

**BE/DBI Committee**

Meeting Notes 6/21/2023

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**Committee Members:** (17 positions, 9 = Quorum)

- x Santosh Kuruvilla, Exeltech – Co-Chair
- x Brenda Nnambi, Sound Transit – Co-Chair
- x Irene Reyes, Excel Supply – Co-Chair
- Jackie Bayne, WSDOT OEO
- Stephanie Caldwell, Absher Construction
- Lekha Fernandes, OMWBE
- x Shelly Henderson, Mukilteo School District
- x Aleanna Kondelis, Hill International
- x Keith Michel, Forma Construction
- x Cathy Robinson, University of Washington
- x Young Sang Song, Song Consulting
- Cheryl Stewart, Inland Northwest AGC
- Chip Tull, Hoffman Construction
- Charles Wilson, DES
- Linda Womack, MBDA
- x Olivia Yang, Washington State University
- Janice Zahn, Port of Seattle
- x

**Stakeholders, Staff & Guests:**

- Talia Baker, DES
- Patricia Collins, Maul Foster & Alongi, Inc.
- Sharon Harvey, OMWBE
- Scott Middleton, MCAWW
- Mark Nakagawara, City of Seattle
- Michele Willms

**Meeting started at 1:03 pm**

Talia informed the committee that during the hybrid CPARB meeting on May 11, 2023, CPARB reactivated this committee. Talia thanked people for attending. This committee can now begin working on the next step from the BE/DBI Legislative Report.

**Discussion Highlights:**

**1. Establish Leadership**

The Former Co-Chairs Olivia Yang and Santosh Kuruvilla would like to step down from leadership. They recommended Lekha Fernandes from OMWBE as Chair of this committee. Sharon Harvey from OMWBE indicated that Lekha was on vacation and that Lekha had asked Sharon to inform the committee that neither Lekha nor Sharon can Chair the committee.

Former Co-Chair Kuruvilla said that given the fact that the committee needs to pick up where it left off, put the three tenants into practice, create consistency in language, and evaluate and bring forth effective strategies and opportunities for firms to compete, it would be good to have new membership and refresh the group. He feels that it is important to have an OMWBE representative in a leadership role.

Former Co-Chair Yang expressed OMBWE is the natural step to take a leadership role.

Irene Reyes thought that Lekha was taking on leadership. She believes the individuals that work with DBI and are subject matter experts are what the committee needs. Former Co-Chair Kuruvilla agreed with this.

Brenda Nnambi indicated that she agreed with what had been said regarding OMWBE. She was not sure about how much Lekha was involved in discussions regarding this work and this committee but said that it might be good to have an offline conversation with Lekha about the importance of OMWBE being involved.

Talia pointed out that there can be several Co-Chairs to share the duties and workload.

Former Co-Chair Yang indicated she had had offline conversations with Lekha and had the impression she was willing to lead and has great ideas for the next phase of this committee. Last year this committee submitted a legislative report and then helped update statute to address some of the issues identified in the report, but there are new challenges. She asked if this committee might be able to address Prompter Pay or identify training to help small businesses grow. She feels it necessary to balance the focus of the last 20

years on building a supportive culture, access to capital, and access to training and access to opportunity. Much of this comes from OMWBE.

Former Co-Chair Kuruvilla said that OMWBE leadership is important because it is the keeper of the Linked Deposit Loan Program. He pointed out that access to credit is important as smaller firms struggle with accessing credit, opportunities, and training. OMWBE is the gatekeeper of capital, so it makes sense that OMWBE is part of this committee's leadership, and it does not have to be Lekha.

Sharon indicated she needs time to discuss this with Lekha, and right now neither of them has capacity. She has heard what people are saying and thinks it's possible Curtis Bennett might be a candidate. She will share the concerns of the committee and desire to have OMBWE in a working leadership role with help of multiple Co-Chairs.

Former Co-Chair Kuruvilla indicated he could be a Co-Chair but feels it would be good to have others who have not yet chaired. Talia indicated it was important to establish preliminary leadership to make sure the committee has consistency with these meetings. Once the committee establishes leadership, it will better be able to identify the schedule and steps forward. Additionally, committee leaders can help with scheduling and meeting support. When Former Co-Chair Yang and Former Co-Chair Kuruvilla were the leadership, Former Co-Chair Yang's staff helped with the scheduling. This helps Talia as she is supporting six CPARB committees and has limited capacity. If someone has staff who can schedule the meetings and can forward her the meeting information that would be her preference.

Irene suggested Former Co-Chair Kuruvilla and herself be acting, not permanent, Co-Chairs until the committee is able to bring OMBWE on board. Former Co-Chair Kuruvilla agreed to be an acting Co-Chair and reiterated that it would be good to have OMBWE be in leadership. Irene asked Brenda Nnambi if she would like to join as an acting Co-Chair and Brenda agreed that she would be an acting Co-Chair.

