

STATE OF CONNECTICUT | SOCIAL EQUITY COUNCIL (DRAFT)

February 7, 2023, Meeting 10 A.M.

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

MEETING MATERIALS

- January 11, 2023, Meeting Minutes
- January 24, 2023, Meeting Minutes
- February Meeting Agenda

Call to order and welcome!

Meeting was called to order by Chairman Paul O. Robertson at 10:02 a.m. He welcomed the public, social equity applicants, and council members.

Attendance

Julianne Avallone
Corrie Betts
Andrea Comer
Avery Gaddis
Subira Gordon
Michael Jefferson
Ojala Naeem
Marc Pelka
Edwin Shirley
Kelli-Marie Vallieres
Kevin Walton

Council members absent:

None.

SEC Staff: Ginne-Rae Clay, Executive Director; Komla Matrevi, Staff Attorney, Jennifer Edwards, Program Manager; Jennifer Stevens, Associate Accountant; Kristina Diamond, Communications & Legislative Program Manager

Guests: Saron Saadeh, Senior Manager, Government and Public Sector Advisory at CohnReznick; Ray Cassidy, Manager, Government and Public Sector Advisory at CohnReznick

Approval of January 11, 2023, Meeting Minutes

Chairman Robertson asked for a motion to approve the minutes from January 11, 2023.

Motion – by Michael Jefferson

Second – by Corrie Betts
In Favor – All
Abstention – None
Motion passed.

Approval of January 14, 2023, Meeting Minutes

Chairman Robertson asked for a motion to approve the minutes from January 14, 2023.

Motion – by Michael Jefferson
Second – by Andrea Comer
In Favor – All
Abstention – None
Motion passed.

Executive Session on Pending Litigation

Chairman Robertson asked for a motion to go into Executive Session.

Motion – by Michael Jefferson
Second – by Andrea Comer
In Favor – All
Abstention – None

Upon returning from Executive Session, the roll was taken again to ensure a quorum.

Vote on Workforce Development Plans

Sarona Saadeh stated that CohnReznick reviewed 3 Workforce Development Plans and 2 were recommended for approval.

Chairman Robertson asked for a motion to accept the recommendation to approve Workforce Development Plan application #ACME008473 submitted by MCEJV, LLC, and ACRE0015647 submitted by FFDW EJV, LLC.

Motion – by Michael Jefferson
Second – by Andrea Comer
In Favor – All
Abstention – None
Motion passed.

There was a discussion about the criteria used to approve or deny the Workforce Development Plans.

Councilwoman Vallieres discussed that if a plan received a 70 or above, it would be approved; for less than 70, the applicant would have to make modifications to their plan.

Councilwoman Gordon questioned if an applicant was able to resubmit the Workforce Development Plan after a denial.

Attorney Matrevi responded that the applicant was able to resubmit an updated plan. He also clarified that in this case, the denial was due to the applicant mistakenly uploading only part of the plan and has been addressed with the applicant.

There was further discussion on how applicants are scored.

Chairman Robertson requested a motion to accept the recommendation to reject Workforce Plan application #ACRE0015644 submitted by Budr Hartford Holding, LLC, for an incomplete submission.

Motion – by Michael Jefferson
Second – by Ojala Naeem
In Favor – All
Abstention – None
Motion passed.

Vote on Social Equity Plan

Attorney Matrevi recommended the Council approve the Social Equity Plan submitted by FFDW EJV, LLC, for their retail establishment in Manchester.

Councilman Gaddis made a motion to approve the Social Equity Plan submitted by FFDW EJV, LLC.

Motion – by Avery Gaddis
Second – by Michael Jefferson
In Favor – All
Abstention – None
Motion passed.

Discussion on Legislative Updates

Kristina Diamond discussed legislative updates. Cannabis bills may be up for a Public Hearing as soon as next week. Staff anticipated testifying in support of the SEC's legislative proposals and recommends testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 203 and Senate Bill 403, which would allow hemp farmers to cultivate recreational cannabis. Regarding changes to the lottery process, House Bill 5432 establishes a graduated schedule of cannabis application fees and House Bill 5730 would allow an individual or business to file only 1 application in the lottery. SEC staff recommends the Council supports the lottery process being more equitable. SEC will also testify at any appropriations budget hearings as necessary. Any official SEC testimony will be provided by Executive Director Clay and Chairman Robertson.

Councilwoman Comer questioned the potential legislation regarding an ombudsman. She also asked if there would be assistance with developing testimony if a council member wished to testify.

Ms. Diamond replied that the bill intended to propose an ombudsman for DCP and dealing with medical patients, not regarding social equity or DECD.

