



Metro

600 NE Grand Ave.
Portland, OR 97232-2736

Meeting minutes

Meeting: CORE Meeting
Date: Thursday, April 8th, 2020
Time: 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
Place: Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Attendees

Co-Chairs: Martine Coblentz, Tristan Penn

CORE Members: Duncan Hwang, Effie Bustamante, Karla Hernandez, Katie Sawicki, Nura Elmagbari, Mahmood Jawad, Maria Magallon, Quincy Brown, Saara Hirsi, Patricia Kepler, Dele Oyemaja, Daniela Ortiz

MERC Commissioners: Danel Malan, Karis J.A. Stoudamire-Phillips

CORE Liaisons: Metro Councilor Lewis, Metro Councilor Craddick

Metro staff: Raahi Reddy, Sebrina Owens-Wilson, Melissa Palavecino,

Absent: Laura John

Welcome and Overview of the day

Marine welcomed CORE committee members. And explains the change in schedule. The plan was originally to continue the conversation about the transportation message. President Peterson was also planning to attend to discuss the supportive housing measure. These agenda items have been moved to the May 21st meeting.

In order to be response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting will focus on how the COVID-19 crisis has impacted Metro and specifically how racial equity is being incorporated into decision making.

Public comment – Members of the public

No public comment was offered.

Before the meeting started CORE members were asked if they had any community updates they wanted to share.

Nura – One of the things I wanted to share that a lot of people are struggling. Uncertainty right now. Certain communities of color and refugee communities. The stimulus package is confusing. I would love some kind of summary from what we should be expecting. I know my clients are very worried about it. If we have time. Severe health disparities when it comes to people of color. Is Oregon or Metro doing anything to help make sure that people of color are getting what they need in terms of healthcare?

Martine – Great questions. We will hear about what Metro is doing later

Katie – Additional resources but it sounds like we will get to that later. Oregon Health Equity Alliance has been putting resources together that will let you jump to what you need. Also supporting and moving health initiatives. Specifically one about the Oregon Workers fund. I will share information out, perhaps via email?

Quincy – I can speak on maybe the comment that I posted in the group. I can give a rundown of the stimulus package. For all of the parents in the room, my company is offering online day care. Permission slip and online resources. Hopefully going to be getting funding for wifi and computer resources for children who don't have access. For the stimulus plan I can speak to unemployment and the resources from TriMet and what that looks. TriMet has moved to Sunday schedule. It is affecting what they will do with COVID 19. All bus drivers will have protective equipment and security glass. Please ride the bus if you can and it is a safe space to ride. My mom is working to get it clean. TriMet needs funds to not have to lay off any people. Unemployment offices are overstimulated and overbooked. Difficult to actually access the office. My mom is working with the unemployment office to access the office if you can't call. There is a Prosper Portland small business relief fund. Address the larger concerns of small business. 11,000 applicants and only 200 accepted. They have a small loan program. Applications are open April 6. Will be open until filled. I can speak further on education with teachers and parents.

Raahi – Question on the chat around resources for immigrants and undocumented folks. PCUN and CAUSA are developing a fund with the state to be able to provide similar to the stimulus money for undocumented people who won't get access to that. Help undocumented families get access to stimulus style support for families.

Danel – Multnomah County supported us through funding for the racial justice initiative. We have a lot of lessons plans in multiple languages – Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Somali.

Duncan – We are working on putting together \$10 Mil between state and local foundations. Folks who don't qualify for stimulus check or unemployment. Will be through MRG foundation. Business navigators through Prosper Portland. Specific resources for small business I will connect you to Prosper Portland.

COVID-19 Implications for Metro

Presenters: Marissa Madrigal, Metro COO

I am very grateful to be here. My spiritual belief system and taught me I am where I need to be. That is Metro at this time as a part of this journey. I am really grateful to be here with the people here who have strong hearts and minds. Dedication to public services. A lot of really tough decisions over the past few weeks. If doing that, the people matter, and the quality here is outstanding.

Marissa shares power point presentation with members.

The conversation that we are going to have today, advancing Racial Equity in the context of COVID19 crisis. Before we get into details and timeline, I want to talk about mandate came into Metro with. In past years at Multnomah County, a lot of my time was redesigning our anti-discrimination process. Coming to Metro, there was a desire to build on successes that organization has had in racial equity. Expand and deepen the work that then happened.

Within a few day, my first day at Metro was on March 9th. The event ban went into place on that Thursday, my 4th day at Metro. The world has been turned upside down. This is a moment more than any to live our values through this crisis. It is easy to have high ethical and moral standard when you are not in an environment of scarcity. Hard to hold onto values when making decisions in a crisis. Personally, when I grasped the scope of where we were and what we would have to do. I went straight to my personal and professional values and those of this organization.