Talia confirmed that Brenda Nnambi, Irene Reyes, and Santosh Kuruvilla are acting Co-Chairs.

Co-Chair Kuruvilla suggested that committee leadership should be added to the agenda at the next CPARB meeting so that the next steps can be endorsed by CPARB.

Co-Chair Nnambi observed while looking at the committee list that there may be people who are not present at the meeting, and they may be interested. She suggested that Frank Boykin at MBDA might be invited. Talia asked that Frank's email address be sent, and Co-Chair Reyes said she would email it.

Talia said that Chip Tull had communicated he could not attend today, and that she had not heard from other members who were not in attendance. She suggested committee members reach out to stakeholder who may be interested in participating with this committee and send Talia any updates for the distribution list to her at the CPARB inbox ([CPARB@des.wa.gov](mailto:CPARB@des.wa.gov)).

Co-Chair Reyes suggested Edwina Martin-Arnold at City of Seattle as a potential committee member. Edwina was the deputy director of OMWBE. Former Co-Chair Yang agreed she would be a good candidate and suggested Co-Chair Reyes should invite her.

Co-Chair Kuruvilla indicated that Bobby Forch wants to be part of this committee. Co-Chair Reyes pointed out that that he was on the stakeholder's list. Talia shared that he was on CPARB's Legislative Drafting Committee, but she was not sure if she had his correct email address. Co-Chair Kuruvilla indicated that Bobby's WSDOT address would be the best way to contact him.

Talia said that the committee needs to identify interested future members and make sure they are added to CPARB's agenda for the September 14th meeting. All interested parties are welcome to participate regardless if they are an official committee member or not.

Co-Chair Reyes suggested everyone review the list of members and stakeholders and let the committee know if there are changes. She shared that Lily Keefe has moved to Seattle Children's Hospital and will send her new contact information to Talia.

Young Sang Song asked what the hourly workload was per week or per month for being a Co-Chair. Co-Chair Kuruvilla said that the reality of previous work was that the committee had to prepare a report for the legislature and the committee had less than a year to do so. So even though Former Co-Chair Yang and Co-Chair Kuruvilla were Co-Chairs, Maja Huff did a lot of the heavy lifting. Co-Chair Kuruvilla had an admin staff member helping and there was also a communications person. There was a lot of active background work. He would guess that was at least one day a week on average.

Former Co-Chair Yang said the dedicated time varies on the product the committee is working on. This committee was in a different place now than when they were writing the Legislative Report that required extra time. The committee has come to consensus about basic principles, and having laid the groundwork, can now turn to implementing what was in the report and will hopefully not be quite so difficult. Former Co-Chair Yang hopes that the committee will pull together a bit more. Part of the difficulty last year was getting the committee to pull in the same direction. She pointed out that it is not just the dedicated hours, but also being patient with the collaboration.

Co-Chair Kuruvilla shared that previously the committee had to divide into two subcommittees and there were subgroups to those groups. With so many layers of work occurring at once the time commitment was about 3–4 FTE's worth per week.

Young emphasized that he wants to participate as support to the Co-Chairs, but as a small business owner, he cannot dedicate an enormous amount of extra time.

Co-Chair Kuruvilla emphasized that OMWBE needs to be actively involved or the committee work will not go very far. Sharon asked for clarification between OMWBE participation vs leadership. Co-Chair Kuruvilla explained that OMWBE needs to be in active leadership, so the group has credibility. Sharon indicated she will bring that information back to OMWBE.

Co-Chair Reyes shared it is a commitment to be in a committee leadership role. Co-Chairs are almost on call because there are last-minute changes to meetings and documentation. She recommended that the Co-Chairs consider an assistant who can do the work if the Co-Chair is not available. Creativity is also an important trait to consider because of the way information needs to be reported. Co-Chair Kuruvilla and Former Co-Chair Yang agreed with these thoughts.

Co-Chair Kuruvilla suggested having Talia to summarize this meeting and ask for direction, backup, and endorsement from CPARB.

Co-Chair Nnambi wondered if the committee should look from a geographic perspective to make sure no areas are missing. The committee might need to include people from southwest Washington. Co-Chair Nnambi may have a few people to suggest and will send those suggestions to Talia.

Talia affirmed that the temporary leadership group is Co-Chair Reyes, Co-Chair Kuruvilla, and Co-Chair Nnambi.

