



Youth Commission

ACTION CALENDAR

February 28, 2023

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Youth Commission
 Submitted by: Nina Thompson, Chair, Youth Commission
 Subject: Adding a youth member to the Environment and Climate Commission

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adds a seat on the Environment and Climate Commission for a person under 18 years of age; and that Student Director on the Berkeley Unified School Board nominates the new youth commissioner and that the full board confirms the appointment.

POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

On January 30, 2023, the Agenda and Rules Committee adopted the following action: M/S/C (Arreguin/Bartlett) to send the items from the Youth Commission, Environment and Climate Commission, and Councilmember Harrison to the City Council with a qualified positive recommendation that the item proposed by Councilmember Harrison be adopted as revised to state that the full City Council will appoint the members to the two youth seats on the Environment and Climate Commission, and that the Berkeley Unified School District Board of Directors will provide recommendations to the City Council on candidates for the youth seats. Vote: Ayes – Bartlett, Arreguin; Noes – None; Absent - Hahn.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

No fiscal impact.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Currently, the only youth involvement in city policymaking is the Youth Commission. The Youth Commission is an important and powerful voice for youth in our city. Youth are affected by every policy decision made by the City Council, in particular, decisions to do with climate change. Youth will be affected by the decisions we make now for the rest of their lives, but are not seriously involved in making those decisions. The current Climate and Environment Commission has no designated seat for youth. This means that the commission lacks the valuable lived experience and perspectives of youth. It is imperative that youth's voices are considered when addressing climate change.

Youth Commission Meeting Monday, May 9, 2022

Action Item: **Adding a youth member to the Environment and Climate Commission**
M/S/Kaplan-Pettus/Thompson: Aye's: Weisberg, Kaplan-Pettus, Chokkalingam, Schlosberg, Thompson, Powell, and Jay. Noe's: None. Abstain: None. Absent: Sanders

BACKGROUND

In 1979 the City Council, by establishing the Youth Commission, recognized the importance of elevating the voices of young people in the city policy process. The enabling legislation of the Youth Commission states that the goal of the commission is to “give youth a voice in effecting City policy and services”. Since that time, the Youth Commission has done its best to navigate city policy bureaucracy and elevate the needs of youth in our city. However, youth voices have been lacking in the majority of city policy decisions.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

There are no direct environmental impacts of this proposal. However, youth have the most to lose from the future of our environment and decisions about sustainability and hence should have a seat at the table when discussing environmental policy.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

The proposal would expand youth involvement in city policymaking and better fulfill the vision laid out in the enabling legislation of the Youth Commission. The Environment and Climate Commission will benefit from the youth perspective. The youth member will help the commission understand the needs and capabilities of youth in our city. The youth member will help the commission to harness the power of young people’s experiences to better fulfill their mission. Young people will need to be part of our city’s, and our world’s, long-term environmental approach. This young person should not be tokenized but should be a full voting member of the commission. The commission should be required to fully engage youth in their planning process. The only way to ensure youth have a fair voice on the commission is if they are treated with respect and dignity by being allowed to fully participate and vote on all matters before the commission. If the city fails to give the youth member of the commission a full vote they risk the commission ignoring young people’s perspectives on this critical issue.

We recommend that the Student Director on the Berkeley Unified School Board nominates the youth commissioner and that the full board confirms their choice. This will better ensure that the representative is in line with the interests of the youth and reduce the risk of over politicization of the appointee.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

We also considered the City of Berkeley Youth Commission appointing the new youth commissioner to the Environment and Climate Commission. We would support this if council feels it is a better approach.

CITY MANAGER

The City Manager supports youth participation in the City’s boards and commissions. Currently, a student/youth in Berkeley may be appointed by the Mayor or a Councilmember to 26 of the City’s 30 commissions. With regards to expanding the number of seats on the Environment and Climate Commission (ECC) to reserve seats for persons between 12 and 19 years old, there are some potential alternatives or considerations that the council may wish to weigh.

- Raise the lower end of the age range from 12 to 14 or limit the designated seats to high school students. Commissions often meet until 9pm or 10pm in the evening, which may be difficult for middle school students. If the students are not able to attend regularly for the duration of the meeting, their absence can affect the quorum of the commission and the commission's ability to conduct business.
- Modify the ECC enabling legislation to require that one or two of the nine seats on the ECC to be filled with a "student" as defined. There are other city commissions that have reserved seats for certain interest groups or categories of commissioners (Mental Health Commission, Design Review Commission).
- Consider adding the additional seats as part of a pilot program or add a sunset date to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the additional reserved appointments to determine if permanently expanding the membership is the best course of action.
- Clarify the intent to limit this practice to the ECC. Significant expansion of this practice would cause a large shift in how commission appointments are made and could result in requests for reserved seats from other agencies or interest groups.

CONTACT PERSONS

Nina Thompson, Chair, Youth Commission

Ginsi Bryant, Secretary, Youth Commission, 981-6678

Attachments:

1: Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. ##-###

AMENDING THE ENABLING LEGISLATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE COMMISSION (3.82) TO: ADD A SEAT TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE COMMISSION

WHEREAS, Youth (persons under 18 years of age) are unable to vote in council or mayoral elections; and

WHEREAS, youth (persons under 18) are not represented in the City of Berkeley Environment and Climate Commission; and

WHEREAS, the voices of youth (persons under 18) have valuable ideas for policy; and

WHEREAS, youth (persons under 18) are capable of serving and participating in city commissions; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Berkeley amends the enabling legislation of the Environment and Climate Commission (Section 3.82) to:

1. Add a seat to the Environment and Climate Commission.
2. The Berkeley Unified School District Board of Directors Student Director shall nominate the new youth commissioner.
3. The Berkeley Unified School District Board of Directors shall confirm the appointment to the Environment and Climate Commission,
4. The following desirable criteria may guide, but not restrict, the Berkeley Unified School District Board of Directors in making appointments:
 - a) To be residents of the City;
 - b) To be between the ages of twelve and eighteen;
5. The youth commissioner shall serve for no more than two years on the Environment and Climate Commission as the appointee of the Berkeley Unified School District.
6. The youth commissioner may continue to serve on the Environment and Climate Commission in the event they are no longer between the ages of 12-18.
7. The youth commissioner may be re-appointed in accordance with the provisions of Sections [2.04.030](#) through [2.04.130](#).
8. The youth commissioner shall be a fully-appointed member of the Environment and Climate Commission.