



## CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION

AGENDA SECTION	WORK SESSION ITEMS
MEETING DATE	MAY 3, 2021

ITEM:	Youth Commission Consideration	
DEPARTMENT: Administration		BY/DATE: Ben Sandell, 4/30/2021
CITY STRATEGY: <i>(please indicate areas that apply by adding a bold “X” in front of the selected text below)</i>		
_Safe Community		X Diverse, Welcoming “Small-Town” Feel
_Economic Strength		_Excellent Housing/Neighborhoods
_Equity and Affordability		X Strong Infrastructure/Public Services
X Opportunities for Play and Learning		X Engaged, Multi-Generational, Multi-Cultural Population

### BACKGROUND:

Previously, the Mayor, City Manager, and staff discussed the potential for a youth commission at the City. The idea was first presented to the Council at the March 1, 2021, Work Session to gauge interest. The Communications Coordinator then contacted a select group of government agencies that have youth commissions to get a better idea of how best to approach the project in the City of Columbia Heights, should the Council choose to move forward with the initiative.

### DETAILS:

Officials from four government agencies provided extensive detail and testimonial about the youth commissions at their respective locations: Northfield, Rosemount, Rochester, and Eden Prairie. All agencies manage their commissions differently, but do share some commonalities across all four: 1.) Kids in grades 10, 11, and 12 are the target demographic. 2.) All agencies emphasize and encourage civic engagement. 3.) Each group has at least one adult staff member in charge of managing the group, though all require some form of involvement from a larger variety of staff members and elected officials. 4.) All four adult coordinators recommend that Columbia Heights move forward with a youth commission in some capacity. 5.) All require a minimum attendance, though excused absences are provided liberally. Items that were not consistent across all groups were: 1.) Term limits, 2.) Partnering agencies 3.) Application requirements. 4.) Application selection process, 5.) Total number of members. 6.) Central focus and format of the group. 7) Frequency of meetings, 8.) Time commitment from staff, 9.) Budget. For more on these differences, please see attached chart.

When asked about the benefits of having a youth commission, each staff coordinator cited the value of youth insight and feedback, stating that several ideas and policies were generated or influenced at the agencies by youth commission members. They also cited the value in encouraging youth to engage in the civic process early on, and in providing important experience and social/political lessons. One of the concerns expressed by Council members in March was attrition of youth attendance. No agency expressed any serious problems with attendance, and none had any trouble attracting applicants. The Columbia Heights School District said they would be supportive of the youth commission and would help market it should the City decide to move forward. The chair of the Columbia Heights Key Club said that they think local youth would be interested.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

Based on staff time and resources available, and the provided feedback from other agencies, staff recommends approving the development of a youth commission that 1.) Meets monthly for two hours, except July and August, 2.) Develops sub-groups based on interests that engage youth in community projects, activities, and policy discussions coordinated by the group with guidance from staff liaison, 3.) Opens applications to all youth in grades 10-12, in any school or homeschool, provided they are a Columbia Heights resident, and accepts any youth who apply who meet those standards and who provide at least one letter of recommendation from anyone who isn't their mom or dad, 4.) Requires no term limits 5.) Allows three unexcused absences per year and an additional three excused absences, 6.) Works in partnership with area non-profits, schools and organizations to coordinate projects, marketing, and budget, 7.) Hosts a monthly educational speaker and/or a monthly educational trip or tour, 8.) Launches its initial application announcement in the fall City Newsletter, 9.) Is allocated a small budget for food and activities, 10.) Is managed on a staffing level by the Communications and Events department, 11.) Includes a rotating council liaison, 12.) Includes regular updates from youth commission liaisons to boards and commissions and council meetings. With approval to move forward, staff would draw up a specific plan and set of standards to be reviewed and approved by the City Council later this summer, and then adopted as a City Ordinance.

**ATTACHMENT:**

Comparison chart