Minutes

Equity Advisory Committee

Meeting date: July 21, 2026 **Time**: 6:00 PM **Location:** Virtual

Members present:

- ☒ Co-Chair, John Pacheco Jr., District 5
- ☒ Co-Chair, Carmeann Foster, at large
- ☐ Yassin Osman, District 7
- ☒ Dr. Tyronne Carter, District 3
- ☐ Toni Carter, District 14
- ☒ Michael Luseni, District A
- ☒ Taiwo Giwa, District B
- ☒ Samiira Isse, District C
- ☐ Anita L. Urvina Davis, District D
- ☒ Zakariya Abdullahi, District E
- ☐ Sabrina Tapia Contreras, District F
- ☐ Odell Brown, District G
- ☐ Vacant, District H
- ☒ Elizabeth Jones Stephens, at large
- ☐ Ibrahim Owolabi, at large
- ☐ Robert Blake, at large
- ☒ Marquita Stephens, at large
- ☒ Brian Xiong, at large
- ☒ Astrid Benedetto, at large
- ☐ Markeya Knight, at large
- ☒ Mitchel Hansen, at large

☒ = present, E = excused

Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment

The Metropolitan Council acknowledges that the land we currently call Minnesota and specifically the seven-county region is the ancestral homeland of the Dakota Oyate who are present and active contributors to our thriving region. As part of the Metropolitan Council's commitment to address the unresolved legacy of genocide, dispossession, and settler colonialism and the fact that government institutions, including the Metropolitan Council, benefitted economically, politically, and institutionally after the forceable removal of the Dakota Oyate, the Metropolitan Council is dedicated to instilling Land, Water, and People Commitments in regional policy. These commitments support the Dakota Oyate, the eleven federally recognized Tribes in Minnesota, Ho-Chunk Nation, and the American Indian Communities representing over 150 diverse Tribal Nations that call the seven-county region home.

Call to order

A quorum being present, Council Chair Pacheco called the regular meeting of the Equity Advisory Committee to order at 6:05 p.m.

Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment

The Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment was read by Co-Chair Carmeann Foster.

Agenda approved

It was moved by Elizabeth Jones Stephens, seconded by Brian Xiong to approve the agenda. Committee members did not have any comments or changes to the agenda. **Motion carried**.

Approval of minutes

It was moved by Taiwo Giwa, seconded by Elizabeth Jones Stephens to approve the minutes of June 16, 2026, regular meeting of the Equity Advisory Committee. **Motion carried.**

Public invitation

No members of the public pre-registered for the meeting.

Information

- Regional Parks and Trails System 2027 Competitive Equity Grant Program Draft Notice of Funding Availability (Jessica Lee, Planning Analyst, Regional Parks)

  Elizabeth Jones Stephens (EJS): Is there data from the 2019 component where you go back to evaluate some of these programs to see if they were able to achieve what they were hoping to achieve?

  - Jessica Lee (JL): We did change the criteria significantly the 2nd time around; as a result of the 2019 cycle we received a lot of feedback from the agencies, so we modified it a great deal. What you see now has been modified slightly from last time based on additional feedback we've received. We're just now starting to close out some of the grants from that first round, so we're still learning how the process is going.

    - EJS: So we don't have any data on utilization, or some of the outcomes, or participation?
    - JL: I wouldn't say we don't have hard data. We do have outcome reports on each grant as they're completing them which they're just starting to do now. So we are seeing some of those outcomes, but we don't have official/hard data.
    - EJS: I'd love to see that in the future, that'd be my feedback.

  EJS: About the 2027 application, can individuals trying to work with their community work with country representatives to help create a programming component?

  - JL: Grants have to be with agencies, but we encourage them to work with partners. They can also contract with people to do some of the programming work. So yes, I would encourage them to reach out to agencies to see how they can get involved.

Marquita Stevens (MS): How many of the proposals granted in the past round, can you identify the ethnic group that sponsored the project? Not the participants, but the ones that designed and sponsored the project, can you identify them? How many were African American organizations or interests, how many were Hispanic, etc?

- JL: We would have the information, but I don't have it at the top of my head. Each application has to list, the agency describes their partnerships and the groups and communities they're working with and who they're hoping to work with. So we do have that information on the individual grant level.

CM Carter: Are we going to offer any instance to smaller towns/cities in applying for these grants?

