

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
SOCIAL EQUITY COUNCIL | REGULAR MEETING - **DRAFT**
OCTOBER 1, 2024 Meeting 10:00 A.M.
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

1) Call to Order and Welcome

Chair Andrea Comer called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. She welcomed council members, state officials, representatives, and members of the public. Following her opening remarks, she initiated the roll call.

2) Attendance

Kyle Abercrombie
Fanita Borges
Corrie Betts
Avery Gaddis
Subira Gordon
Andréa Hawkins
Michael Jefferson
Daniel Karpowitz
Melvin Medina
Ojala Naeem
Edwin Shirley
Kelli-Marie Vallieres
Kevin Walton

Executive Director: Brandon McGee

3) Approval of September 3rd, 2024 SEC meeting minutes

Andrea Comer informed the council that Councilwoman Gordon had decided not to renew her term and expressed gratitude for her service, encouraging other members to join her in wishing Gordon well. Andrea Comer called for a motion to approve the minutes.

Motion – by Edwin Shirley
Second – by Michael Jefferson
In Favor – All
Opposed – None
Abstentions – None
Motion passed unanimously.

4) Executive Session

a) Updates on Pending Litigation

The Council moved to enter an executive session to discuss pending litigation.

Motion – by Michael Jefferson

Second – by Andrea Hawkins

In Favor – All

Opposed – None

Abstentions – None

Motion passed unanimously.

Andrea instructed the participants to leave the Zoom meeting and join the executive session via a separate Teams link, and she thanked the public for their patience during this transition.

5) Vote on Equity Joint Venture Application Recommendation

a. Approval

i. AMHF.0004030 – Leaf CT LLC

Chair Andrea Comer initiated the discussion by confirming a quorum and requesting a motion to approve the application.

Motion – by Kelli-Marie Vallieres

Second – by Edwin Shirley

In Favor – All

Opposed – None

Abstentions – None

Motion passed unanimously.

6) Executive Director's Report

McGee highlighted the progress made over the past month, including his efforts to realign the SEC's organizational structure. He also reintroduced the mission of the Social Equity Council, emphasizing its focus on ensuring that communities disproportionately affected by the war on drugs have equitable access to the cannabis industry and benefit from economic reinvestment.

McGee discussed the SEC's three core programs: the Community Reinvestment Program, the Revolving Loan Fund, and the Workforce Development/Accelerator Program. He provided updates on each program:

The **Revolving Loan Program** has received 18 applications from social equity applicants, requesting over \$7 million in total.

The **Community Reinvestment Program** is undergoing reassessment, with plans to target early childhood education, reintegration of justice-impacted individuals, and other community needs in disproportionately impacted areas.

The **Workforce Development/Accelerator Program** is being reassessed in partnership with the Office of Workforce Strategies to enhance collaboration with local businesses and educational institutions.

McGee also introduced key SEC team members, including Ana Rosa (administrative assistant), Kristina Diamond (legislative and communications manager), Vera Lembrick (community reinvestment manager), Jennifer Edwards (project manager for the Canna-Business Revolving Loan Program), and new hire Mariedy Collazo Cruz (legal director).

He proceeded to share updates on legislative initiatives, focusing on advancing the council's mission through policy development and holding cannabis businesses accountable to their social equity and workforce development plans. McGee paused to invite questions from the council, but none were raised.

McGee reviewed the agency's finances and organizational chart, focusing on the reassessment of vacancies and recruitment. He also prioritized addressing issues within the social equity applicant processes and highlighted collaboration efforts with various state agencies.

One of the key points McGee made was the need for increased transparency in the review process for social equity and workforce development plans. He proposed bringing on a research quality analysis expert to enhance this effort. He then walked the council through the budget, emphasizing its role in supporting the council's statutory obligations and strategic planning.

McGee specifically highlighted line items related to social equity application verification, handled by the consulting firm CohnReznick, and community reinvestment and workforce development programs. He explained that while \$5.6 million is budgeted for community reinvestment in FY 2025, additional funds will be sought for FY 2026 and FY 2027. He and Vera Lembrick are reassessing the previous Pilot Program to ensure transparency, accountability, and proper measurement of success.

Councilman Michael Jefferson raised concerns about community reinvestment funding for FY 2025, inquiring why a concrete plan for that year had not been fully developed. McGee clarified that while \$5.6 million is allocated for FY 2025, the agency is reassessing its current infrastructure before committing the funds to ensure more efficient use.

McGee also noted that \$34 million remains in the Social Innovation Fund, but the agency has intentionally paused the disbursement of \$22 million in favor of a more strategic approach.

Jefferson also questioned the use of the \$22 million initially planned for FY 2024, to which McGee explained that the \$5.6 million would be drawn down from the \$34 million, with plans to reassess spending for FY 2026 and FY 2027.

Finally, McGee addressed several contractual obligations related to marketing, outreach, and the development of a three-year strategic plan. He emphasized the importance of setting measurable goals and improving communication between the staff and council. McGee expressed his appreciation for the council's time and commitment, outlining next steps that include further defining and implementing strategic management initiatives.

Chairwoman Andrea Comer supported McGee's explanations, providing additional context on budget approvals from the legislature.

The discussion concluded with McGee's assurance of ongoing work on strategic planning and engagement with council members in the coming months.

7) Good of the Order

Councilmember Michael Jefferson contributed by discussing the recent comptroller's report, expressing his belief that the report vindicated the previous Executive Director and the Council. Jefferson noted that despite past scrutiny, the recommendations from the comptroller's office could apply to other state agencies as well. He emphasized that while the Council may have time to develop a strategic plan, the Black and Brown communities in the state cannot afford to wait for much-needed funding, citing the urgency of addressing socioeconomic issues impacting youth, particularly during the critical summer months.

Councilmember Corrie Betts briefly interrupted to inform Jefferson that his audio was breaking up but allowed him to finish his statement. Jefferson concluded by urging the Council to expedite the funding process.

Andrea Comer responded, acknowledging the urgency Jefferson highlighted, but stressed the importance of strategic planning to ensure transparency and maintain the Council's credibility. She pointed out that state and federal funding had already been directed to communities in need and reiterated the necessity of thoughtful planning to avoid the scrutiny the Council had previously faced.

8) Adjourn

Motion – by Avery Gaddis
Second – by Kelli-Marie Vallieres
In Favor – All
Opposed – None
Abstentions – None

Motion passed unanimously.



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Date: October 1, 2024

RE: Minutes: October SEC Council Meeting Minutes Minutes (Draft)

Please be advised that the above-referenced typewritten minutes are a true and accurate description of the proceedings obtained from the recorded conversations to the extent that the audio could be clearly heard/understood. Portions that could not be heard/understood have been notated with a (an “inaudible” or “?...”).

Sincerely,

Brenda LaFleur

Brenda LaFleur
Owner, A Plus Reporting Service, LLC

I certify that this document is a true and accurate description of the proceedings obtained from the recorded conversations contained in the listed audio file.

Boden Truitt

Boden Truitt,
Transcriber