



**BUSINESS OF THE CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND**

**AB 6217
February 7, 2023
Consent Agenda**

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	AB 6217: Community Conversations Series Wrap-Up	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Receive report. No action necessary.	

DEPARTMENT:	City Manager
STAFF:	Jessi Bon, City Manager Merrill Thomas-Schadt, Sr. Management Analyst
COUNCIL LIAISON:	n/a
EXHIBITS:	n/a
CITY COUNCIL PRIORITY:	4. Focus efforts and actions to be an environmentally and fiscally sustainable, connected, and diverse community.

AMOUNT OF EXPENDITURE	\$ n/a
AMOUNT BUDGETED	\$ n/a
APPROPRIATION REQUIRED	\$ n/a

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda bill is to provide a synopsis of the development and execution of the 2022 Community Conversations series.

- The Community Conversations series was approved by the City Council in late 2021 (see [AB 5956](#)) in partnership with the community groups ONE MI and Do the Work MI with a budget of \$60,000.
- Seven separate programs were presented throughout 2022 on topics such as the process to remove racist property covenants still on record, the experience of Asian and Asian-American families on Mercer Island, and trainings on harassment intervention and implicit bias.
- Community feedback on each program was gathered via surveys and the response was positive.

BACKGROUND

The City recognizes and supports matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion by participating in cultural competency training, supporting a range of community events such as Juneteenth and Sukkot, and issuing City Council proclamations which highlight the unique experiences of community members across all backgrounds.

In August 2021, the Mayor and City Manager connected with ONE MI and Do the Work MI to discuss their interest in collaborating with the City on an event series to engage the community on topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion on Mercer Island. Members of ONE MI and Do the Work MI expressed an interest in partnering and supporting this work.

In November 2021, the City Council approved the partnership proposal and plan to host the Community Conversations series (see [AB 5956](#)). Members of ONE MI and Do the Work MI pledged to volunteer their time to support the programming of the series, make recommendations on potential speakers and topics, and help with the logistics for each of the events. Contracts with speakers, consultants, and any other services related to the community event series were to be held by the City and administered by City staff.

Content for the series was created with the following goals to:

- Offer space for conversations that expand understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion to the Mercer Island community.
- Provide support for underrepresented families through conversation and opportunities for community connection.
- Offer a variety of events that meet the needs of different age groups and demographics.

Sessions were to be offered through both in-person and virtual engagements, dependent upon current COVID-19 protocols and guidance. A budget of \$60,000 was approved to cover speaker costs (fees and travel), accommodations for hearing or visually impaired participants, Zoom support, and supplies for activities or refreshments.

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

Community Conversations Sessions

There was a total of six events in the Community Conversations series, and one community event developed by series' organizers but funded by the City's Recreation Division. A brief summary of each is provided below.

Towards Inclusive Community (February 2, 2022)

This event was organized and presented in partnership with the Mercer Island High School Black Student Union and the University of Washington's Civil Rights and Labor History Project. The presentation included a history of segregation and racially restrictive property covenants in the Puget Sound area and on Mercer Island specifically, and resources for homeowners to identify and address such covenants connected to their own property. Over 275 people participated virtually.

Intergenerational Conversations: A Roundtable with Asian American Islanders (May 25, 2022)

This event was held in partnership with ONE MI, Do the Work MI, and the Mercer Island High School's Education Coalition for Asian American Representation and moderated by Mercer Island School Board member Maggie Tai Tucker. Roundtable participants came from the diverse Asian American community of Mercer Island and explored differing perceptions around academic achievement, body image, and social norms. 22 people attended this event in-person at the Mercer Island Community and Event Center and approximately 30 participated online.

Oral History Family Interview Workshop (June 5, 2022)

This interactive program was presented in partnership by ONE MI, Do the Work MI, the Stroum Jewish Community Center, the Mercer Island Historical Society, and the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. The workshop, facilitated by Islander Robin Li, showed how oral history interviewing is different from other types of conversations. Participants practiced strategies for conducting effective interviews and learned best practices on recording and archiving oral histories. There were 27 attendees at this in-person event.

Mercer Island Pride (June 26, 2022)

The Mercer Island Recreation Division and organizers of the Community Conversations series held Mercer Island's first Pride event, recognizing, and celebrating the LGBTQIA community. The event was held at Mercedale Park and featured local band Puget Sound, refreshments, lawn games, and an information booth hosted by the Mercer Island LGBTQIA Parent Affinity Group. Resources from Youth & Family Services were shared, and residents of all ages enjoyed a relaxed, fun afternoon to celebrate and support their community. Approximately 75 people attended the event.

How to be an Ally (October 24 & 26, 2022)

These sessions were led by Right to Be, an organization that provides customized training experiences on a variety of topics designed to educate and empower communities in their equity and inclusion work. This training was broken into two sessions, one geared for teens and one for adults. Participants learned tips and strategies on how to deal with racism and harassment in the real world, and how to prioritize their own safety while offering support for others. 25 people participated in these online trainings.

Disability as a Strength (November 7, 2022)

This event featured Mercer Island resident and Microsoft's Chief Accessibility Officer Jenny Lay-Flurrie. She led an engaging presentation on her own life experience as a deaf person, her work in the tech industry on tools and accommodations for people with disabilities, and how the inclusion of people with disabilities enriches our communities, workplaces, and lives. 34 people registered online and 15 people attended in person at City Hall.

Mitigation Implicit Bias (December 8, 2022)

This interactive training was also led by Right to Be. The session taught participants how to understand their own implicit biases and the unintended harm that can occur without engaging tools to recognize and undo them. Through polls, thought experiments and writing exercises, attendees reflected on how unconscious bias can impact themselves and others, and heard strategies to confront and overcome it. 11 people participated in this training.

Communications & Feedback

A webpage was created on the City's Let's Talk platform for the [Community Conversation series](#) in order to provide schedule, program, and background information. Promotion of the series was shared between ONE MI and City communications platforms including social media, the City's calendar webpage, and the MI Weekly Newsletter. A mailing list was established to connect directly with past participants. The Mercer Island Reporter covered several of the events in issues throughout the year.

City staff gathered feedback through online and in-person surveys, virtual chat platforms, and via email. The majority of feedback was positive, appreciative, and interested in learning about future events. Since the

series concluded, City staff has received inquiries about “what’s next” and requests for partnership on upcoming holidays and important community topics.

Summary of Program Costs

The City Council approved \$60,000 in 2022 to fund the Community Conversation Series. The total amount spent was \$11,600, not inclusive of staff time.

NEXT STEPS

The City is committed to doing its part to foster an inclusive workforce and community. City staff are now pursuing the following:

- Continuing to evaluate current and future special event offerings with an inclusive lens to incorporate the history and traditions important to the Mercer Island community. Examples include Juneteenth, Pride, and Hannukah celebrations and diverse, accessible programming at Summer Celebration! and other events.
- The Youth & Family Services Department workplan for 2023-2024 includes a goal to integrate and expand equity and social justice practices in their work.
- There is a budget proposal, pending consideration by the City Council in spring 2023, for the development of a DEI plan to identify areas of improvement within the City organization and recommend updates to City policies and procedures.
- The City recently joined the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) to utilize training modules and other collaborative resources to provide both internal and external training and programs.
- Reviewing and updating policies and procedures related to recruiting, hiring, and training new employees with an emphasis on inclusion (such as “blind” resume reviews, diverse interview panels, and accommodations for people with disabilities).

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Receive report. No action necessary.