

Diversity Advisory Council Meeting Notes

June 15, 2021

Attending from the council:

Susan Badger-Jones, special projects consultant
Charity Fain, Community Energy Project
Dolores Martinez, EUVALCREE
Indika Sugathadasa, PDX HIVE
Shane Davis, City of Portland
Kheoshi Owens, Empress Rules
Cheryl Roberts, African American Alliance for Homeownership
Sherry Tran, Bend small business owner
Rebecca Descombes, Native American Youth and Family Center
Oswaldo Bernal, OBL Media

Attending from Energy Trust:

Emily Findley	Juliana Hairston
Elaine Dado	Kenji Spielman
Cheryle Easton	Wendy Gibson
Elizabeth Fox	Julianne Thacher
Alexis Bright	Shelly Carlton
Amanda Thompson	Thad Roth
Alex Novie	Susan Jowaiszas
Tracy Scott	Kirstin Pinit
Tyrone Henry	Karl Whinnery
Mayra Aparicio	Ashley Bartels
Taylor Navesken	Jay Ward
Cameron Starr	Amber Cole
Jessica Kramer	Amanda Zuniga
Melanie Bissonnette	Diamante Jamison
Naomi Cole	Mana Haeri
Ryan Crews	
Hannah Cruz	

Others attending:

Mark Kendall, Energy Trust board	Aaron Frechette, Cascade Energy
Jessica Arnold, Cascade Energy	Anna Kim, Oregon Public Utility
Ezell Watson III, Oregon Public Utility	Commission
Commission	Shelly Beaulieu, TRC
Terrance Harris, Oregon State University	

1. Welcome, Agenda Review and Group Reflection

Tyrone Henry, Energy Trust's diversity, equity and inclusion lead, convened the meeting at 9:01 a.m. The agenda, notes and presentation materials are available at Energy Trust's website at <https://www.energytrust.org/about/public-meetings/diversity-advisory-council-meetings/>.

Tyrone Henry led the group in a reflection on a diversity image highlighting the strong reaction and consequences to Colin Kaepernick, a professional football player whose practice of kneeling during the national anthem in protest of social injustice led to the loss of his career. His image is contrasted with other examples of conscientious objection to patriotic symbols and practices by white individuals on the grounds of religion, which had no negative consequence. Council members reflected on the striking perspective created by comparing these images.

Members pointed out that when [Kaepernick] began his protest, the movement was not as loud, and predicted that if a white person did the same action, they would not have been ostracized. The NFL and its fans were trying to set an example, which is a form of anti-black racism aimed at preserving the status quo.

Tyrone Henry introduced a new member who will soon join the Diversity Advisory Council, Terrance Harris of Oregon State University, whose role there involves directing student activities. Tyrone then led a round of introductions among all the council members, who each shared about themselves and welcomed Terrance.

Tyrone Henry announced an upcoming series of Energy Trust Community Summits that will take place virtually to solicit public input on future DEI goals and activities. He invited the Diversity Advisory Council to attend or get involved in these events.

2. Legislation and Policy Update

Topic summary

Hannah Cruz, Energy Trust senior communications manager, and Alexis Bright, Energy Trust community relations/policy intern, presented an update on state legislative activity and the status of priority bills Energy Trust has been monitoring. Staff reviewed Oregon Public Utility Commission grant agreement language outlining the organization's prohibition on lobbying, stating that staff make new legislators aware of these guidelines and reference this non-advocacy role whenever responding to requests for information on pending legislation.

The state legislative session is in its final two weeks and legislators are working through a backlog of bills. Of highest interest to Energy Trust is HB 3141, which modifies the public purpose charge that underpins Energy Trust's program funding. The bill is multi-faceted and includes extending the 2026 deadline to 2036, expanding the uses of renewables funding, moving energy efficiency funding out of the charge and into regular OPUC ratemaking processes and adding equity metrics to create accountability for environmental justice. This bill just received a work session and is expected to move on to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means. The bill received a public hearing early in the session and includes largely the same content as when it was introduced. One clause related to low-income electric bill payment assistance was removed due to that work being addressed in a separate piece of legislation. HB 3141 is the result of months of discussion by an array of stakeholders in a process Energy Trust participated in at the request of the Governor's office.

Other energy-related bills have moved forward or passed during this session including: a bill that will allow Oregon Public Utility Commission to consider energy burden and other cost considerations when setting rates; a bill that would set zero emissions standards for electricity and increase the amount of renewable energy that must be derived from smaller community-led projects; a bill that would temporarily increase low-income bill assistance; and a bill that would designate \$350 million in funding to mitigate wildfire damage to residential homes.

Staff also reviewed the status of notable bills related to racial equity, which the council has expressed interest in hearing updates about.

Discussion

Council members asked about the bills related to low-income bill assistance, and how they connect to Energy Trust's work. Staff clarified that Energy Trust monitors this activity because it aims to ensure that programs catch customers where low-income assistance ends to avoid any gap in assistance. Eliminating or reducing debt due to arrearages also allows customers to focus on essential needs. The council asked if arrearages could disrupt Energy Trust's revenue stream, and staff expressed that is hard to determine at this point and is a good question. Staff clarified the implementation dates for enrolled bills, many of which will take effect at the start of 2022.

Next steps

Staff will continue monitoring bills and provide updates as needed. Staff will provide a summary of activity from the full legislative session at the next public board meeting in July. Tyrone Henry will share today's PowerPoint presentation with the council for reference.

