

Missoula City Council Committee of the Whole Minutes

November 18, 2020

12:30 PM

ZOOM Webinar

Members present: Stacie Anderson, Mirtha Becerra, John P. Contos, Heather Harp, Jordan Hess, Gwen Jones, Julie Merritt, Amber Sherrill, Sandra Vasecka, Bryan von Lossberg, Heidi West

Members absent: Jesse Ramos

1. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

1.1 Roll Call

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Seeing none.

3. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

3.1 LEARN Missoula Contract

Eran Pehan, Department of Community Planning, Development and Innovation said we joined by members of LEARN Missoula. Presenting on collaboration with LEARN Missoula regarding the city's equity goals and request approval of a contract to support these effort. LEARN Missoula is research project team which is BIPOC led and directed. BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color). They have a history of engaging with the community in diversity and equity work. The group emerged as a result of concerns of City Council on how to best address issues of structural racism in City government. They submitted a request for partial funding from the City and are also seeking funding from other sources. The contract today is a request for a foundational funding of \$75,000, out of a total budget of \$387,000. The project has 4 goals: actively engage BIPOC members; to cultivate research partnerships with the BIPOC community; to center BIPOC voices on issues of structural inequity, marginalization and systemic oppression; and to scrutinize the nature of municipal departments data to understand interactions with and treatment of BIPOC residents. The project has 4 outcomes: the generation of practical and applied knowledge directly from BIPOC community members; the acquisition of BIPOC-centered solutions and strategic action steps; the privileging of BIPOC-generated knowledge and strategies so they play an instrumental role to bring about change; and a deeper understanding of municipal departments existing data and recommendations based on these insights. These outcomes are essential for the City to move ahead with our equity work. Discussed the 5 equity aspects of Missoula's Strategic Plan: design and create programs, facilities and spaces that promote equity; work with community partners to define disparities in our community and to identify the most promising solutions; create a pro-equity policy agenda that will advance racial and social equity in various areas; create an equity and social justice strategic plan that will serve as

a blueprint for integrating and implementing pro-equity practices in the major functions of government; and engage neighborhoods to identify and understand needs and promote pro-equity policies and programs. All of this work requires the generations of knowledge from the BIPOC community, BIPOC centered solutions and a deeper understanding of data from the City of Missoula. Discussed next steps: a one year recursive model that allows for the dissemination of information throughout, because the research builds upon itself. Reporting includes updates in City Council meetings and also on the projects website: learnmissoula.org.

Alderperson von Lossberg welcomed Project members, thanking them for the work they've done and will be doing with the City. Invited members to add to Eran's introduction.

Dr. Laurelle Warner wanted to reinforced: the project team recognizes they aren't the experts. They are committed to actively engage with and work with BIPOC community, activist groups and organizations to listen to their understanding of historical issues and ask about their vision of what a just and equitable Missoula looks like. The 2nd piece is gaining data informed BIPOC generated knowledge. It important that the work is data driven, from the voices of the BIPOC voices. The 3rd piece to acknowledging structural inequality, that our society is whiteness centered, it's not about people being bad, it's a systemic issue. Their research is not trying to prove it exists, it is focused on now that we know it exists, how do we figure out solutions.

Alderperson von Lossberg asked for questions from Council.

Alderperson Harp asked if the work they are doing will address racist housing covenants that might still be on our books, if so what are we going to do to eliminate those.

Dr. Laurelle Warner said they are looking at this data in city departments, looking at the policies and covenants that might exist through a racial equity and inclusion lens. They will work with any City Department that are interested to scrutinize internal practices and come up with recommendations to move forward.

Alderperson Harp asked if they will have the ability to enter into any department?

Dr. Laurelle Warner they are hoping the City will gentle nudge Departments to welcome them and participate in the project.

Alderperson von Lossberg said Dale might want to speak to this.

Dale Bickell, Chief Administration Officer said this is a priority in Mayors office, and they are expecting full participation from all Departments. He said one constraint will be a lack of data, but the ability to start collecting data in the proper way and then use it is going to be important. They are focusing this learned effort on City operations and County as well, a and are hoping to be model for others organization in the City.

Dr. Laurelle Warner said they want to interrogate the data and help Departments set up feedback loop so they can use the data to inform decisions and make changes. They will help Departments create reflexive practices with the data, allowing it to inform what they need to do differently.

Alderperson Vaseka asked about the budget. In August LEARN Missoula proposed a \$100,000 study and it was included in the City's 2021 fiscal budget. In 2 months the price tag has grown to \$387,000, what has driven this growth?

Eran Pehan said in August during the budget process they requested \$100,000 in funding to support the effort. She doesn't believe LEARN Missoula included a budgetary amount in their initial scope. That amount is what the City of Missoula presented as their support. The budget of \$387,000 is the first time they've seen a budget attached to the scope of work for LEARN Missoula, the previous presentation was about their request for support of the work.

Alderperson Vaseka asked is there a plan for how many progress reports along the way? Is there an estimate for how many BIPOC research conversations are necessary to fulfill the PSA?

Dr. Laurelle Warner said there is no set number. Their method is recursive, which means everything immerses through the process. Their goal is to be intentional in presenting data as it emerges, that is the qualitative piece. The quantitative piece is the real time data they gather from working with the Departments. They will know when they've had enough when they reach saturation, meaning they start hearing the same stories and experiences over and over again, and aren't hearing new insights. Once they have BIPOC generated knowledge that is applicable and practical, it is imperative they keep working together to ensure fidelity and trustworthiness.

