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CITY OF PORTLAND
IN THE CITY COUNCIL

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**RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING A RACIAL EQUITY STEERING COMMITTEE TO
DEVELOP A COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT AND ACCOMPANYING INITIAL
RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPONSE TO SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES**

WHEREAS, during its years as both a part of the state of Massachusetts and before that as a colonial territory of Great Britain, and continuing in the first 45 years of statehood, the State of Maine was governed by rules that allowed slavery, and it had residents who were slave owners, slave traders and slaves; and

WHEREAS, the practice of slavery does violence to the dignity of the human beings made into property, and that violence continues to haunt American society to this day; and

WHEREAS, almost all of the 400 years of Black America's experience was under slavery and Jim Crow laws, both of which allowed preferential opportunity to some while at the same time subjected Blacks and people of color to hardship and disadvantage in all areas of life; and

WHEREAS, during the Civil War, Maine sent its soldiers to fight with the Union against the Confederacy and their courage and sacrifice helped make possible an end to the practice of slavery in the United States; and

WHEREAS, on June 19, 1865, Black slaves in the City of Galveston, Texas, finally learned that the Civil War had been won and they were free and slaves no more; and

WHEREAS, June 19th has been recognized around the country as "Juneteenth," in honor of this historic day and all that it promises all of us as free citizens of the United States; and

WHEREAS, in June 2020, following the release of the video of the horrific police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, thousands of protesters filled the country's cities and towns, including Portland, marching and kneeling and lying down in city streets and squares to memorialize this death, in protest; and

WHEREAS, the protesters used the words, Black Lives Matter, to confront invasive and persistent racial injustice, and they made demands that police forces around the country cease to allow the chokehold and cease to confront Black suspects with escalated violence; and

WHEREAS, the citizens of Portland are rightly outraged by the devaluation of Black lives and humanity; and

WHEREAS, these recent events have illuminated that certain public policies have created inequities and wide disparities of well-being and opportunity among the Black community within Portland, the State of Maine and the United States ; and

WHEREAS, the enormous consequence of systemic racism in our society is that opportunities for employment, housing, health care, safety, wealth, and education have been denied or diminished for Black people and other persons of color; and

WHEREAS, the World Health Organization defines “public health” as “the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts of society” and those efforts “aim to provide conditions under which people can... be healthy, improve their health and well-being, or prevent the deterioration of their health; and

WHEREAS, the United States Office of Disease Prevention recognizes that discrimination negatively impacts health outcomes; and

WHEREAS, the Portland City Council believes that the time is *now* to declare systemic racism a public health crisis in our community; and

WHEREAS, racial disparities and resulting socioeconomic conditions have contributed to a public health crisis among Black people that has been recently highlighted by the disproportionate number of Covid-19 cases in Maine among Black people, and People of Color; and

WHEREAS, available data shows that Black people in Maine are arrested and incarcerated at a much higher rate than others; and

WHEREAS, there are documented racial disparities in school discipline; and

WHEREAS, we cannot continue to ignore the widening gap locally and nationally of the trust between people who work in government and the people in the community they serve; and

WHEREAS, closing this gap requires that we address the underlying inequities that continue to divide our community along racial, social and economic lines, and work to build pathways for healing; and

WHEREAS, we recognize that we are at the beginning of a new nationwide and community conversation regarding race and the system that has been in place since 1615 which has created disequity and disadvantage; and

WHEREAS, all citizens of Portland deserve justice, fair treatment, and recognition of their valuable contributions to the community; and

WHEREAS, engaging the community is in the best interests of the City Council since such engagement will help the healing process to commence, and will help the Council develop policies and budgets that support and serve all Portland citizens;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Mayor Snyder and members of the Portland City Council hereby establish a Racial Equity Steering Committee to develop a community vision statement regarding institutional racism and structural inequities, and make recommendations to address and respond to systems, policies and procedures in need of Council review and action; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Racial Equity Steering Committee will be charged with drafting a Vision Statement regarding Portland's community vision to address institutional racism and structural inequities; reviewing and recommending changes, if necessary, to various policies and procedures that may disproportionately impact Black people and other persons of color including, but not limited to, policies regarding healthcare, employment, homelessness, public safety, and housing. The Steering Committee will also be charged with recommending how Juneteenth should be recognized within Portland; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that in addition to the Racial Equity Steering Committee, the Mayor, with input from the City Council, will appoint a working group of not more than three members to select a neutral convener to begin the planning for, and execution of a series of Community Conversations designed to illuminate issues of systemic racism in Portland, and engage community members in a robust dialogue to educate, inform, and foster positive change. These Community Conversations will inform the work and recommendations of the Racial Equity Steering Committee, and will be convened and facilitated by a neutral party in collaboration with local groups, organizations, and individuals, and be supported with funding from the City; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Racial Equity Steering Committee will consist of no fewer than 9 members and no more than 13 members, all of which will be appointed by the Mayor, with input from the City Council, and shall include a range of stakeholders from the Portland community including, but not limited to, representation from the City Council, Portland Public Schools, public safety, housing, healthcare, employment, education, homelessness, and community organizers; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Racial Equity Steering Committee will elect leadership from among its membership, either a Chair or Co-Chairs, who will develop meeting agendas, and who will work closely with an independent facilitator paid for by the City of Portland, and a member of City staff assigned by the City Manager; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Racial Equity Steering Committee will meet over the course of six (6) months, from September 2020 until February 2021, and will submit their final written report and recommendations to the City Council regarding the ways in which city government should address and respond to institutional racism and structural inequities. The final report shall be submitted to the City Council in the form of a communication on or before March 15, 2021; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the City Council hereby requests that the Portland Public Art Committee, which is responsible for administering the Public Art Program collection, and reviewing potential gifts of art to the city's collection according to the Guidelines for the Public Art Ordinance, engage in a public process in order to determine the best way(s) in which to respond to community offers of public art in support of racial equity either through a mural, banner or other form of public art within the City of Portland.