



Mayor & Council Meeting Date: March 7, 2022
Agenda Item Type: Presentation
Department: Housing and Community Development
Responsible Staff: Frederika Granger

Subject

The Rockville Human Rights Commission and the Human Services Advisory Commission
Presentation on Survey Findings from a Community-Wide Survey

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Mayor and Council receive the Rockville Human Rights Commission and the Human Services Advisory Commission presentation on the findings of the Survey of the Wellbeing and Needs of the Rockville Community Results. Staff ask that the Mayor and Council consider the following when hearing this presentation:

- Is there a need for further study of the wellbeing and needs of the Rockville Community, including a Human Services Needs Assessment?
- How did the City's residents fair, mentally and physically, in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and of national social unrest? Did the City provide and provide for necessary services—i.e, healthcare, housing services, food distribution ?
- Are there areas that the newly formed Community Policing Advisory Board could glean from the survey results?
- Is the city's current promotion and outreach approach sufficient in reaching residents and disseminating information to its residents?

Discussion

Executive Summary

This item is a continuation of an on-going Mayor and Council discussion about social justice, racism, and bias. The Mayor and Council have discussed this topic at previous Mayor and Council meetings, including June 22, July 6, July 20, September 21, December 14, 2020, January 25, 2021, and March 1, 2021.

In this agenda item, members of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC) are presenting an overview of findings from this community survey the commissions conducted in 2021.

As directed by the Mayor and Council and as expressed by the HRC and HSAC for the desire of a community-wide survey, the HRC and HSAC jointly developed a survey instrument. The survey

sought to gather data and solicit feedback concerning matters of social justice, racism, and bias and of wellness in the Rockville community during the COVID-19 pandemic. A draft of the survey is provided in Attachment A for reference.

The HRC/HSAC deployed the survey on June 1, 2021, and kept the survey open for a five-month period following deployment. The survey was disseminated to all residents on the online platform, Survey Monkey™, accessible on desktop/laptop, tablets, and mobile phones and hardcopies were available upon request. The survey was translated into common languages spoken in the city, including Spanish, Simple Chinese (translators typically translate into “Simple Chinese” instead of Cantonese or Mandarin), Russian, Vietnamese, and Korean.

The HRC and HSAC received valuable input and insight from the survey response as the city explores ways to address critical topics, including accessibility to services and discrimination. The HRC and HSAC received 347 completed surveys, representing less than one percent response rate based on 52,954 (Source: U.S. Census, 2022) of the city’s population 18 and older.

The survey was voluntary and anonymous. Aggregate results are presented here for discussion.

Overview of the Survey

The Human Services Advisory Commission (HSAC) and the Human Rights Commission (HRC) pursued conducting this survey to find out how the Rockville residents were faring during the COVID-19 pandemic and the social and political unrest stemming from injustices and inequities experienced within communities of color, including the murder of George Floyd in the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department. With the direction of the Mayor and Council and logistical support from the City’s Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), the HSAC and HRC formed a Joint Committee and created and administered the attached survey. The survey explores an array of racial equity and social justice issues, including:

- The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Rockville community.
- The community’s perception about discrimination and inclusion in the city in the wake of George Floyd’s murder and the resulting demand for justice.
- Accessibility of services—cost, location, language, and culture barriers.
- The ability to reach the entirety of the Rockville population for their input, especially those communities that are hard to reach.

The preliminary data obtained in this survey will also help inform HCD preparation for a potential Human Services Needs Assessment. Moreover, HCD staff and the commissions, HRC and HSAC hope to glean the success of promotional efforts to solicit and obtain survey responses from a broad swath of community members, geographically and demographically.

The survey questions were developed and informed based on various sources, including the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), best practices nationally, and input from Mayor and Council and City staff.

The survey consisted of 42 questions, including 40 multiple-choice and two open-ended questions (zip code and neighborhood). There were no right or wrong answers to these questions. The questions centered on residents' wellbeing during the pandemic and social unrest and upon the City's response to both. Specific questions relating to City services, employment opportunities, employee relations, policy, and program prioritization considerations were also included in the survey.

Highlights of Findings

The attached report prepared by the HSAC/HRC Joint Committee provides an in-depth analysis of the survey. Below are select highlights of the survey results.

- **Demographics:** The demographics of the survey are not representative of the City's demographics despite efforts to reach all parts of the City.
- **Policing:** Concern for violent crime and theft is indicated along with a high level of support for improved training and diverse hiring practices for police.
- **Discrimination:** 72% to 87% of the respondents reported not having experienced discrimination in any context as listed in the survey. Of those who reported to have experienced and/or witnessed discrimination centered around service providers, and in neighbor-to-neighbor interactions.
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing:** 92% reported that their mental health and happiness are fair, good, or excellent. However, when the question was presented as stress and anxiety, 96% reported stress and anxiety induced by national politics, fear of contracting COVID-19, employment, and health of a friend.
- **Needs during COVID-19 Pandemic:** 77% of the respondents reported needing no services or having no barriers while 19% reported needing mental health services.
- **Additional findings:** Many (36%) skipped the survey question on the preferred method of receiving information from the City. Of those who responded, 80% reported E-mail as their preferred method.

Concluding Considerations:

Overall, this survey had its limitation, especially in the COVID-19 environment where social distancing was imperative. This study was not scientific, but rather an informal survey. However, it provides important insight and could serve as base-level data for further study in a professionally administered Human Services Needs Assessment. Should the Mayor and Council authorize a more comprehensive and scientific study, below are some other considerations:

- The survey revealed levels of anxiety and stress experience by community members as anticipated given the world-wide health emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic and of social unrest. This is known at the local, county, state and national level.
- The need for mental health services, especially for children and youth, has increased due to the pandemic and to social unrest, is apparent based on city and county data as well as national.
- There is a stigma regarding mental health and illness which may speak to the low number of residents' reporting struggling with their mental health.
- There are barriers to mental health services for low-income residents, including transportation, high copay or deductible, language, shortage of services, and lack of permission from parents.
- There are many ways in which the city promotes information. This survey experience revealed the need for a more effective, uniform and coordinated method of outreach efforts to gain information from residents and of providing information to residents.

Mayor and Council History

The Mayor and Council have discussed this topic at previous Mayor and Council meetings, including June 22, July 6, July 20, September 21, December 14, 2020, and January 25, 2021, and March 1, 2021. This item is a continuation of an on-going Mayor and Council discussion on Social Justice, Racism, and Bias.

Public Notification and Engagement

The survey was disseminated to all residents on the online platform, Survey Monkey™, accessible on desktop/laptop, tablets, and mobile phones. Hardcopies were available upon request. City staff promoted the survey at various city sponsored events, including the inaugural Juneteenth event in 2021. HRC and HSAC commissioners also carried out various outreach efforts, including social media outlets, emailing groups and organizations including the City's boards and commissions. Lastly, the commissions delivered promotion fliers at various locations, including ethnic and religious community facilities and establishments. The survey was translated into common languages spoken in the city, including Spanish, Simple Chinese, Russian, Vietnamese, and Korean.

Boards and Commissions Review

The HSAC and HRC developed and administered the survey with logistical support from staff.

Next Steps

Provide staff and or the commission with direction, if warranted.

Attachments

HRC HSAC Survey English FINAL PDF (PDF)

Survey of the Well Being and Needs of the Rockville Community All Answers - ed PDF (PDF)

HRC HSAC Survey Report Final (PDF)