

Community Equity Council Meeting

June 28, 2022

Facilitator: Ben

Councilmembers In Person: Anni, Ben, Del, Majeid, Mahsa, Norma, William

Councilmembers Online: Raquel, Lara, Tiffany

Staff: Director Rich Hillis, Commission President Rachael Tanner, Miriam Chion, Claudia Flores, Carla de Mesa, Lauren Hiller, Ilaria Salvadori (Graphic Recorder)

1. Opening

Ben, as the facilitator, opened the meeting. Ben asked staff to read a statement acknowledging that the Equity Council's work is done on unceded Ramaytush Ohlone lands. Ben also gave acknowledgement of Pride Month and the recent death of 53 migrants in a truck near the US-Mexico border. Another councilmember reminded the group of the white supremacy-motivated murder of 10 Black residents in Buffalo.

The Equity Council members welcomed Anni Chung as the newest councilmember. Anni is the President and CEO of Self-Help for the Elderly (SHE), a community-based organization for mostly immigrant and monolingual Asian seniors. Anni Chung has served as CEO since 1981. She was appointed to California Commission on Aging by Governor Newsom for a 3-year term from Oct 2020 to Oct 2023. She is a Board member of the Asian & Pacific Islander Council and the Wildflowers institute and also the Producer of a Chinese Television show called "Chinese Journal" for KTSF-TV 26.

2. Equity Council – Planning Commission Coordination

Director Rich Hillis opened the conversation about collaboration between the Equity Council and Planning Commission with a brief overview of the roles and goals of each body. Commissioner Rachael Tanner then introduced herself, reiterating her desire to foster communication and knowledge sharing between the two bodies. She framed the conversation with the question, "**what is the long-term relationship between the Equity Council and Planning Commission?**"

The Equity Council's discussion featured several major themes:

Start by building trust between the Equity Council and the Planning Commission – Councilmembers generally agreed the Planning Commission had a long way to go to earn the trust of vulnerable communities in San Francisco. Councilmembers shared that they either had not encountered the Commissioners or the hearing in their work before or had had negative experiences at hearings or as a result of the Planning Commission's decisions. One councilmember expressed that the community held the belief that the Commissioners' opinions were decided before they reached the hearing and that no amount of public comment or advocacy could change their minds. This contributed to the belief that the Commissioners' opinions were influenced solely by backroom discussions and political considerations. Another councilmember expressed frustration that decisions that deeply impacted his neighborhood were made by commissioners that may not understand his community.

Lack of clarity about public access to the Planning Commission – Councilmembers asked Commissioner Tanner how community groups and members of the public could access and advocate to the Commissioners. Councilmembers agreed they did not feel that the Planning Commission was receptive to communication outside of a hearing. Despite how important planning decisions were to their communities, one councilmember pointed out, the planning process was obscure and difficult for the average person to understand. Commissioner Tanner responded that each Commissioner has their own level of capacity and interest in listening to members of the public or community organizations outside of Planning Commission hearings. Moreover, Commissioner Tanner emphasized that Commissioners could exercise limited personal discretion at hearings and were bound by code and legislation in making their decisions.

Creating long lasting institutional changes, beyond personal relationships – Councilmembers again and again reiterated that they wanted communication and collaboration based on the values of equity and inclusion to be imbued into the Planning Commission’s processes. One councilmember summarized it as such - “what happens when you and me aren’t at the table anymore?” On this, a councilmember expressed that they wanted not only community leaders at the table, but wanted Commissioners to engage entire communities.

Solidifying Racial and Social Equity in the Planning Commission – Commissioner Tanner explained that consideration of racial and social equity is not an explicit requirement in the Planning Commissions bylaws and expressed interest in exploring possibilities to formalize equity commitments.

