

The Mayor's Community Advisory Board

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

DRAFT Minutes

Attendance: Christine Alves, Rachel Braga, Pam Byrd, Christopher Franscesconi, Maryann Fonsenca, Elizabeth Fox, Cendi Arias Henry, Marlon Henry, Noele Hosley, Patrick Kelley, Onna Moniz-John, Krista Moravec (Secretary), Michelle Nuey (Chairwoman), Rodrigo Pimentel, Elmer Pina, David Rangel.

Excused: Keith Cabral, Tatiana DosSantos (Vice Chairwoman)

I. Call to Order

Chairwoman Michelle Nuey called the meeting to order at 6:11 pm following several minutes of technical issues with Zoom. Members and guest speakers were asked to call in.

II. Consent Agenda

Approval of Minutes

- October 14, 2020 & November 9, 2020

A motion was made by Elizabeth Fox and seconded by Christine Alves. There was not discussion. All voted in favor to accept the minutes of both dates, none opposed, no abstentions.

Robert's Rules Reminders

Because of the technical issues with Zoom, Chairwoman asked members to announce themselves before they speak.

Announcements

There were not announcements

III. Public Comment

Chairwoman called for public comment on the call. No public comments were initiated.

IV. Guest Speakers/Presentations:

Topic: City Demographics, Hiring and Representation Across Departments

Guest Speakers: Elmer Pina, City Municipal Integrity/Affirmative Action/EEO Officer, and Victor Santos, City Human Resources Director

Victor Santos began his presentation by thanking the CAB for what they are doing and dedicating their time to the community. He started as Human Resources Director for the City in June 2019. He speaks Portuguese, Spanish, and English. He is from the Azores and the first in his to go beyond a 4th grade education. He empathizes with the Affirmative Action philosophy and very much in favor of that office. Mr. Santos said they have not had a complaint regarding affirmative action to the City and this is a feather in Elmer Pina's cap and the team.

When Mr. Santos came on board with the City, he has made sure that Mr. Pina is part of their interviewing process as either an observer or part of the hiring board itself. He observes what is going on and can alert them if there is something out of the ordinary. The board has a minimum of three board members from city departments. Community members and representatives from other municipalities that have expertise in a field have been invited to participate to have an outside perspective and to be as fair as possible. There are rubrics for every position. All candidates are asked the same questions to remain consistent. Also, part of the city charter gives residency points to city residents applying for a city position and seniority points are given for promotions. The City also offers military points to applicants.

Mr. Santos noted they are working on the rubric for internal promotions. Panelists on the review board who do not know a candidate can use the rubric and see their experience, attendance, recommendations, disciplines etc.

Mr. Santos said all positions are posted internally or externally depending on the position. Final rankings are posted. Some positions require a written exam, oral, and/or evaluation. The system is fair and consistent. Since Mr. Santos has been with the city there has never been a witness to any activity that would be doubtful from an affirmative action perspective (i.e. someone pressuring Mr. Santos to give someone a job). The hiring board is always neutral. There are 13 positions the city is recruiting for now.

Mr. Santos provided an overview of representation of minority representation of city employees and the city's recruitment practices.

- Of the 13 administration or departments heads, two are minority, five are female.
- Of middle management, five are female and five males are minority.

The Police and Fire Departments hold open houses to attract minority candidates. They will feature female and minority staff to express the diversity, to talk about their experience in the field.

- The Police Department had eight new hires: two are minority, two are going into the academy in January, and two are laterals.
- The Department just finished recruitment: 13 were certified, six withdrew, and seven are available and continuing on with the background check phase of recruitment. Of the seven, one is a minority.

- The Fire Department had 20 cadets graduate, of which four are minority and two are female.

The majority of the City's openings are due to retirements.

Elmer Pina began his presentation by providing some of his background at the City. He has been there 15 years, since 2005. He started as a grant writer for the East Providence Prevention Coalition (EPPC) and still supports EPPC a little bit as a liaison. The EPPC is responsible for sending decoy youth into different establishments to buy alcohol. Fines to establishments that sell to the youth are put back into these efforts.

When Mr. Pina left EPPC, he took the position at the Affirmative Action (AA) Department from 2008 to 2011. In 2011, the City was taken over by the State Budget Commission, which lasted about two years. When that happened, there was an onslaught of retirements to get out with old contracts. The AA Department budget was cut, and he had to reduce staff by 10%. Once the AA Department was depleted in staff, it was consolidated with Human Resources. Mr. Pina currently has no staff, and 2019 was the first year his department was afforded an operating budget. In 2014, Mr. Pina was also designated as the Equal Employment Opportunity Office for the School Department.

Mr. Pina provided some background about the city itself. The Mayor runs the daily operations of the City. Prior, East Providence had a city manager with a five-member council with a member acting as a mayor ceremonially. There are 18 schools, 13 of which are public. There are 13 department heads, of which are two minority, the City Clerk and Director of Administration. Of the division heads, one is minority and five are female.

Every year Mr. Pina prepares a report card for the Mayor of the City's employees. He had the Powerpoint presentation for the CAB, but due to the technical difficulties of Zoom, it could not be shared and will be sent to CAB members.