About me personally. My father is an immigrant from Mexico. My mom was a runaway from Mass. Met in LA. Built a business. Went through ups and downs because of who my father was. Spoke with an accent. Discriminated against in the PNW. I had a child at a young age and lived paycheck to paycheck until recently. Because of the way that society treats young Latina moms. I come to racial equity work from a very personal place. It is hard for me not to see myself or my parents in this work. Which is why we want folks with lived experience in the workforce. I try to bring my professional experience on how to build sustainable work, structural components of a government system. Unintended impacts on people of color and people with disabilities and people who experience discrimination for one reason or another.

A lot of hope on March 9 for what we were going to work on and a strong set of values. So much has happened. For weeks, it felt like shoe after shoe was dropping. With each big change, we had to figure out what it all meant for Metro, and our workforce and our business. Rumors about event ban started circulating, shutting down event was going to disproportionately impact our public visitor venues – Zoo, performing arts, convention center. We first went to who is there. Who are the people in that environment we need to consider. IN all venues we have a lot of lower wage, variable hour employees. They may live paycheck to paycheck. They don't have anything guaranteed. How do we give those workers some certainty? How do we protect them from a work downslide?

At the beginning when we thought this would be a shorter lived event. I was working on rounding up support to keep them on for the term of the event. Use delaying projects and reserves to keep people in venues. We committed to pay folks until April 1 to give everyone some certainty as the world seemed could be crumbling around us. So that they could do what they needed to do for their families and absorb the shock of what was happening.

Do a lot of work internally. Essential workers. How did we make safe spaces for those who had to report to work? A lot of conversations, if the boss and his favorites let to telework and everyone else comes in? A lot of conversations about how to be equitable. Sending a clear message, that we expect you to try to do the best thing for your employees. If you come to a fork in your road where once decision is better for employees than another one, then lean toward better for employee and let that guide us. Also let science guide us.

Mid to late March and rumors about a stay at home order swirled. Realized that we were going to be in this for a long haul. Venues not open until late summer or early fall. Some models taking event ban out beyond on that. At this point we had to weight the short term benefit of keeping employees on payroll with the long term benefit of not bankrupting the venues. Reduce expenditures to a smaller amount to weather the storm and long term open up venues and bring people back.

This was the heartbreaking point. We realized if we didn't reduce costs and lay people off, we would not be able to bring people back. There have been a lot of tears shed over this decision, not just by me. When I think of the people that got laid off, I see my dad. Who is 77 and still working by the way, because he has to. And a lot of people are in that space where retirement is not an option.

When we realized we needed to lay people off we decided to put the COVID lens on it. What does it mean to lose your job in a pandemic? We knew that people would collect unemployment and when Families First passed. They would not have as much coming in but at least something. The most concerning was about benefits, especially health benefits. Made the decision to extend health care for three months, through July 31st. hopefully, this is when we will be back in the safe zone. Events may not be coming back but at least they can see primary care providers and take care of themselves.

Over the last week we worked through notifications. Many employees covered by Collective Bargaining Notifications. There are some folks who may be able to bump into other positions, either vacant or other positions in Metro or other departments. There is some hope for some people there. It was over 740 people who lost their jobs which is 41% of our total workforce. What we learned in subsequent days – those were emergency decisions
The rest of Metro even with different business lines in waste, parks, and planning. They will all see revenue reductions because of the other ways that the economy is being impacted.

Those decisions for 4th quarter through the end of June. Decisions in next week to constrain spending.

Right before I got to Metro, Andrew Scott had submitted a budget pre-COVID. We are scrapping that budget. We will be working with Metro Council to make cuts to next year's budget through the normal public engagement process with stakeholders. Emergency decisions for venues and the urgent decisions for the 4th quarter. It is still very difficult, we have more time to apply values more deeply in the long term.

Questions so far?

Nora – Hi Marissa, thank you for your hard work and for showing your emotions. I appreciate that greatly. I want the people who are in power to care. That is the only way that I think change will happen. From a budget, money perspective, I am not well read on how an organization like Metro – will COVID 19 crisis change the way you budget? In terms of budget? Are you allowed to have a savings account for the even we are off work for 1,2,3 months? Can you factor that in budget coming up?

