

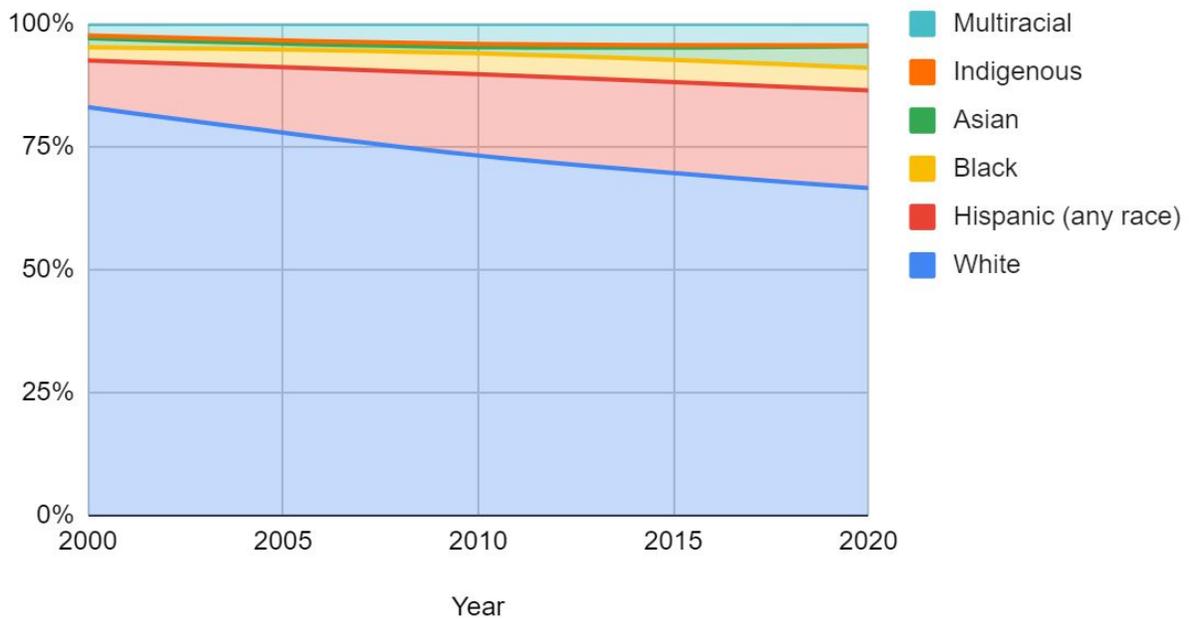
# Proposal for a Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

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**Executive summary:** *Establishing a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion advisory committee will create new opportunities for citizen engagement, provide a valuable resource for city leaders, and align with West St. Paul's strategic plan.*

## BACKGROUND

West St. Paul is an increasingly diverse city. Over the past 20 years, the city's white majority has decreased from 87% to 74% of the population.



Changes in representation in a city's government often lag demographic shifts, and a legacy of mistrust of public institutions can make it a challenge to engage communities of color in decision-making. Similarly, women, the disabled, LGBTQIA people, and others who have historically been marginalized or overlooked in power structures are often reluctant to step forward and make their voices heard.

Representation and dialogue are critical to overcome these barriers, and it is not reasonable to expect city leaders to accomplish this without help. Citizen groups like the Women of West St. Paul and the Residents of Color Collective have done incredible work in recent years — in some cases at considerable personal risk — in supporting candidates for public office and developing a more inclusive culture in city government. Formalizing this work in a committee process will provide additional structure and create a deliberative process for addressing complex issues before they flare into public controversies.

This also helps to achieve key imperatives outlined in the city’s [2020 annual report](#), most notably to “identify opportunities to bolster diversity and inclusion outreach.”

Section 2.02 of the West St. Paul City Charter states “The City Council may by ordinance, resolution or in any other manner prescribed by state law, create or abolish any other commissions or boards and appoint the members thereof, with advisory power to investigate any subject of interest to the City and to prepare any recommendations for consideration by the City Council.”

Lastly, this helps address a growing need to match community volunteers with opportunities for involvement, a concern that has been raised by the City Council in recent meetings.

## **CONTEXT**

At least six Twin Cities suburbs have Human Rights Commissions, some dating to the 1960s, linked below:

- [Richfield Human Rights Commission](#)
- [Edina Human Rights and Relations Commission](#)
- [Brooklyn Park Human Rights Commission](#)
- [Robbinsdale Human Rights Commission](#)
- [Bloomington Human Rights Commission](#)
- [Northfield Human Rights Commission](#)

While these commissions serve a critical function in their communities — in some cases adjudicating civil rights complaints — this proposal differs in that it envisions an advisory committee, rather than an oversight commission with statutory powers.

Functions of a West St. Paul DEI committee could include:

- Identifying and promoting training resources for city staff and leadership

- Reviewing policies, site plans, recruiting protocols, etc., to provide perspective and feedback
- Provide a standing forum for community members to raise questions and concerns and help make connections with city staff or leadership as needed
- Track recognition months, days, and other events for city proclamations
- Provide guidance on city outreach efforts and connect with community organizers to aid with communication

## **STRUCTURE**

- 7 members with representation from all three wards. Four members appointed to three-year terms, three members appointed to an initial one-year term, renewing to a three-year term, to ensure continuity.
- 2 ex officio members: A City Council representative and the City Manager or designated liaison.
- Regular monthly meetings and special convenings as needed.

## **COMMUNITY INTEREST**

Initial public outreach has already identified more than 40 individuals signing on to support the concept and at least 15 people interested in volunteering to be members. Some sample comments:

*“It is very much needed to keep our city accountable.”*

*“This is a much-needed committee in WSP.”*

*“I wholeheartedly support such a group ... change is needed direly in WSP and in cities all across the nation.”*

*“I am in full support of this. I would love to see a diverse group of individuals involved.”*

*“Many other cities in Minnesota already have a human rights commission or similar advisory committee that can both help advise the City Council and provide a forum for discussions regarding DEI. I think the time has come for West St Paul to follow their lead.”*

*“This would be crucial as the city will likely continue to diversify and the services the city offers should reflect that change! Happy to support efforts and hope that the makeup of the committee would also reflect the city's diversity.”*

*“Fantastic idea and an important way to show our commitment to growing diversity in our city and state.”*

*“I fully support this group being formed! I think it would be good for the community as a whole.”*

## **CONCLUSION**

We recognize that West St. Paul has made considerable strides in this area in recent years. The intent of this proposal is not to call out shortcomings or highlight the negative, but to carry this work to the next level in the form of a true community partnership.

We appreciate your consideration of this proposal and look forward to next steps.