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Contact: Bob Hume
bob.hume@stpaul.gov
651.266.8518
651.247.0768

Mayor Coleman Announces Solutions to Improve Equal Access for Contractors

City to merge departments to consolidate, better utilize existing resources

(SAINT PAUL) – Stemming from a first-of-its-kind audit taken on by any city in America, Mayor Chris Coleman announced today steps the City will take to improve and ensure equal access to City-managed contracts, especially for firms owned by those from traditionally underrepresented communities.

Among them is the creation of a new City department that will consolidate existing resources to better serve, monitor, and enforce City policy designed to expand economic opportunities and produce a more economically inclusive Saint Paul.

“This is a solution to a decades-long problem in Saint Paul. When we took on this internal audit, we weren’t looking to place blame, but to make sure we were doing what’s right,” said Coleman. “The recommendations from a broad coalition of community, business, faith, and union leaders will help us ensure that no one gets left behind in Saint Paul. This is about workforce development, better coordination, and more focused leadership – I thank all those involved for their partnership.”

The creation of the Department of Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity will bring together civil rights enforcement; contract analysis and procurement; contract monitoring, investigation, and enforcement; and capacity building and workforce development under one roof. Currently, these services are spread between four departments with little overlap and coordination.

"I am incredibly pleased that there have been opportunities for meaningful public input from the very beginning of this endeavor. The Department of Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity represents a step in the right direction toward Saint Paul fulfilling its obligation to all of its residents," said Ward 1 City Councilmember Melvin Carter III.

The new department would be headed by a director who would serve 3-year terms at the recommendation of the mayor and vetted through a community selection process similar to that for the City’s police and fire chief. A public commission like the Human Rights Commission would provide some performance oversight of the department.

“This has been a long and hard-fought process to make serious changes in how the City and HRA

does business. I applaud Mayor Coleman's courage and leadership to do things differently in order to achieve equal economic opportunities for persons of color and women," said Nick Khaliq, President of the Saint Paul Chapter of the NAACP.

Other steps Mayor Coleman announced included developing a Saint Paul-led multi-jurisdictional approach to manage regional buying decisions and improve the availability of minority and small business vendors through a comprehensive technology investment; partnering with labor unions, the private sector, and outside resources to build capacity and develop a strong workforce; and developing uniform contract language and a contract compliance ordinance that provides stronger enforcement and expanded workforce investments.

"We can create corridors of opportunity for economic development; we can improve educational opportunities for our children to prepare them to enter the workforce; but if we fail to create an inclusive environment in which all vendors and contractors have equal access to contract opportunities, we will fall short of building strong neighborhoods, safe streets, and sustainable jobs," Mayor Coleman said. "These recommendations put us on the right track to a better city for our families and future entrepreneurs."

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