Alderperson Sherrill said she is excited about this moving forward. Asked if the data being shared externally to have broader reach? Asked Eran if this will be shared on Engage Missoula site?

Eran Pehan said yes, this good project to use that site as a public education opportunity and direct them to the LEARN Missoula site.

Alderperson Sherrill said she thinking about data collection and looking at policies, how we will ensure we are moving needle in right direction? How do we track how the changes we make are doing?

Dr. Laurelle Warner said part of how we will know we are making change will be using mixed methods and engaging in conversations with the BIPOC community to seeing what disconnects there are between city departments and what BIPOCs experience. We will know the needle is moving in the right direction because action is informed by BIPOC voices. The 2nd way they'll know is that they will be offering very specific recommendations around data. For example, looking at demographics of Departments and if there are BIPOC voices present, and reviewing hiring practices.

Jamar Galbreath wants to challenge the notion of universal needle moving, because different communities require different solutions. Wants to ensure we are operating solutions by engaging the populations, so results might look different.

Dale Bickell wanted to address Ambers question from Administrative perspective and said that they want to measure outcomes when they do policies considerations. Hiring is the perfect example of where we can do a good job of collecting data on how recruitment is going and if we are attracting diverse applicants. Also mentioned analyzing our organizational culture regarding racial equity.

Dr. Laurelle Warner said part of their process is bringing an anti-racist/anti-oppressive/anti-discriminatory lens and will help Departments create their own reflective process to scrutinize their own data. It's important to recognize organizational culture.

Alderpersion Merritt she hopes that all the volunteer boards and commissions are included in the project. They tend to have the same types of candidates. She wanted to bring up criticism she is hearing from folks and would like to know how to respond. They say that we know racism exists, so why study it instead of just taking action?

Dr. Brad Hall said it is about helping make constituents part of process. They are trying to go beyond anecdotes and the anger we all feel, and to form basis for actions we want to accomplish. This is based on data, and collecting these experiences so that we have the saturation of information needed to make real decisions. In order to use City resources, you have to be able to show that this is what the data is telling us. By supporting this project, you are investing in understanding. It's important include have conversations with the critics to include them in the process and to be mindful about not making assumptions about what people care about. As we engage with the community it's important to include methodologies that will allow them to help us identify other voices in the community we may not be reaching out to and need to engage with.

Dr. Laurelle Warner added that research is a powerful vehicle mechanism that historically wasn't available to the BIPOC community. It's important for them to use the research to collect and codify these experiences and to put those experience together in a well-designed, equitable and ethical way that represents the full spectrum of voices, because no one has ever done this. Their goal is to create localized BIPOC generated knowledge about the issues and solutions.

Jamar Galbreath mentioned that research is needed to understand racism in our community and culture, so we know exactly how to treat it. Racist policies grow when they go unexamined and unchecked, so research is critical so this doesn't happen.

Dr. Laurelle Warner gave examples of data informed work from Michele Alexander.

Alderpersion Becerra thanked All Nations Health Center as fiscal sponsor and LEARN Missoula. She thinks this project has been developed with great attention to detail and sensitivity. She thinks the result will give us a lens to make meaningful and sustainable change. She is happy to make the motion.

Alderpersion West said thank you. It's important to have objective and independent funding sources, so it's not all from the city. Where is the additional money coming from and how it will be communicated to the public so it doesn't appear to be just a City government project?

Dr. Laurelle Warner said they are in the process of soliciting financial support from additional organizations, currently organizing a list of organizations to contact.

Dexter Royes said they will also be reaching out to other corporations and non-profits. They are also looking at applying for grants.

Alderpersion Vaseka said appreciates discussing the push back and she will be siding with them and respectfully declines to support this project.

Jamar Galbreath thanked All Nations Health Center as fiscal sponsor and mentioned that donations can be made to All Nations to support this project.

Alderson von Lossberg thanked all members of the team and for the support from most of the team. He supports this project and offered his help. Asked for public comment, seeing none. They have a motion on the floor and called for a vote.

Alderson Hess mentioned that Land Use and Planning Committee will start at 1:40 p.m.

After the vote, Alderson von Lossberg asked Alderson Vaseka and Alderson Contos if they want this to go on the committee report or consent agenda?

Alderson Vaseka and Alderson Contos agree that consent agenda is fine.

Alderson Anderson said she prefers it to go on the committee report.

Alderson Merritt agrees.

Alderson Vaseka and Alderson Contos said that is fine.

Alderson von Lossberg said ok it will go on committee report and adjourned the meeting.

Moved by: Mirtha Becerra

Approve and authorize the Mayor to sign a contract for services with All Nations Health Center, the fiscal sponsor for LEARN Missoula, for \$75,000 to conduct a thorough research project and provide a place-based action plan that is created by and centered upon Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC).

AYES: (9): Stacie Anderson, Mirtha Becerra, Heather Harp, Jordan Hess, Gwen Jones, Julie Merritt, Amber Sherrill, Bryan von Lossberg, and Heidi West

NAYS: (2): John Contos, and Sandra Vasecka

ABSENT: (1): Jesse Ramos

Vote results: Approved (9 to 2)

4. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m. by Brian von Lossberg.