Commissioner Tanner agreed that the Planning Commission and Planning staff had much work to do to build trust with community. She and several councilmembers asked staff to explore paths to systematize racial and social equity considerations in the Planning Commission’s processes and bylaws and collaboration between the Equity Council and the Planning Commission. This collaboration could include regular Equity Council reports to the Planning Commission, a potential annual workshop, or inviting other Commissioners to attend future Equity Council meetings. Commissioner Tanner also expressed a desire to attend future Equity Council meetings.

3. Draft Communications & Engagement Strategy

Planning staff presented a draft communications and engagement strategy to Equity Council members. The goal of the presentation and discussion was to assess Planning’s strengths and failings in community engagement and communications and to solicit advice from the Equity Council on potential strategies.

The draft communications and engagement strategy came out of a directive from the Racial and Social Equity Resolution adopted by the Planning Commission in 2020. It directs the Planning Department to engage communities in all aspects of their work, serve diverse communities in San Francisco, and acknowledge the impact SF Planning has on the health and wellbeing of communities. The strategy is guided by six goals, to 1) create engagement and communications guidelines and resources for staff, 2) improve communications with communities, 3) broaden public participation, 4) build trust and improve relationships with community, 5) increase community capacity, and 6) increase staff capacity.

At the end of the presentation, councilmembers were asked to (1) rate SF Planning’s engagement performance in the last year (1 to 10), (2) imagine what a perfect score of “10” would look like, and (3) consider what actions SF Planning would have to take in order to reach a “10” score on engagement.

SF Planning's community engagement and communication greatly improved, but more work needed.

Many councilmembers agreed that communication with and meaningful access to the Community Equity Division of the Planning Department has been satisfactory and deserving a score of 8. These same councilmembers, however, did not report the same degree of engagement and access to other sections of the Department, which would deserve a score of 2. They have difficulties accessing information about projects and permits. Councilmembers identified coordination between divisions and communication on upcoming projects as a major area of improvement. Additionally, one councilmember highlighted a persistent disconnect between Black communities in the Bayview and Planning.

Community active role in plans and projects. Ideally, councilmembers want Planning to play an active role in advocating for community concerns to project sponsors, digesting technical information, and communicating potential areas of concern to communities. In line with earlier discussions about systemic changes, councilmembers hoped Planning and the City could build enough trust with community to advocate for communities' concerns.

Planning needs to absorb some of the community's capacity to oversee and regulate development for their concerns. Communities are often, explicitly or implicitly, asked to play an oversight role on the ground in order to enforce their own concerns and interests. This stretches community capacity thin. Councilmembers would like to see Planning use their in-house technical expertise to digest incoming proposals, act as a first line of advocacy or regulation, and engage community leaders and organizations as needed on issues they've expressed concern. This would help reduce the burden on community organizations. This collaboration, however, requires Planning to be able to communicate clearly and simply with community, which they currently do not do.

4. Updates

Planner Liaisons to Communities

Following up on a request councilmembers made to Planning, staff shared a draft table that identified a point planner for many key communities and Cultural Districts in the city. Councilmembers asked Planning to continue to identify point people for communities not listed currently on the table.

Community Engagement Resources

Based on input collected during one-on-one conversations with councilmembers, Claudia presented a proposal for the use of \$750,000 Planning budgeted for community engagement for the 2022-23 fiscal year. The proposal assigns \$100,000 to community reports, \$400,000 to coordination and strategy co-creation, and \$250,000 to community dialogues and learning.

Community Access to Planning Jobs

The Hiring Subcommittee participated in the hiring of a Community Engagement Manager and a Community Development Specialist. Staff invited councilmembers to also participate in the upcoming hiring of three staff for the Tenderloin strategies.

Sharing Equity Council Strategies

Staff announced that we will continue coordinating with Cultural Districts and other community groups to present the Equity Council's work and strategies in the coming months, aiming to conduct presentations throughout the summer and into the fall.

5. Closing

Ben closed the meeting and reminded councilmembers that the next Equity Council meeting will take place on July 26, 2022 at 4-6pm. The June Equity Council meeting will return to the topic of neighborhood economic vitality.