Based federal guidelines, minorities and females are under-represented in city positions:

- 423 city employees, including public safety
- 23.4% female
- 10.4% minority

Mr. Pina noted that the City has hiring goals. These groups are under-represented in a lot of city departments because once you get a job in the city, people don't tend to leave. There are few positions that are opened. When there is a retirement or transfer, it's important to act on it. The City just hired a new controller, who is a minority.

Mr. Santos added that since the Mayor came on, this is the first time Mr. Pina is part of the hiring process, from the application process to the interviews, to make sure it is an equitable one. He is also receiving funding for events during Black History Month, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and the Annual Neighborhood Day at the Onna Moniz Park to promote neighborhood safety and togetherness.

Mr. Pina concluded that the office has been through a lot and still struggles with resources. The office is about what's fair and equitable. We have to ensure there is someone in this position and we are doing the things we need to.

II. New Business

Follow-up question and answer discussion with presenters

Questions/comments for Mr. Santos' presentation

- Member: there data or a sense of how representative the city offices are representative of the community?
- Mr. Santos: Elmer will have those figures for you. We go through great strides to attract minorities and females. Unfortunately, we don't see the numbers we like in applicants. A lot of those applying to the Police and Fire Departments do not make it. In October, 20 out of 24 failed the agility test. We tell them in advance so they can prepare, but we do lose a lot of candidates between the agility and written tests.
- Member: Is that overall or specific to race/ethnicity?
- Mr. Santos: Overall, I would love to hear suggestions of where we can post our positions to attract minority or female candidates. We have three labor positions in the Department of Public Works that are entry level. We had 49 applicants, which is great.
- Mr. Pina: About four or five years ago, we were using a certain written test and we found we were losing candidates at a high rate, particularly minority candidates. Through an adverse impact analysis and we found the test to be inadequate for our needs and subsequently found another validated testing company with an entry level test that more candidates are passing. We were able to modify our process.
- Member: Are there efforts to change the brand or perception of officers to attract more minorities?
- Mr. Santos: I hope to change the image of the Human Resources Department. It had gone through various directors and former city managers. I knew I was inheriting a lack of trust and transparency. I have been working very hard to change that. I am very accessible. I still go to various departments to make sure they don't have to come to us. I think we have very good relations with our unions. I think the Mayor and Director of Administration have a good open-door policy. The changes to the hiring and promotion processes have made them more transparent. Also, the testament of no legal issues in court.

- Mr. Pina: Some of the efforts we have tried in the past to change the narrative include 1: Advertising positions in minority organizations like the NAACP and others in RI and 2: Making sure that our hiring panel is diverse by having people we are trying to attract as observers but also scoring. Moving forward we are getting more people of color on the hiring panel.
- Member: I believe that we can lead a horse to water but can't make it drink. You can get people to apply for jobs, but if that's not what they want to do, they won't follow through. They complain about the Police Department and City Hall, but they don't apply. It's beyond our control, you can only do so much.
- Mr. Santos: Some think they will never get a job at city hall. I am very surprised at the lack of city residents that apply. The City received a \$36,000 grant to hire youth this past summer. It was difficult with COVID-19 to find youth to apply, but I went to a football practices near the senior center. I asked the Coach if I could address a group of 60 youth and he said yes. I shared information about the employment opportunity (part time, \$12-15 an hour, 40 hours a week). Of those 60, not one applied. Ultimately, we hired 16 people but many were not city residents.
- Mr. Pina: The only context I would add, is it is difficult to put it out there hoping it will undo what has been put in place. Even through it's a great start, it's going to be many years. You have the historic hill to undo.
That is why we need to create and have these policies and procedures in place so when I'm gone, they are there to create equity. We finally have an administration that believes in equity and inclusion and we need to lay the groundwork.
- Mr. Santos: Please let me know any ideas you have; vsantos@eastprovidenceri.gov or 209-9594. I am committed to make this work.
- Chairwoman: In addition to policy and procedures that will build diversity and equity in the hiring practices, I would like to hear more down the line in terms of inclusion and retention. It's easy to be creative about recruitment. I'm interested in hearing about retaining that diversity. Is the workplace environment inclusive? Is the climate what it needs to be to retain the diversity? Also, in terms of the landscape of city departments, can you talk about personnel and resources allocated to each department?
- Mr. Santos: Regarding the environment, before COVID19, I undertook initiatives to recognize employees. On the first floor outside of the Chambers we have a "Wall of Fame" for city employees. I did due diligences on old city records and we have over 400 names on that plaque of individuals that contribute 20+ years. We will induct another 15 in January with another 20+ years of service. We've organized potluck lunches. I was cooking at the different fire stations and doing cooking demonstrations at the library. We also recognize birthdays and employment anniversaries with the City. As far as personnel, I have not seen any type of staff cutting in department budgets, or vacancies that are not replaced. We have made modifications but no drastic cuts in the budgeting process. With COVID-19, we went through a workshare program through Labor Day. It saved the City \$400,000 thanks to the assistance of city employees who volunteered to

do workshare rather than layoffs. I think we are well represented with females in various departments, to include in a Public Works supervisory role. However, there is room for improvement.

