

TO: Human Relations Commission (HRC)
FROM: Minka van der Zwaag, Human Services Manager
DEPARTMENT: Community Services
DATE: August 11, 2022

SUBJECT: Agenda Item # 4 - Referral from the City Council – Follow up on Recognizing Key Dates to Advance Race & Equity

NOTE: This is a duplicate of the staff report that was included with the HRC agenda for the June, 9, 2022 meeting

Background

On March 7, 2022, Council considered a Colleague’s Memo from Vice Mayor Kou and Mayor Burt titled Recognizing Key Dates to Advance Race & Equity (Attachment A) in which they recommended the local recognition and celebration of dates of historic significance that provide “an important opportunity to increase community awareness and for us to acknowledge the struggles and accomplishments of groups who have been fundamental to the development of American society.” These recommendations were intended to help the City progress on its equity goals as stated in its [Equity Mission Statement](#) passed by Council in November 2020. The Equity Mission Statement reads:

The City of Palo Alto is committed to creating a respectful, fair, and professional workplace and city. We will identify prejudices, eliminate inequities, welcome many perspectives, and use a collaborative approach to create an environment that works for everyone. The City's commitment to achieve equity in Palo Alto is the shared responsibility of our residents, organizations, governments, and other institutions.

The memo also stated that to “help meet those goals, the City should pursue opportunities to recognize and embrace our diversity and civil rights and oppose hate crimes. As a next step, we should formally recognize and celebrate significant multicultural dates and months to promote equality, honor diversity and oppose racism.”

Formal recognition of the following dates was proposed:

- June 19th as “Juneteenth” – Commemoration of the emancipation of enslaved people in the United States. June 19th is recognized as the date when freedom was obtained in the last locations of the south and has become a symbolic date of African American freedom.

- May 31st as “Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta Day” – Paying homage to two key leaders of the United Farm Workers who fought for farm workers’ rights, economic justice, and civil rights.
- October 11th as “Indigenous People’s Day” – Changing Christopher Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples’ Day.
- Proclaim May as “Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.”

During the Council discussion of the recommendation, Mayor Burt stated that the recognition of these events and individuals “gives us an opportunity to have ongoing education and celebration and respect for the contributions of the diverse groups that have built our democracy and who have challenged and continue to challenge us to live up to our ideals.”

There was general support of the dates proposed, with key discussion centering on other possible dates to consider, including the following: Holocaust Remembrance Day and Armenian Remembrance Day (in keeping with the educational component suggested by Mayor Burt); and on changing October 11th (or the date of the second Monday annually in October) from Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples’ Day. There was some interest by a member on the City Council to consider the recognition of the second Monday in October as “Italian Immigrant Day” as an option in addition to another option of recognizing it as both “Columbus Day” and “Indigenous Peoples’ Day” as do some states and as President Biden did last year.

As the HRC has previously played a strong role in engaging on issues related to diversity in the community, it was suggested that the commission could give helpful input on how the dates identified could be celebrated, the evaluation of the other possible holidays/remembrance days mentioned, and the consideration of the possible re-naming of the October 11th – second Monday in October (currently Columbus Day) Holiday. This direction is included in the motion passed as shown below.

MOTION: The City Council voted to formally recognize and celebrate the following dates:

- A. Juneteenth, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta Day, and add Indigenous Peoples’ Day as dates of historic significance, and May as Asian American Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Heritage Month; and
- B. Authorize Proclamations celebrating the above dates;
- C. Refer to the Human Relations Commission recommendations on how to best recognize and celebrate these dates (ones above);
- D. Ask the HRC to evaluate recognition of Holocaust Remembrance Day and Armenian Remembrance Day and evaluate if October 11th should be re-designated as Italian Heritage Day

The motion passed unanimously (7-0).

Discussion

At present, the following holidays are recognized by the city:

Federal Holidays –City employees receive a day off:

- New Year's Day
- Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day *
- Presidents' Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day*
- Labor Day
- Columbus Day
- Veterans Day *
- Thanksgiving Day and the day after (2 days)
- December 25
- A Floating Holiday between December 25 and January 1

*City sponsored/co-sponsored events on these days

In addition, the following days have been recognized by the City or a City Department with varying degrees of activity:

- Palo Alto Day
- Earth Day
- World Music Day
- Arbor Day
- Coastal Clean Up Day

In addition, the City often recognizes special days or months through proclamations (e.g., Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, Affordable Housing Month, etc.).

There is not currently an established policy for adding days or events for local recognition. Those recognized in the past have been primarily brought forth by staff and/or in association with a City sponsored/co-sponsored event.

The HRC must now consider how best to respond to the Council referral as listed under C and D in the motion above in addressing whether the HRC should create a policy or process on the recognition of holidays, days, months of historical significance. The following questions may be helpful in framing the discussion.

- Should the HRC recommend a policy on recognition of holidays and days or months of historical significance?

- Should there be named “categories” for dates to be acknowledged by the City (in addition to state and federal holidays, i.e. local holiday, heritage day, commemorative holiday)?
- Should there be a baseline “level” of recognition of each day based on their “category?”
- How could educational and celebratory components be included in the recognition?
- How could the community be engaged in the celebration of these events?

The Council referral does not include any additional request for days off for City employees. Just the referral related to the renaming of an existing holiday (October 11/second October in October). Staff asks that HRC keep in mind the resource implications for any recommendations made including staff time and budget.

Action at this meeting

The HRC is being asked to provide recommendations to the Council on the following:

- How best to recognize and celebrate the holidays listed in the Council motion and;
- Evaluation of the addition of Holocaust Remembrance Day and Armenian Remembrance Day for local recognition
- Whether October 11th should be re-designated as Italian Heritage Day or something else.

The Commission can frame their recommendations to the Council as part of a memo or report.

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