3. Finalized Organizational Goals for 2022

Topic summary

Melanie Bissonnette, Energy Trust senior project manager, presented the final versions of Energy Trust's 2022 organizational goals, which the Diversity Advisory Council helped shape during its development. Four goals were developed based on common themes heard at a joint advisory council session that took place in April. The high-level goals center on achieving energy savings and generation while supporting customers who have been impacted by natural disasters; expanding community-led approaches; increasing internal capacity to engage in strategic partnerships; and developing new ways of working and supporting staff.

Discussion

The council asked if the goal development was influenced by community members and customers we wish to serve and asked for more context on our community engagement strategy. The council stressed that the process should be centered around customer input, not just stakeholders (Kheoshi Owens). Tyrone Henry stated that the upcoming Community Summits will be a step toward including customers in Energy Trust's planning process. A board member (Mark Kendall) added that we received significant public input on our most recent 5-year Strategic Plan. Tyrone Henry stressed the importance of DEI as an organization-wide effort that requires accountability from all staff. The council expressed a strong desire to see anti-racism explicitly called out in the goals and wanted to know how activities to promote clean energy solutions will produce tangible benefits in communities (Kheoshi Owens).

The group discussed having Diversity Advisory Council members support development of explicitly anti-racist language for the goals. Council members also suggested adding meaningful numeric metrics to the goals to promote accountability (Kheoshi Owens). Members were interested in learning about ways Energy Trust will achieve these goals and metrics. Staff shared that the action planning process that occurs during our annual budget cycle later in the year will lay out the strategy for achieving the goals.

A council member (Kheoshi Owens) shared her approach to community engagement, which involves education to the community, finding out what members need and providing compensation for their time and input. The member shared that she offers consulting services as part of her business to support efforts to achieve cultural change and equip staff with tools to

call out anti-racism more prominently in organizational planning and communications. She stressed the importance of these tools in dismantling white supremacy ingrained in organizational structures.

Next steps

The organizational goals will influence staff action plans and Energy Trust's annual budget for 2022. More conversations will take place to discuss incorporating specifically anti-racist language into organizational goals and communications.

4. DAC Selective Interest Survey

Topic summary

Tyrone Henry provided an update on a survey offered to Diversity Advisory Council members to learn about their areas of interest, to inform support for organizational initiatives outside of council meetings. Most council members have completed their surveys, and Tyrone invited members already working in their interest areas to share about their contributions so far.

Discussion

A council member shared about participating on hiring committees for new staff (Sheri Tran). Each hiring panel is now required to include a Diversity Advisory Council member. The member was encouraged by the experience, stating staff seem open to different perspectives and supportive of candidate diversity.

Another member shared her experience contributing in various ways to advocate for racial diversity in many aspects of organizational work (Kheoshi Owens). The member's perspective and direct feedback has already led to staff changing their thinking in some cases. The group discussed having this member return to deliver a training on creating inclusive environments.

Next steps

Diversity Advisory Council members are encouraged to complete the survey and continue working in their focus areas as opportunities arise.

5. OPUC Update

Topic summary

Ezell Watson III, DEI lead for the Oregon Public Utility Commission, introduced a discussion on UM1124, which provides a moratorium on utility disconnects due to nonpayment. He will be convening a discussion among internal and external stakeholders to inform a recommendation he will be making to the commission in December on how to deal with disconnects and arrearages once the moratorium ends.

Ezell Watson III encouraged council members to join in this discussion when it takes place, especially members of color. He aims to create a recommendation that considers the Oregon Public Utility Commission's new ability to create differentiated rates for low-income customers, which could decrease the overall number of disconnects. He encouraged participants to lean into the process, as his facilitation style may be different than what they have encountered in the past.

Discussion

A council member stated that more voices need to be heard to create longer-term changes (Charity Fain). The council asked if the current funding to support low-income bill assistance is expected to be inadequate compared with the need. Ezell Watson clarified it is inadequate on its own, but other sources of support can factor in, including the Low-Income Home Energy

Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and federal assistance. He also hopes to bring the investor community to the table. Ezell Watson III stated he does not support using threat of disconnect as an incentive to force a customer to seek available assistance.

The council asked if there is a donation process for utility customers to support other customers facing disconnection. Ezell Watson III confirmed there is, but there is low awareness of it. A council member asked if public purpose charge funds could be credited to customers (Kheoshi Owens), and Ezell Watson III stated it would take several pieces of legislation to grant statutory authority to Oregon Public Utility Commission, so that is not a short-term option.

Next steps

Diversity Advisory Council members are encouraged to participate in this upcoming public participation process.

8. Meet our New Energy Programs Director and Executive Assistant

Topic summary

Tyrone Henry introduced Tracy Scott, Energy Trust's new Energy Programs Director and new Executive Assistant, Elaine Dado.

Discussion

Tracy Scott shared her career background, which includes working with neighborhoods and communities, construction management and the energy sector. Tracy Scott spoke to some lessons learned through working in different areas of the country. Elaine Dado spoke about her experience working in nonprofit organizations for the past 25 years and expressed excitement about learning about the energy industry in her new role.

9. Announcements

The council discussed the idea of re-visiting a past event that brought the Diversity Advisory Council and board members together to engage directly with each other in an informal way.

Mark Kendall provided an update on the board's DEI ad hoc committee to improve the board's performance regarding DEI. The ad hoc group accepted applications for coach consultants and co-leaders to guide implementation. Interviews will be taking place shortly with two candidates. He encouraged council members to continue their direct style of guidance to help us all move ahead.

Council members encouraged all attendees to engage in activities to honor Juneteenth, especially through donation to Black organizations and businesses, and to be proactive in furthering anti-racism (Kheoshi Owens).

10. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

11. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:28 a.m. The next council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 14, 2021, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on Zoom.