- Chairwoman: Do you offer some type of workload analysis that looks at the needs of each department and the scope of work for each? Is each department vying for staffing needs?
- Mr. Santos: All staffing needs are done through each department's budget process.
- Member: For the youth job program you mentioned, what is the age that they can begin?
- Mr. Santos: The age was 16 and we had some that were 19 from Providence. They worked across all city departments. During the elections, we got a grant to hire help with canvassing. We called one of the youth that worked with us because of their work ethic.
- Member: Are those posted at the high school?
- Mr. Santos: Unfortunately, it was during the summer and school was out.
- Chairwoman: There may be an opportunity to be more comprehensive in getting internships and employment opportunities integrated into the process at the high school.
- Mr. Santos: We'd love to have this grant opportunity again and hopefully we can learn about it earlier. We have a good relationship with the School Department Human Resources.
- Member: Guidance counselors should also have access. Going forward, it would be good to have a collaboration with CAB and yourself to advertise for any jobs. We could also send that message out to reach others in the community.
- Mr. Santos: Yes. I will send future announcements to Elmer.

Comments/questions for Mr. Pina's presentation

- Mr. Pina: In the interest of time, the CAB can follow up with me later.
- Member: Elmer's been at this job very long time and commend him for all the work he's done. Even though I am commending him, I think it's a sad fact that he's just received a budget. He wasn't able to do the things he'd like to do in the Affirmative Action Department. I'm glad he has a budget finally and hopefully we can make some changes now.
- Chairwoman: I will echo, particularly with the historical issues and now attempting to close those gaps. You also have a new role as Municipal Integrity officer. The concern on my end is personnel support for your office. I am concerned that the scope of work for your office is still not understood.
- Mr. Pina: I do not have staff. I will ask a member of Human Resources to run a report for me. As Municipal Integrity Officer I am always fielding questions with other city departments, putting out fires, and now being part of CAB and what we are assigned to

do. I also wanted to report that we ensure there are minority subcontractors. The state law is 10% of contracts should give preference to them.

- Chairwoman: Thank you. The membership should forward questions to you directly and we can revisit this conversation. Thank you for preparing the report. If you email the slides, we can have some time to deliberate to make suggestions to inform where appropriate.

Member feedback needed regarding break out groups

The Chairwoman noted this will be done by emails to individual CAB members. She wants the thoughts of CAB members about the focus areas to confirm a format for breakout groups going forward at each meeting. She wants to get membership actively involved in the work.

III. Old Business

Continued discussion regarding recent incidents and impact on our community and next steps

At the last meeting there was a discussion about a post from high ranking East Providence police officer. The Chairwoman noted that the incident is still being monitored. It raised a lot of concerns around public safety and excessive force. She opened the discussion back up to allow those who were not at the last meeting to express their ideas or concerns, because this does have an impact on the community. Member comments included the following:

- I did read the post, and it was disheartening, and I shared this with Chief Nebus. I have not received an email back from him. It's been month later. I know he is busy. I don't know what came of the post. The comments and the whole thread were disheartening. With the way the world is now, it's ok to put something like this on your personal Facebook page, but on a citywide page where everyone can see, a little disheartening.
- I will reiterate what was said. Here we have a chance to come together as one to work on these issues. When I saw that post on a public page by a professional, it frightened me. Someone in charge, high ranking, making comments like that. It's one thing on your page, and I have a problem with that, too, but when it's on a public page it's a different story. I have to hold myself as a CAB member to a certain standard. I expect others to do the same.
- I didn't see the post. This post might have been derogatory and connected with Blue Lives Matter. These actions are divisive and difficult to create unity around. If the Police Department is trying to create unity, whether individuals or not, the institution as a whole is being represented by this. It needs to recognize what does and doesn't create unity. It's not clear if they do. I'm not sure if there's a history/pattern or lack of sensitivity/awareness.

- Is it possible to work with the law enforcement members of CAB to develop mutually agreed upon measures of engagement? I think that's the huge part of the challenge, engagement with law enforcement. Law enforcement are trained to work with civilians, but civilians are not trained to work with law enforcement.
- Is this an issue of dialogue or policy and practice?
- Policy and practice, but guidance.
- That needs to be put on paper to spell it out with the agreement with the Police Department, and we can put that together.
- Chairwoman: Those measures can be policy. Dialogue can also be useful. These types of comments risk being representative of the entire institution of the Police Department and not an adequate one at that. As we start to think about this recommendation, we need to be intentional and thoughtful. Some information that would help create an opportunity for dialogue with the department can be a change of perception to recognize what is divisive. Maybe CAB can be an agent to make a recommendation to host a dialogue with the Police Department and our members. If we are going to be making recommendations to the Mayor, we should document this. This membership can have great input into what that recommendation looks like. At the next meeting, this can be a breakout activity and members can back to the larger group with a formal recommendation.

IV. Adjournment

Elizabeth Fox made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Onna Moniz-John. All were in favor, none opposed, and no abstentions.

Meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm