

STAFF REPORT

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION 19-5016

Date: Aug. 26, 2019

Department: Council Office

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Length: 20 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

While Metro has many broad charges regarding issues of regional concern, it's important to recognize specific goals for the months to come.

The Metro Council is specifically looking at four key areas for the coming year: efforts to combat the white nationalism that challenges our American values of civility and equality; addressing the growing economic uncertainty that could spark recession; action to reduce the impacts of pollution and climate change; and improving public safety in the Portland region.

ACTION REQUESTED

Council feedback and consideration of Resolution 19-5016.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

At the request of the Metro Council President, this resolution presents an opportunity for the Council to exercise regional leadership. While Metro will continue to work on many areas of metropolitan concern, these would be the top priorities for the current Council.

In an era of growing polarization and divisiveness, the Council has an opportunity to be clear about what Metro stands for: the American values of justice, equity, dignity, economic stability and stewardship of our place in the world for future generations.

With these values under threat, this resolution will make clear the Metro Council's course for protecting and supporting these values in the near term.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

- Are these the right focus areas for the Metro Council?
- Are the focus areas accurately highlighted in the resolution?

- How should this resolution direct the work of Metro’s programs and departments?

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends the Metro Council adopt Resolution No. 19-5016.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

1. Known Opposition/Support/Community Feedback

Metro has heard from many community members that climate action, respect and equity, personal safety and economic justice are priorities in the greater Portland region. A 2019 poll of 1,463 Metro-area voters, with a margin of error of 2.8%, indicated that 63% of voters view climate change as an extremely or very serious problem; 45% viewed racial equity as extremely or very serious.

Conversely, 19% of Metro residents do not view climate change as a serious problem, and 20% said they do not view racial inequality as a serious problem. We also know that there are white nationalists who live in greater Portland who would object to improved racial equity; people who do not support the proposition that all people are created equal; people who do not believe we have a responsibility to leave this place, and this planet, in better shape than we found it. It is likely they would oppose many of the tenets of this resolution.

2. Legal Antecedents

Resolution No. 08-3940, for the purpose of affirming a definition of a “successful region” and committing Metro to work with regional partners to identify performance indicators and targets and to develop a decision-making process to create successful communities.

Ordinance No. 10-1244B, for the purpose of making the greatest place and providing capacity for housing and employment to the year 2030; amending the Regional Framework Plan and the Metro Code; and declaring an emergency.

Ordinance No. 14-1346B, for the purpose of adopting a preferred Climate Smart Communities strategy and amending the regional framework plan to comply with state law.

Resolution No. 16-4708, for the purpose of approving the strategic plan to advance racial equity, diversity and inclusion.

Resolution No. 17-4777, for the purpose of reaffirming Metro’s support for stability, opportunity, safety and justice for all people living in our shared region.

3. Anticipated Effects

Guidance to Metro staff on Council priorities.

4. Financial Implications

None.

BACKGROUND

Combatting white nationalism and advancing racial equity

In the 1810s, Black Christians in Charleston, S.C., began congregating in what would eventually be called the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. In nearly 200 years, the church was visited by Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King Jr. and countless other Black leaders. In 2015, a man walked into the church and murdered nine parishioners because of the color of their skin.

Three years earlier, a man murdered six worshipping Sikhs in the Milwaukee suburb of Oak Creek. Last year, an alleged white supremacist murdered eleven people at a synagogue in Pittsburgh. And so far this year, at least three alleged white nationalists have murdered religious or ethnic minorities in mass shootings in the United States, the most recent of which was the El Paso shooting of Aug. 3, in which twenty-two people were murdered.

In our own region, 19-year-old Larnell Bruce Jr. was murdered in 2016 by a man who had been a member of a white supremacist prison gang.

There have always been white supremacists in the United States, some on the fringes, some in seats of power. The founding document of this state, the Oregon Constitution, notoriously banned African Americans from even entering Oregon.

They oppose the very notion of Jefferson's "All men are created equal" and they oppose the notion that Lincoln's government "of the people" must also be "for the people." They do not seek the "beautiful symphony of brotherhood" of which King spoke.

While it may seem absurd that our nation has reached a point where the values of equality must be adopted as a resolution, the need to do so is emblematic of our current political climate. In fact, just two years ago, the Metro Council passed resolution 17-4777, expressing the Council's backing of the residents of the Portland region in supporting stability, opportunity, safety and justice for all of those living in our shared region and reaffirmed the Council's commitment to building community trust.

White nationalism is, of course, not the only threat to our region and our nation.

Economic justice

The economic paradigm that has emerged this century has not offered shared prosperity. Since the Great Recession, household wealth in the United States has increased nearly \$50 trillion and more than one-third of that growth, \$16.2 trillion, has gone to the upper 1 percent of households. Workers in the Metro region, and many other parts of the country, can no longer expect that a 40-hour week will provide enough income for basic living expenses.

The Metro Council has many tools at its disposal to combat these trends, most notably its work in improving access to affordable housing, so that Oregonians are not expected to work an unreasonable amount in order to be able to afford housing.

Climate change

Climate change is also threatening Oregon. Since records started being kept at the dawn of the Industrial Age, all of the planet's ten hottest years have been since 1998. Pollution, particularly from petroleum consumption but also from disposal of waste, is releasing chemicals into the atmosphere that prevent solar radiation from reflecting back into space. The Metro Council has adopted policies to help curb pollution in the Portland region, particularly from tailpipe emissions. But more can be done in all facets of pollution emission to combat the growing harm of climate change.

Personal safety

Finally, there is the matter of personal safety. From Jan. 1 to Aug. 21, 2019, 284 people have died on Oregon roads, including 36 in the city of Portland alone. Metro is a committed partner for many Vision Zero efforts and the Metro Council is committed to improving safety for people who are getting around our region.

ATTACHMENTS

[For work session:]

Is legislation required for Council action? ☒ Yes ☐ No

- If yes, is draft legislation attached? ☒ Yes ☐ No
- What other materials are you presenting today?