



City of Seattle

Seattle LGBTQ Commission



Special Meeting Minutes

July 23, 2020 | 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Commissioners Present: Kari Lerum, Joseph Suttner, Manuel Venegas, Chris Brown, Annabelle Backman, John Rodriguez, Latosha Correll, Byram Simpson, Nate Higby

Commissioners Absent: Deepa Sivarajan, Victor Loo, Jessi Murray, Deaunte Damper, Michael Garrett

SOCR Staff: Janet Stafford

Meeting Minutes recorded by: Chris Brown

Guests: Dominique Stephens (Mayor's Office) , Brett Pepowski (Pending commissioner) , Caedmon Cahill (SOCR)

Public Open Comment

1. No comments

Agenda: Address complaints surrounding the Mayor's performance

Latosha - Didn't see any research, what are the other OCR Commissions doing? Can anyone speak to that?

Janet - There isn't specific conversation with the other commissions.

Caedmon – There are no formal conversation on this.

There are notes available from the call on Monday and Wednesday of this week. There are working meetings this week and office hours set up to break down some of these requests. Where are folks at with doing the legwork ahead of today? I recognize this is in addition to our regular meeting. The Seattle Police Officer's Guild (SPOG) Contract was our last special meeting.

There were a variety of feelings as to whether Mayor Durkan should resign. What are your roles as commissioners? What are the questions as to our scope of work and questions to the efficacy of that as a strategy? We are talking about where demand is coming from. Movement is instigated about racial

justice and about systemic issues. Is it effective to call on an individual to resign in response to a systemic problem? What is the actual real level of control Mayors office has over Seattle Police Department (SPD) and where do the majority of the decisions lie? What does it mean and what should be done when the mayor really sets the tone as to the conversation and how we are talking about police brutality and biased policing? The Mayor stated, SPD represents the national standard for reform, while ignoring the ways in which those reforms have failed, or not BEEN fully enacted yet. Those were some of the main points that came up.

Latosha - From what little time I had on the call on Monday that seems pretty accurate. They talked about clarifying regulations, the meetings early this week, and informal conversations in office hours. These are not meant to be open public meetings, just ways to talk through some of the issues before the main meeting.

Annabelle – They spent a fair amount of time discussing how do we properly express calls to action that we can support without having to get into the nitty gritty, and properly holding the mayor and others accountable and not just wagging fingers and not holding them accountable.

They shared a letter from the national women's political caucus that calls the mayor to the carpet. It does not call for resignation, but clearly and expressly states they are against what has been going on what's been going on so far. It discusses actions for the mayor to take. A letter could be a good action to follow in terms of being strongly opposed to what's happening in city currently, and expressing a lack of faith in the mayor and giving her some paths to try and restore that, while not explicitly calling for her resignation, which we discussed may or may not be productive.

Kari – I would like to reiterate a couple other things that are important against calling for her resignation: King County Equity NOW is a black led community based leadership and they have not called for her resignation. It is important to listen to and elevate calls for black led leadership, that does not include resignation. That was a big point for me.

It is already difficult for city affairs to do business as usual. The concerns around the mayor resigning are that it would make it hard to get meetings together, council meetings / committee meetings would need to be moved around, shifting of leadership within city council could have bad effects on our city as well. Further, there will be another election coming up soon. There are nightly Womexn led marches asking for Mayor Durkan's resignation. I do think that adds an interesting element for me. That is a significant reason for police calls and continued escalated and antagonization from SPD. That is an element for me. I've been going back and forth on this all week...which way I'll vote.

Her being first lesbian mayor is completely irrelevant to this discussion. Her being a member of the LGBTQ community does not in any way alter the impact of her decisions and the effect they have had in the city. It does not alter SPD's behavior on the streets and SPD's actions on the protesters. It has zero impact on that. One thing I found most offensive when listening to Mayor Durkan's press conferences at times is when she would reference her identity as a lesbian woman in a way where she was pink washing the issue and attempting to shield herself or her actions behind support for the LGBTQ community at large.

I think there's similar issue with putting the chief in control and the level of control for SPD Chief Carmen Best and Mayor Durkan. There is a misinformation campaign on what has occurred during the protests. They released a timeline regarding the first weekend of protests that was blatantly inaccurate based on

trove of footage of what occurred. They promoted a timeline that was false, and shows escalations on the part of protesters. It did not occur after SPD instigated in the first place. They trapped protesters in. Mayor Durkan had control over the citywide curfew and it was released with 15 minutes notice; not even that for some people. There is no or limited control in these circumstances.

