

To: Human Rights Commission
Christian Eriksen, Chair

From: Wokie Freeman-Gbogba, Assistant City Manager
Beth Toal, Human Resources Manager

CC: Jay Stroebel, City Manager

Date: September 11, 2019

Re: Response to July 12, 2019 HRC Letter to City Manager Jay Stroebel

We received your request to host a meeting with city officials to identify removable barriers to diversity recruitment. In your request, you asked that departments respond to four questions:

- 1) Where, in your department, do you see barriers to increasing the diversity of staff recruitment?
- 2) Are any of those barriers within your power to remove? If so, what steps are you taking to remove them?
- 3) If the barrier is not in your power, how could others (City Council, grant funding, legal changes) help you remove the barrier?
- 4) Thinking about your peers in other municipalities, are there specific things they have done to be successful in increasing the diversity of their workforces? if so, what are they? Could they help your department?

In preparation for the meeting and in response to the above questions, a summary of department actions and barriers are outlined, along with the main areas of focus the city has taken to address these barriers and increase diversity in recruitment.

Summary of Department Actions

Each Department responded to the questions asked above. Upon review of these responses, themes between certain departments become apparent. When comparing our initiatives and processes to other cities, it is clear that all departments are doing similar things as other cities and the barriers that exist for us, exist for others. In fact, several other cities look toward Brooklyn Park to mimic our initiatives due to our strong commitment to racial equity and inclusion.

Recreation & Parks (R&P) and Operations & Maintenance (O&M)

The labor market supply is dominated by white females in R&P and white males in O&M. Brooklyn Park competes with other cities and industries for diverse talent and can lose candidates due to lengthy hiring processes required by state statute (e.g. criminal background checks for staff who work with children). An effort has been made to employ permanent hires from the seasonal employee pools but those pools still lack diversity, particularly in O&M. A challenge is Brooklyn Park's ability to pay a competitive wage for this talent. Also, these two

departments face other restrictions, meaning certain work can only be completed by employees over the age of 18 years old, or who have a driver's license.

For recreation positions, it has become increasingly difficult to recruit young professionals particularly since the U of M Twin Cities (an institution with a higher percentage of students of color than other local schools) recently dropped the Parks and Recreation major from its program. Creation of youth intervention positions through Zanewood has opened a pathway for more available candidates of color to apply.

Additionally, in O&M, the union influences where employees start on the pay range and typically, new hires do not start above Step 1. Plus, roughly 50% of full-time staff start off as seasonal employees, and it has been difficult to recruit youth of color for seasonal work. Efforts have been made to recruit in schools and to advertise our opportunities in unique ways such as stickers on vehicles. This year, there are plans to meet with local school counselors to let them know about opportunities.

Police and Fire (Public Safety)

Barriers in public safety jobs in recent years have a lot to do with people's desire to do this type of work. Negative stereotypes have greatly influenced the pools of candidates interested in this work. In order to address this barrier, and in response to extensive review of the Police Department (PD) hiring process by several sources (Black Peace Officers Association, Multicultural Advisory Committee, and the Resilient Communities Project team, the Police Department (PD) has turned to its Cadet program to permanently hire diverse candidates which allows employees to get a foot in the door while they obtain the necessary qualifications to do the job permanently. Recruitment is starting at the middle school level for the Explorer Program, and in the high schools and local colleges using the Safety Resource Officers and Juvenile Officers. Candidates receive points for being a Brooklyn Park resident, or for attending school in Brooklyn Park. And to lower economic barriers for the Explorer programs, PD is establishing a scholarship program, starting in 2020.

Another significant barrier in any PD hiring process is the long, expansive background process, where many of the requirements are established by state statute. Many potential candidates of color may have had contact with the criminal justice system due to the disproportionalities that exist, and would not qualify for a position at PD.

For the Fire Department (FD), barriers to employment include requirements for prior training, education and experience. Eliminating some of the requirements and training-on-the-job could potentially increase the pool of available candidates of color. The Fire Department (FD) is currently exploring the possibility of establishing a career firefighter academy in its upcoming hiring processes and expect to see a much more diverse applicant pool. Another barrier is the limited availability of open full-time positions, because the Minnesota fire service is largely a volunteer or paid-on-call service. Another potential way to diversify the FD is to create a part-time Emergency Management Service (EMS) program as a pathway to future full-time firefighter employment. Similar programs in St. Paul and Minneapolis have been successful.

