

Received 9-06-18
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WEST MULTNOMAH
Soil & Water Conservation District

August 28, 2018

Portland City Council, C/o Council Clerk
1221 SW Fourth Ave., Room 130
Portland, OR 97204

Re: Office of Equity and Human Rights

Dear City Council Members:

The West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District (WMSWCD) is a public service district dedicated to the conservation of soil and water resources for people, wildlife and the environment. As such, our work benefits Portland's overall health and livability. Our work is conducted in close partnership with numerous agencies, organizations and residents including many City of Portland bureaus.

Our Board of Directors has declared that the strength and vibrancy of the District's work rests on principles of diversity, equity and inclusion. Without this commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion the District will be unable to succeed in its mission. In adopting the District's Racial Equity Statement, the Board affirmed that gaining the perspective of many will increase our organization's overall strength and that by working proactively and deliberately to be equitable and inclusive, the District will be more successful in our work.

Our Board of Directors would not have gotten to this point had it not been for the Equity 101 Training provided to us by the Office of Equity and Human Rights, specifically, Koffi Dessou and Judith Mowry. They were instrumental in grounding us in the importance of this work though our recognition and understanding of how the effects of institutional racism and unconscious bias may prevent access to our work and the public benefits that arise from it. I remember one key message that Koffi clearly delivered. "It is about performance." One Board member characterized the training provided as transformative. The effectiveness of the training ties back to the effort invested in developing it. Koffi met with our staff a series of times, with additional communications in-between, to ensure that the training he and Judith delivered would be relevant and impactful. In recognition of these significant contributions to moving our equity work forward we awarded the City of Portland's Office of Equity and Human Rights our *2017 Government Partner of the Year Award*.

We commend the Council's vision in establishing the Office of Equity and Human Rights. It is truly about building community, a welcoming sense of place and belonging in the greater Portland area. We are grateful that the Office of Equity and Human Rights has the license to extend its services outside of city government and look forward to a lasting collaboration. Please accept our deepest gratitude. We ask the Council for continued and expansive support of the Office of Equity and Human Rights so other organizations and communities can benefit from the Office's work in a manner similar to our experience.

Sincerely, 

Terri Preeg Riggsby, WMSWCD Board Chair