Regarding the Chief of Police. Personally, I believe both Mayor Durkan and Chief Best need to be replaced. I do not think it would be productive to call for Best's resignation while Mayor Durkan is still in office. I do not trust her to appoint someone better because she supports the behavior of SPD. There is no indication that she is against the action she has taken. Calling for both of their resignations provides the mayor the opportunity to deflect blame to Chief Best, fire Chief Best and then do what people are calling on her to do. There is a nuanced discussion on this and I am thinking about this as well. It helps to think about why we should only call for one and not two resignations. I am thinking about the separation of powers. Critiques are helpful for the Mayor's office to separate themselves and herself from SPD so it's not a unified authoritarian front, to help govern the people of Seattle.

There are issues of implicit bias. The actions of a person must be judged on their actions alone. Regarding the previous mayor Ed Murray, some Democratic groups did not call for Ed Murray's resignation, which gives me pause. As a scholar of media and bias around gender and sexuality, it is real. This does give me pause...is there a difference of animosity toward this particular mayor in other cases and across the nation? I am concerned about the willingness to scapegoat women politicians. There is the issue of what she did or did not do that had harm to protesters and City of Seattle residents.

So now I am coming back to-- what is our goal? A couple people have mentioned the letter put out by the women's coalition. What are the immediate actions, and demands of King COunty Equity Now? We must do what has to be done or move aside so that somebody else can.

John - In most parts I agree with Kari, I personally don't support the idea of demanding the mayor as well as the chief of police to resign. I've been following other cities and states, and we are going through the same crisis and same situations. Even when I have mixed feelings, I do think also most of the demands are valid. It is not an easy task, not an easy job.

Most of the time I see politics as objectively as possible and can't take it personally. Do you remember, before Chief Carmen Best was appointed, the implicit bias with her nomination and appointment? She was celebrated as the first black female to be nominated and appointed as chief of police in Seattle. I try to be politically objective: being political, and objective at the same time. I support the idea of resignation demands.

Manuel - Chris made a comment about how we need to give the mayor opportunity to respond to feedback coming with us, within a week of some sort of guidance that we gave. It has not been the case that the mayor's office has actually reflected on guidance that doesn't already align with their position.

A year ago we wrote a letter about the rising number of homeless camp sweeps. I don't have faith that the office will take guidance on this, as opposed to here's how to respond to a non-binary person respectfully. Without going big on our demands, we are going to be ignored. The only way to potentially have impact, is to join the chorus. The mayor's office only engaged for pride flag raising or to do damage control when we've objected to head tax or homeless sweeps. I don't really have faith the mayor's office is going to respond in any meaningful way. There's been a huge outcry of people asking the same. On City Council, Lorena, Theresa, of the 3 sitting council, need to ask yourself if you're the

right person to lead. What does leadership mean, how can you respond to a community that is clearly responding to real issues? There have been specific calls from the mayor that have impacted protesters. The protestors were stuck downtown with less than 15 minutes notice to clear downtown. Some of them were assisting by giving someone medical aide, and the bus lines were shut down. She has actively harmed me. I know it is hard to be Seattle's mayor. There have not been mayors in recent time that lasted more than one term. At this moment there is not any real attempt being made to listen and to find any common ground, except when she can tweet at Trump. Maybe us calling for her resignation will result in resignation.

Reflecting more, I think that's going to look like condoning actions that have been taken. Her actions actively harm people trying to exercise their right to protest. Maybe it is not Mayor Durkan's fault, if she has no control over police. She couldn't get police to not wear mourning bands or to actually command the police at that point. Some things are out of mayors jurisdiction. At a moment we don't have stability. I don't think changing it will add to instability at this point.

Referring in response to our call amongst many after first weekend of protests, Mayor Durkan did lift curfew ultimately. She did engage with some, selective, black leadership in Seattle in response to do so. I reiterate some of the things Jessi was talking about. We have called on mayor to engage on us and other groups regarding the SPD contract and consent decree. Mayor Durkan did not respond to our requests. She only responds when it becomes politically expedient. I sat in on CPC meeting Mayor Durkan attended during the first week. It misrepresented how her office and city process to lift the consent decree --parsed words requested the process, which is not the same as asking for consent decree to be lifted.