Administration, Community Development, and Finance

It is noticed that the market is diversifying its available applicant pool naturally, in most lines of work within these departments. Barriers that exist are around low turnover for advanced

positions, limiting an entry level employee's ability for growth and advancement. On the other hand, turnover is high in these departments for people of color who would be able to obtain advancement/promotion and growth in other cities or who do not feel a part of the Brooklyn Park culture. Initiatives have included expanding internship programs to find ways to advance interns into permanent positions. Additionally, removal of artificial barriers in the hiring process and identifying transferable skills, and reclassifying requirements as preferred qualifications have successfully aided in the recruitment and hiring of diverse candidates for some of the positions.

In some lines of work, like building inspectors, the available pool of candidates tends to have older, white men. There is a shortage of people going into this work, in general.

Areas of Focus

The Human Resources (HR) Division has put in place many initiatives and programs to aid in the recruiting and hiring of diverse candidates. Recognizing a one size fits all approach is not practical, HR has made efforts to work directly with hiring managers to address this initiative. Those efforts can be grouped into four main categories.

Recruitment

As the labor market changes and it becomes more of an environment where the candidates are "hiring" the business rather than the business hiring the candidate, it becomes increasingly important to market our "business" to candidates from their perspective (i.e. what can we do for you?). HR has asked for additional funding in the 2020 budget to put efforts to recruitment activities such as job fairs, advertising, and direct marketing for hard-to-fill positions. As mentioned above, using existing pools of candidates such as seasonal workers and interns to fill permanent positions is key to our success. But to do that, attention is being directed at how to diversify those applicant pools.

Retention

Retention of staff is an area of focus as the labor market changes with more people of color and a different generation of priorities in the workplace. The new generation of employees are looking for growth in their work, and balance between the things they want to do versus the things they need to do. People of color have expressed a sense of being "tokenized" in the workplace and a sense of isolation. Once we are able to recruit and hire a diverse workforce, the city is turning its efforts to creating a culture that meets everyone's needs. To do this, focus has turned to creating employee resource groups, creating growth opportunities for staff, training managers in new management techniques and generally creating a culture that is open and welcoming for all.

Hiring Process

Human Resources has made huge strides in adjusting the hiring process to expand the diversity in applicant pools. Removing artificial barriers in the hiring process (i.e. Is a BA actually needed to do the job?), looking at transferable skills (i.e. working as a cashier demonstrates great customer service skills), and eliminating the concept of "fit" from our collective language (i.e. define competencies and behaviors, not a gut feeling) are three major areas of focus for diversifying the workforce in Brooklyn Park. Conducting hiring planning meetings so managers define the process up front, diversifying interview panels to include different perspectives, and conducting "blind" reviews or "banded" reviews of applicants are other tools put in place to give

opportunities to all. More oversight from HR in general around interview questions, screening questions, and hiring decisions has helped challenge hiring managers' decisions.

Brooklyn Park Philosophy/Culture

Overall, the city has a great opportunity to leverage our culture to attract and retain diverse employees. Initiatives such as *Brooklyn Park 2025*, City Values, Racial Equity, Continuous Improvement, Customer Service Excellence Standards, and more all need to be combined to market our culture and help in diversity efforts. The city needs to define its role in the local municipality labor market. Employees are attracted to Brooklyn Park to gain experience and move on to advance in other cities making turnover a part of our experience. Brooklyn Park also needs to define its role in representing the community it serves against the available labor market (53% vs. 23%). Lastly, Brooklyn Park needs to define what diversity looks like to us and what behaviors and competencies meet our objectives and culture as an organization.

We hope that this memo informs the conversation to take place between the Human Rights Commission (HRC), Human Resources and department directors. Please let Wokie Freeman-Gbogba, HRC Staff Liaison, know how you would like to proceed or if you have any additional questions around the information provided.

Thank you,

Wokie Freeman-Gbogba and Beth Toal