Co-Chair Kuruvilla suggested an action item. He would like the acting Co-Chairs and Former Co-Chair Yang to meet with OMWBE and Lekha to have an action item conversation so the committee can be ready for the upcoming CPARB meeting. Co-Chair Reyes suggested that Talia and Sharon get everyone together. She reminded committee members that the work that has been done has paved the way for an easier process. What is the OMWBE's availability? The committee needs that subject matter expertise. Especially from Lekha, who is an attorney. Sharon affirmed that this was helpful information and noted that she also has a legal background. Talia will work to schedule a meeting about OMWBE engagement. She

reminded the committee that no other committee members could attend the leadership discussion meeting due to committee quorum numbers and the risk of violating the Open Public Meetings Act.

## **2. Review/Update Mission**

Janice Zahn suggested evaluating the bills that were passed and seeing what has come to pass. Co-Chair Kuruvilla pointed to the three bullet points in Section 3 of the report: compile information, identify gaps, make policy or legislation recommendations. Committee members should list best practices as they differ depending on the topic. Former Co-Chair Yang suggested the committee should create a list of best practices, distribute it, and then see what gaps emerge.

Co-Chair Kuruvilla said that these items were a good start and that when leadership is established, the committee gets more direction from CPARB, and after the conversation with OMWBE, the mission can be refined.

Talia shared the Committee webpage and prior mission. She recommended committee members review this and bring suggested changes to the next meeting. Co-Chair Kuruvilla described the report's next steps as a guideline and suggested adding a 4th bullet of developing best practices, identifying gaps and then potential legislative changes to fill those gaps.

Former Co-Chair Yang suggested taking the ideas could come from the BE/DBI Report. She suggested creating a list of best practices, distributing it, and ask stakeholders to identify gaps.

Keith Michel agreed that an inventory and a list about more tangible outcomes does make sense. He shared some of the more technical practical things in the industry, such as how to develop good aspirational goals for a project might be more useful. In the best practice category, there is a wide variance in techniques depending on the method. He sees a lot of inconsistency in reporting, and it would be beneficial for his industry if there was guidance about reporting for project-specific results. Specific examples really make a difference.

Keith appreciated Young's question regarding the time commitment and noted that the committee is not creating a deliverable with an eminent deadline, and he encouraged everyone to keep recruiting. This committee has a lot of potential and will not be the heavy lift it was in June of 2022.

Co-Chair Kuruvilla said that the committee has a good start. Once the leadership is established, after a conversation takes place with OMWBE, and the committee gets direction from CPARB, the bullets might crystallize a little more.

## **3. Establish Meeting Schedule**

Former Co-Chair Yang suggested setting 90-minute meetings in July and August. That will give the committee a target to work backwards from and get together with OMBWE. Then in July the committee could elect new leaders and start to put together the mission and scope of work. Then the committee could act in August and report back in September. She suggested the third Wednesday of July and August. If the time does not work with new leadership, the schedule can be adjusted.

Talia established July 19 and August 16 from 1:30 to 3 and the Co-Chairs agreed.

## **4. Forward Planning**

Talia stated that the agenda items for the July 19 meeting are to elect leadership, further clarify the mission, and begin to identify potential legislation topics. Committee members should recruit people in the community as stakeholders and potential voting committee members. All recruits will be stakeholders until

the committee leadership requests additional appointments at the September 14<sup>th</sup> CPARB meeting. It is important that new members are committed to showing up and doing the work.

**Next Meeting:**

Talia asked the committee if there were any additional items for the agenda other than electing leadership, further clarifying the mission, and beginning to identify legislation topics. Former Co-Chair Yang suggested that this was sufficient and that after the meetings with the Co-Chairs and OMWBE they may add things to the agenda.

After clarifying that there were no other topics, Former Co-Chair Yang moved that the committee adjourn.

**Action items:**

1. Sharon Harvey will report to Lekha the concerns of the committee and desire to have OMBWE in a working leadership role with help of multiple Co-Chairs.
2. Sharon will reach out to Curtis Bennett as a possible candidate for OMWBE in a Co-Chair role.
3. Irene will forward Frank Boykin's email to the CPARB inbox.
4. Irene will invite Edwina Martin-Arnold at City of Seattle as a potential committee member.
5. Irene will send Lily Keefe's new contact information Seattle Children's Hospital to Talia.
6. Talia will add Frank Boykin from MBDA, Edwina Martin-Arnold, and Lily Keefe to the updated distribution list.
7. Co-Chair Nnambi will send potential membership contacts to Talia.
8. Committee Members review the list of members and bring changes to the next meeting.
9. Talia will work to schedule a meeting about leadership strategies with OMWBE and BE/DBI leadership.
10. Committee members review the current committee purpose and bring suggested changes to the next meeting.

Focus efforts around the following:

- Comprehensive review of 39.10 with lens of equity (include RCW 39.04 & 39.80).
- Create consistency in language.
- Evaluate and bring forth effective strategies and opportunities for firms to compete.

**Meeting adjourned at 2:10 pm**

**References/Resources:**

[Business Equity/Diverse Business Inclusion Report. June 2022](#)