Brett—I am on the pro resignation side. Commenting on whether we are scapegoating a queer white woman --are we being too harsh? Choosing not to punish or remove or hold Mayor Durkan accountable, is not going to change that the previous mayor was not held accountable enough. I don't care that she's queer—it doesn't make it right what she is doing. Our job is to represent community, and the community seems to be calling for her resignation.

We have to start somewhere when dismantling white supremacy. We have to do something in response to what Mayor Durkan is doing. The concerns for if Mayor Durkan is removed -- will she be replaced by someone worse who is more complicit in what police are doing? Not sure what could happen there. When the mayor is removed what would happen? Council President would become interim mayor unless they do not want to keep the job as mayor. Lorena has been critical of Jenny Durkan. A lot of people are calling for Mayor Durkan to make changes and reflect. She has had more than enough time to reflect, she's had time.

Nate—I am still deciding how I'm going to vote on this. But, I agree with a lot of points. With a manager, you need to provide feedback or fire them, you need to give them a chance to respond to that feedback. People of Seattle have been giving chances to respond. I am echoing a lot of sentiment around that. Not many are calling out for her resignation, and Jenny still hasn't fulfilled the rest of those demands. She must fulfill the demands or replace her with someone that will fulfill those demands. End goal is so that these demands are fulfilled. Right now, to do that it would be to remove Jenny or ask her to resign.

Our role is that we aren't voting to remove Jenny rather applying pressure to get Mayor Durkan to take some sort of option. We don't have the authority by vote as commission to remove her from office. Do

we join calls for Mayor Durkan to resign as one of many strategies to get some kind of action? This is a serious moment of reckoning for policing as an institution. There is a broader fight for racial justice in this city and country and we are treating it with significant amount of gravity. Do we want her to listen to demands, or I personally would prefer to amplify the demands that have been listed by the letter National Women's Political Caucus of Washington. Or if we're done, just say we are done.

Commissioner question- Many people have said she has done nothing. We don't have evidence of what she has or hasn't done. Is there evidence of showing she would like to move forward? We are being invited to talk with her about SPD budget. There is space for us to consider the option to tell her you need to do XYZ and if you're not capable, then we would be forced to ask for your resignation.

Outline Document:

Draft and issue a letter that:

- States that we oppose the recent behavior of SPD and Mayor Durkan's and Chief Best's handling of the ongoing protests.
- Details the recent episodes of police violence in Seattle, and places that in the context of SPD's history of excessive use of force and resistance to reform.
- Details the mayor's role in supporting SPD, including echoing false narratives and seeking to block Council legislation that bans SPD from using weapons such as tear gas.
- Details the current budget crisis caused by COVID-19, and the impact across-the-board cuts would have on social equity.
- Calls for the following actions:
 - Comply with community demands to bring an immediate and permanent end to SPD's violent attacks on protestors and communities.
 - Support the demands of community organizations such as King County Equity Now and Decriminalize Seattle to invest in communities and holistic approaches to public safety.
 - Reflect on whether she is capable of fulfilling these demands and beginning the work of rebuilding trust with all residents of the city and resign if she is unable or unwilling to do so.

Is there a timeline added to this letter- If you can do these things by these times on what we want to see her do?

Are we drafting the letter now? Possible letter we could write and use that as a centerpiece for the next stage in the conversation on what we would like to commit to as a commission. I personally joined the LGBTQ Commission, and haven't seen meaningful engagement with office of the mayor which surprised me. I shared ideas of how to improve, and what to do to improve networking with the office of the mayor, as well as for city council. We do represent the LGBTQ Community in Seattle so I agree we have to highlight how we the community feels.

One option on the strong side is to join the chorus to ask for resignation. Some medium compromise would be for calling for a list of specific things and giving her conditional call for resignation if she doesn't behave better. I don't have faith there will be meaningful action on anything we bring forward. I reiterate, would we be able to have a motion for a letter based on sentiment of the outline Annabelle put into the chat which is-- is she either willing to do these things or to resign?

We have posted almost every letter we have written on our Twitter. I don't remember mayor responding to any letter so public acknowledgement is not maybe realistic. If we vote on a letter, could we also vote to write the social language? Because sometimes there is a huge letter, and I end up picking 2 sentences that I think are important. Those are the two sentences that people read. We should think about the way we use our Social media tools and not just the letter. I'd like to vote that the group will write the letter and the social language at the same time.

I'd like to get a sense when we are voting on these things to indicate the critical talking point elevator pitch of the letter and to ensure the commission as a whole is aligned on what we are trying to say, not voting just on the finalized letter. Let us capture ideas without having to write the whole thing while listening.