There was discussion on council members testifying. Councilman Jefferson was concerned by council members testifying without having their statements vetted by Staff to ensure consensus.

Councilwoman Vallieres asked how opening the opportunity for hemp farmers to cultivate and sell cannabis would affect the licensing process, lottery process, and the social equity component of what the Council is trying to oversee.

Ms. Diamond explained that the number of hemp growers is sure to increase if hemp farmers are allowed to cultivate recreational cannabis, and the concern is oversupplying issues and diminished retail pricing, undermining the intent of the Cannabis Bill.

Councilwoman Gordon asked if the SEC-supported legislation is being proposed by a specific legislator or going through the chairs of the General Law Committee.

Ms. Diamond understood that the SEC proposals would be submitted as a raised bill in the General Law Committee. Staff will continue to meet with the General Law Committee in helping to move the legislative proposals forward. She also suggested that if individual members are interested in testifying, they submit their testimony to SEC staff and the Chair to make sure that it is vetted.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Clay spoke about SEC staffing, program updates, and the focus for February. Staff is working with the Department of Administrative Services to fill 5 Social Equity Council office positions: CD Assistant Administrator, Paralegal, Program Manager for Reinvestment, Program Manager for Outreach, and Administrative Assistant.

In program updates, the Accelerator Program started January 16 and participants have reported learning a great deal. The Canna-Business Revolving Loan Fund Program is being finalized with webinars and information sessions planned as soon as those details are complete. Staff will be going back to the Bond Commission for additional funding based on feedback that a lot of people may be coming to borrow money from this fund. Regarding Community Reinvestment, an ad hoc committee chaired by Ojala Naeem was established. In Workforce Development, Staff continues to work with the Office of Workforce Strategy. Governor Lamont is scheduled to deliver his annual budget address tomorrow February 8. Social Equity Council staff will be reviewing Social Equity Plans submitted by social equity applicants, with 1-point checklist criteria. Each business is required to provide a 6-month progress update to the Council as well as an annual report as a condition of their license renewal. This will be tracked and monitored.

Councilman Jefferson asked who on the staff reviews the Social Equity Plans.

Executive Director Clay responded that she and Attorney Matrevi reviewed the first plan, and she will continue to do so.

Committee Reports

- **Reinvestment Committee** Ojala Naeem
The committee has been established and is working to get a meeting on the calendar for the upcoming weeks. The goal is to define and redefine the plan for reinvestment and come back to the Council with a proposal in terms of the funds requested for this fiscal year and the next fiscal year.
- **Finance Committee** Andrea Comer
With the departure of Councilwoman Shaw, Councilwoman Comer has returned as Chair of the Finance Committee. Previously the Finance Committee was meeting quarterly, and that is being moved to bimonthly because of the conversations around community reinvestment and the absence of funds. For Fiscal Year '23, there is about \$6.1M in the Community Reinvestment and Workforce Development line that has been untouched. The Finance Committee will talk through developing a plan for reinvestment plan to release those funds for FY '24 and '25 and also hear from the Reinvestment Committee on suggested plans.

Councilman Jefferson was concerned that the money in that fund is used to give back to the disproportionately impacted communities within the next 6 months.

Councilwoman Gordon stated the Outreach Committee was prepared to listen to the community's needs.

- **Governance Committee** Ojala Naeem
There was no report or recommendations, but the council members will be receiving the annual review process this afternoon to fill out.
- **Outreach and Marketing Committee** Subira Gordon
There was no report or recommendations. The committee will be meeting this week.
- **Policy Committee** Edwin Shirley
There was no report at this time. The committee will meet this month.
- **Workforce Development Committee** Kelli-Marie Vallieres
There was no report or recommendations at this time. Chair Vallieres reminded members to pass along the job description and application information for the Workforce Development Coordinator position to any interested parties.

For the Good of the Order

There were no updates.

Adjourn

Councilman Gaddis made a motion to adjourn.

Motion – by Avery Gaddis

Second – by Andrea Comer.

The meeting adjourned at 11:10 AM.

/ab

February 9, 2023

RE: Transcript: Social Equity Council Meeting - 2-7-2023

Please be advised that the above-referenced typewritten transcript is a true and accurate transcription of the recorded conversations to the extent that the audio could be heard/understood. Portions that could not be heard/understood have been notated with an (an “inaudible” or “?...”).

Sincerely,

Mary A. Goehring

**Mary A. Goehring
CEO, Transcription Plus, LLC**

I certify that this document is a true and accurate transcription of the audio voice file indicated above.

Anne Bruno
Anne Bruno