

a. Discuss Youth Commissioner Voting

Assistant City Manager Rebecca Olson briefly highlighted this item as detailed in the Request For Council Action and related attachments dated January 25, 2021.

Mayor Roe indicated at the last discussion there was direction to get past and current Youth Commission and parent feedback regarding this and he wondered if staff had done this yet.

Ms. Olson explained back in September, staff reached out to all of the current Youth Commissioners and asked them to talk with their parents about this concept. The feedback staff received was that either they were okay with the voting or whatever the Council's pleasure was. She noted staff did not directly get parent feedback at that time.

Councilmember Strahan appreciated the thought that went into the attachment of the sample application. She stated it would be nice to have the applicant sign it in addition to the signature of the parent. She thought it was really important and being an educator, as a student is rarely allowed to speak solely for themselves without the permission of their parent. She noted legally, she did not know if the City would want to get into a situation where the Youth Commissioner could be involved in something without the permission of their parents. She thought the concept and how specific to the young person was really applicable.

Councilmember Willmus agreed and thought that was a logical approach. One of the things he would go one step further with is that these Youth Commissioners would be voting members so they should be accessible to the public. He would like to see if the City goes in that direction that they have at least an email contact for them. That would be a City email so if there are any issues, such as a data request, it is not being sent from someone's personal email account. He thought that would provide an additional layer of privacy for the individual.

Councilmember Etten agreed as well with several of the comments. He definitely would want the youth to sign their application. He agreed with Councilmember Willmus that there should be a city email with the expectation that the Youth Commissioner use that email. At the same time, his concern for all of this is if the person is a voting member, then at some level there has to be the expectation that this person is available to the public and is responding to the public. He thought the City needed to be very thoughtful of that. The HRIEC has certainly delved into several subjects that are very difficult and brought up very strong positive and negative responses from the public. The City has to be thoughtful about whether they want that person to be required to respond. He did not think it was legitimate to say that person can vote and not be responsive to the public at the same time. He also arrived at a vote that is noted as is currently the practice of Ms. Olson on the HRIEC without it being counted as a full vote as maybe has been requested by one Youth Commissioner. He was hesitant to do this but if it is allowed, there needs to be more guard rails to protect the youth.

Councilmember Groff thought the draft application created was a very good start. Having served on the HRIEC and also the Planning Commission, he did not recall a Youth Commission on the Planning Commission, but he could be wrong. His experience with the Youth Commissioners is that those individuals are very interested in the subjects and wanting responsibility. He thought that diminishing their role has to be considered here.

He thought with correct parental advise on this, the City could move forward and not be risking a lot of blow back. To his knowledge, nothing on the HRIEC was so controversial that there were protests going on or anything like that. He thought that going ahead with this would not be a big risk.

Councilmember Willmus thought the most contentious issue he had seen with the Commission since his starting on the Council would be the conversations that went on regarding the marriage amendment and there were hard conversations that occurred then at the HRIEC and also as that recommendation came to the City Council. There may be parents who have reservations about their teens being involved in some of those conversations. There may be some reservations on the part of having their child subjected to some of the emails that the Council was subjected to and also the seated members of the HRIEC.

Councilmember Groff indicated he was on the HRIEC at that time and they did not receive extensive emails that were considered hate emails. The HRIEC had the hearing and that is where most of the information came out. His experience is that the Youth Commissioners are just as compassionate or more passionate about those issues as the Commission Members but if the parents have a different opinion, then that would have to be worked out between the parents and the youth. He thought safeguards could be put in place to address those types of situations.

Mayor Roe indicated he was going to suggest that the disclaimer page as well as the signoff page have more of that type of information included in it. He thought there could also be a general opt in or opt out as a part of the application process where a member could choose whether to be a voting member or not.

Councilmember Etten asked if the Youth Commissioners already get the emails.

Ms. Olson thought that was correct and they are part of the group email when someone emails the Commissioners.

Councilmember Etten thought there would be an expectation of potential responding to the public and that for him is the issue because it is a different level of exposure.

Councilmember Strahan explained there is also that level of civics of what is an appropriate response when someone has that option. She thought that might be something that needs to be taught when onboarding the Youth Commissioner.

Ms. Olson stated that is an excellent point because that is also one of the items the HRIEC is looking at, as well as what kind of things are needed for onboarding Commissioners. This is an item on the HRIEC workplan for this year.

Mayor Roe thought the Council was supportive going forward with Youth Commissioner voting and looking at what could be done with applications and disclaimers as well as training and other information that provides some of those guard rails discussed. He also thought the HRIEC should continue to look at both the proposed draft application as well as anything else related to this process.

Mayor Roe offered an opportunity for public comment with no one indicating a desire to speak.