducted by the City Auditor’s Office of City departments, boards, commissions and offices, including the commission appointee process and fiscal impact.