Marissa – That is a great questions. All governments are allowed to have reserves. There is a sweet spot for reserves that it is enough when you have an emergency but not so much that you are hoarding money that could be in service to the public. Everybody, Metro, and other governments in the US had figured out sweet spot based on everything we had seen before. For example with Hyatt Hotel and convention center – they had modelled worst case on great recession and 9/11 event. Everyone at the time, thought this was a very conservative way to go. What are the chances something like that would happen? Well – we are in it. Nothing thought of a complete full stop. Part of our residence stream is hotels tax – 22 hotels are closed. 90% reduction in revenue. That is jaw dropping. Collectively the reserve conversation is going to change.

The other thing for Metro, which I understood but not so viscerally. Metro doesn't have a very large General Fund. Most of Metro's funds and programs are funded through restricted funds- parks bonds, waste fees, etc. That was the hardest thing for our workforce to understand. Not a lot of general money to move around. Why can't you use some of that money, so much over here, why can't you move that. Legally we cannot. So very small general fund that we can use to fill a very large hole.

Quincy – Marissa thank you so much for the work that you are doing. I appreciate the emotion that you are showing. It shows myself and others that you really care. Racial equity lens and lens to help people. What kind of work are you doing with other government agencies to lower the impact of layoffs? Are you trying to do it in a way that not all government jobs are not gone instantly? What are ways, long-term, that Metro is considering how to move the budget around and deal with an emergency? Emergency

management protocol – what are efforts now and in the future, if we have another spike in the fall how can you effectively answer those questions and sustain and not lay off. How can you move money around? Etc.?

Marissa – Because of our venues, we were hit first. Everyone was shocked by the number of people that were impacted. As I talked to colleagues and City of Portland, the County and other places. Their revenues will take a dive too just a different timeline. Everyone is on the same boat right now. In addition to continuing to be on emergency response. Also getting attention of the Federal Government to get funding that can continue services that everyone relies on. I don't know how hopeful I am about that but I will try to be. Trying to make sure that Metro doesn't get forgotten because we are in a weird regional space. Councilors trying to keep us front and center.

I think that I plan to have a conversation with our CFO about our reserve policies. That is a discussion happening across the country. We will want to look at that for the future. It is going to take time to build those up especially for the venues. The minute the event ban lifts we need to position ourselves to open up. I know that we still have some events booked out into the future and by being prudent now not finding ourselves in worse spot than we are now.

Danel – I know that last year and this year, there were concerted efforts from Metro with Julio Garcia and you for COO. You can't undo what is happening now. When you look at the cuts, a lot of the cuts were made at lower levels. And majority of people of color were in those lower paid positions. Are there more plans to look at bringing more people of color into managerial positions? Are we going to retain the partnerships with PYB and others who were providing steps on the ladder to move up within Metro?

Marissa – We have done some analysis on the impact of this layoff of this first wave. And, the overall impact, the sheer number of people was huge. Because of the nature of the workforce, there was a huge impact on people at the lower income level bracket. Right now, there doesn't look like there was a disparate racial impact. The percentages of the workforce have been roughly the same. Raahi – jump in if wrong. We retained people of color at higher income levels.

Raahi – Essentially, we are just diving through the data now. We will be releasing this. In our initial analysis, and looking at demographic dashboard – wage levels and classifications. Essentially what we found, because there was a such a sweeping impact on the variable hour employees that ultimately we lost a number of folks that were people of color that were in that group. When you look across wage levels, we laid off people of color at the same rate as white people. In total numbers it was devastation to us at Metro. Actual numbers we lost a lot of people of color who were co-workers. We thought a higher percentage of people of color being laid off than white workers. We found that that was not

the case. When you looked across the wage, they were not laid off at a higher rate than what their proportion was to the population. At some level, we found that we were as an agency we were trying to manage the layoff process and were having some thoughts about everyone new or everyone of a certain group is out. There was more fairness across. The total impact is bad all around because of the total numbers. There will be a better written narrative of what to share. Question is – moving forward, will we be able to sustain DEI initiatives to move people of color into management positions?

Marissa – A Racial equity lens is now more important than ever. The more diverse workforce at the table the better decisions you make. We are in high uncertainty low information. We need to call on ourselves to bring in more voices into decision making. For the budget aspects of it, we are going to have some tough decisions and tradeoffs to make. It is going to be an environment of scarcity. Won't have funds expected to have. I was excited to come here and get your perspective on how to apply racial equity lens on decisions moving forward. We have a bit more time on budget for next year.

To be explicit about racial equity lens. Equity and equality are not the same thing. We considered an across the board furlough. Business and equity that doesn't make sense. A lot of decisions about what is fair. Same broad brush is not fair or equitable. A traditional approach to the financial crisis – without an equity lens – would result in most vulnerable workers bearing disproportionate impact. Residents of great Portland – employees are community and community are our employees. Invest in what builds resiliency not just for programs and initiatives but for vulnerable communities.