Regarding a vote to approve the writing and issuing of the letter-- this is what it would contain. Some members of commission need to draft the letter and release by a certain date. If we want to wait for a vote on the final letter, there could have to be another special meeting which would have to be delayed until August. Therefore it is best if we can and if folks are willing to do this, to vote on whether or not we will be drafting a letter containing these elements.

- COVID 19 emphasis around the funding of choices city is making. A notion that we are facing a budget crunch. We talked about across the board budget cuts that disproportionately affect communities.
- Strong motivation to look at how SPD received disproportionate amount of city budget, looking at cutting more from that space, to maintain some other programs.

John – I'd like to add on the social impact as well of demanding police defunding. What does public safety mean -- lets fund that. What is the purpose of police? What do we need to have police do, lets fund that. Reallocate funds to these amongst other ideas, or institutions of public safety. This was brought up earlier in the week, the example of public safety funded where it actually only funded 4 days a week, only during daytime hours. That captures some of what is asked here or we can be more explicit on how we define public safety. I personally recommend keeping that in, if we vote to write this letter. It can be relatively short. We don't really have evidence that the mayor has read our former letters. Should we call for a motion?

Commissioner - Not yet.

Commissioner I appreciated reading the letter, it helped. It is hard not seeing everyone. The only thing I am not necessarily in agreement with is the, need to bring pressure, what does that pressure look like? It is an act of discernment—the mind meeting with the heart. It doesn't fit, as much as I appreciate what folks said. More along the lines of Kari's earlier said, and Jessi said. It doesn't sit right with me to say you do this, or resign. The letter Jessi shared, from earlier, I like the way that was presented. But the only thing that didn't sit with me was saying you do this or resign. There are some other groups that I align with that have not called with her removal. They are more in the lines of we are here for the people. The people are not looking at the issues we are looking at. The people are not having to sit down with the city, city offices, the mayor's office and provide solutions. They are in pain. We are in pain. She has

caused a lot of pain. And things are not all her fault. So I'm not there yet, but I like the letter otherwise. Nobody's vote is going to change how we work together. There is not a clear right thing to do.

Annabelle – I move to draft and issue a letter that does all the stuff that the document says. Minus the inclusion of decriminalize Seattle. **(motion)**

To summarize:

DRAFT:

Draft and issue a letter that:

States that we oppose the recent behavior of SPD and Mayor Durkan's and Chief Best's handling of the ongoing protests.

Details the recent episodes of police violence in Seattle, and places that in the context of SPD's history of excessive use of force and resistance to reform.

Details the mayor's role in supporting SPD, including echoing false narratives and seeking to block Council legislation that bans SPD from using weapons such as tear gas.

Details the current budget crisis caused by COVID-19, and the impact across-the-board cuts would have on social equity, and how that exacerbates the impact of the choices we make regarding budget priorities.

Calls for the following actions:

Comply with community demands to bring an immediate and permanent end to SPD's violent attacks on protestors and communities.

Support the demands of community organizations such as King County Equity Now to invest in communities and holistic approaches to public safety.

Publicly commit yourself to the lengthy process of rebuilding trust with the community and give us specific items of how this will be done

Reflect on whether she is capable of fulfilling these demands and beginning the work of rebuilding trust with all residents of the city, and resign if she is unable or unwilling to do so.

Nate – **Motion seconded**

Annabelle- Amend to strike last action in the letter of "Reflect on whether she is capable of fulfilling these demands and beginning the work of rebuilding trust with all residents of the city, and resign if she is unable or unwilling to do so." **(amendment)**

Latosha – **Motion seconded**

In the final letter we would want to include that we seriously discussed calling for her resignation. We invite the mayor to engage with us in our role as an advisory body and to meaningfully listen to voices of BIPOC and Black commissioners and we should not include resignation in the motion.

Kari - Yes

Joseph – abstention

Manuel- yes

Chris - yes

Annabelle - yes

John - yes

Jessi - yes

Latosha - yes
Byram - yes
Nate - yes

Amended motion

Kari - Yes
Joseph - No
Manuel- Yes
Chris - Yes
Annabelle - Yes
John - yes
Jessi - yes
Latosha - yes
Byram - yes
Nate - yes

Commissioner - Who can take lead on drafting letter, participating in process, set timeframe of when to have draft out for full commission?

Annabelle, Kari, Byram, Latosha.

Adjourned 8:58PM