- JL: We only work with the 10 regional park implementing agencies, so they're the only ones that can receive a regional parks system grant through us. I do work very closely with those 10 agencies, have good relationships with all of them, and will definitely be assisting them with the process

Mitchel Hansen (MH): We talk about land acknowledgements, equity, and everything in the

same sentence, how do we actually start showing that? The most prominent and trusted voices are often left out of this process.

- JL: I think it's really important that these projects are forged out of community engagement that the agencies are doing. So it's important for those agencies to make sure that those groups are engaged during that process.

Carmeann Foster (CF): I know that CM Carter asked about assistance for preparing the application. I wonder if there is, or could be, engagement prior to the application being created? Not everyone is as good with equity work, so when we talk about partners having processes to get community dialogue to come up with these projects, some might benefit from some technical assistance in that area as well, long before the application is ever written. I know that there is limited capacity, so even if it was a guide or a toolkit that was sharing the best practices in how people can go about those things…too often it ends up being the folks who know the right people who get engaged in those processes, or sometimes it's just someone who stumbles upon an opportunity as opposed to partners doing their strategic engagement to get people to the table.

- JL: We do engage with the regional parks implementing agencies throughout this process so we've been working with them for the past year to put the NOFA together. We rely heavily on them to engage their communities. We are always available to help, but there are staff capacity limitations and we do rely on the agencies to work with their partners.

CM Pacheco: What happened to the Hiawatha Golf Course?

- Emmitt: The Hiawatha Golf Course is part of the Nacomas Hiawatha Regional Park. There was a long range plan done a couple years ago on that park area, specifically on the golf course. Currently it's an 18-hole course and they're proposing to shrink the golf course's footprint to make the golf course more accessible to a wider array of people, so it will go from 18 holes to 9 holes, is the proposal. Nothing has changed to my knowledge. I haven't talked to the park board, specifically Tyler Pedersen at the park board, who led that planning process. They are looking to develop, for instance, a paved loop trail around Lake Hiawatha, and that would be a huge success just because so many people are interested in it. I know that there's some really hard feelings with some of the golfing community, particularly some African American community who have a history there. The park board is working hard to identify other parts of their golfing system to serve any of the gaps that emerge from that. There are other ways that they're also thinking about making that space more accessible to a wider variety of interests. As a follow-up from this meeting, I will call the park board and send you an update as I learn more.

Torri Hampton (TH): While you guys are here, can you go over how we interact with the parks and recs in the area here at the Council? Also, where do you guys sit at the Council?

- Emmitt: We sit on the 2nd floor in the Community Development Division at the Roberts Street building. We have a nuanced relationship with the regional park implementing agencies. We do not own or operate an acre of park land or trail land, but we do support them through funding, like the equity grant program. The equity grant program is kind of unique because it's a competitive program and it's something the Council has more control over. Most of the funding we provide to those 10 regional park agencies comes from the State of Minnesota and we pass it through based on funding formulas that are written in state law. We also help with legislative coordinations, so we're over at the state capital during the legislative session advocating on behalf, with the Governor, so we do have limitations in that regard, but we really do bring in significant resources. We do all the research on the

regional parks and trail system around visitor use. We also provide funding for land acquisition, that's another one of Jessica's jobs, she helps the agencies make those critical acquisitions for parks and trails.

- JL: We also do a lot of policy development with them. Each regional park and trail unit has their own long range plan and those plans all go through the Council as well.
- Emmitt: We also have a Parks Ambassador program which is really focused on introducing the regional parks and trails system to new visitors. The idea that there are a lot of people out there that have never even heard of the regional parks and trails system. They're working hard to make those connections with communities that don't have the outdoor recreation traditions.

MH: In terms of the equitable scorecard, each one of these individual entities are they required to have their own equitable scorecard to apply, or is it one that you operate? If that's one of the pre-conditions for someone applying for this fund is to have their own equitable scorecard, not only to their engagement overall, but also with the BIPOC communities, especially regarding indigenous land that may also be on regional land?

- JL: Yes and no. What we do have is an equity toolkit requirement in each long-range plan, and each grant that we do has to be related to a long range plan and the community engagement in that long-range plan drives the project.

Announcement

Invitation to provide feedback on a new website for Metro Housing and Redevelopment Authority, looking for 3-5 people.

Participation requires 1:1 virtual meetings for 30 minutes scheduled during the week of August 10th to 18th. Sign up will be sent out via email by Torri.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned by CM Pacheco at 6:54 p.m.

Certification

I hereby certify that the foregoing narrative and exhibits constitute a true and accurate record of the Equity Advisory Committee meeting of July 21, 2026.

Approved this 18th day of August 2026.

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