For the budget reductions in the 4th quarter and the proposal for next year. We issued pages of guidance including a racial equity lens that should be applied to decision making. We asked our department directors to have a people centered lens. Originally when we talked about that it got confused – we should prioritize keeping jobs. That is true that benefits the community and the economy. We had capital projects planned that health and safety for the public and employees. People centered – that doesn't make sense not to do these projects. They should be safe when they visit or work in our facilities. Asking our departments to be critical thinkers. Really work through the nuances of these decisions. They will be faced with difficult choices.

Instead of one good option and two bad ones. They might have three bad ones. So which one is less bad for people. Steps that we are asking people to take. How does their decisions impact equity goals? Analysis of budget recommendations? Seek input from impacted stakeholders and to share that with leadership team.

The discussion we would like to have is to get your guidance. What does our mission, our goal to advance racial equity, diversity and inclusion through the lens of COVID 19 – unique impacts on communities of color? What guidance do you have? Are we on the right track?

Discussion – Q&A

Patricia – People with disabilities. How were these decisions made in terms of work being done? I know that through all of your theaters and parks, you had one ADA coordinator on staff at the Zoo. I was working with that person on an ADA transition plan. That person was in the first round of layoffs. See equity because it wasn't the entry level position. But also – if you thought you could do without that it is not a great message for people with disabilities?

Marissa – Cutting a position does not relieve the zoo or any of us of our obligations under the law or under a moral commitment. I am happy to go back and get more insight from Don Moore. If that person is not doing that work then someone is. And if they need help or technical assistance – they reach out. If you can't fund that position the work still needs to happen.

Mahmood – What is the data for race/ethnicity layoffs since COVID? Available? How is racial equity being used for partners that work with Metro – has it impacted partner organizations and relationships?

Marissa – We have some of that data. We are still analyzing as Raahi mentioned. We are collecting that and will be transparent about the impacts for this initial round and rounds going forward.

Community Partnerships. Nothing has changed yet. One of the things that we are going to be talking about tomorrow during Council Worksession. We will be talking about a quick response. We have pretty restricted funds here at Metro. For grants and community partnership programs. Take all of those out and look at COVID 19 lens. What stability do we have? What flexibility? Can we reframe or adjust those programs to better serve the community for this moment? If so, how? With community I am talking about internal community and that we operate in. Internally has been on employees and now it is on community partnerships. No decisions made but we are beginning to process where and how we being to adjust our current offerings to be better partners during this time. We made some outreach calls to community partners. Because we know that, our initiatives have been successful through FOTA. Expo center and Convention Center have been successful. Layoffs were going to hit communities of color strongly. The announcement went out on Friday. We made those calls on Thursday – Urban League, Coalition of Communities of Color, APANO. We first thanked them for their support of FOTA and their help in increasing hiring of folks of color. Also let them know that we would be making these layoffs. Letting them know that this would happen and would need additional support. Community partners are very important and we need to retain those relationships. We truly value that commitment and will continue to do so moving forward.

Quincy – You have mentioned how your different budgets work within different group. Housing has to be housing. Parks and Rec. How do you do a hire back process that increases racial equity? Look at funding – what services can you do now to increase equity? Like houseless folks are using parks. Maybe using some of the funding to create safe space in Metro Parks. Like City of Portland has hand washing stations, etc. Look at budget to increase racial equity within those spaces where you have money.

Tristan – My question is more general and not specific. When you say, we, who are you specifically talking about when you are referring to making these decisions? Thank you, I know this is not ideal. Thank you for the time and humanizing this too. Heavy is the head. I definitely appreciate your quick leadership in this.

Marissa – From day 1, we have been meeting as a team – myself, Raahi, Deputy Andrew Scott, CFO, HR Officer Julio, Communications, and Attorney. Mutli-disciplinary group of people. Tough what we had to do but not because we disagree on values. Beginning asked what is the best thing we can do for our people. Everyone jumped on this, at this level and on the same page. No convincing anyone to do the right thing. I have worked in government almost 15 years. I have usually encountered people who have been like ‘we have never done it that way’. Nothing like that. That is the core team in consultation with Council and with subject matter experts. I am someone who likes a big table. I would rather have all of the perspectives present and duke it out than have to go back and fix something. It is better to have as many as we can.

Sebrina – we will be writing up the recommendations and questions tonight. I will send them back to the group. Make sure that you agree it captures what you said, it is also an opportunity to add recommendations. If you don’t want to type it up, call me and I am happy to type it up for you.

Adjourn