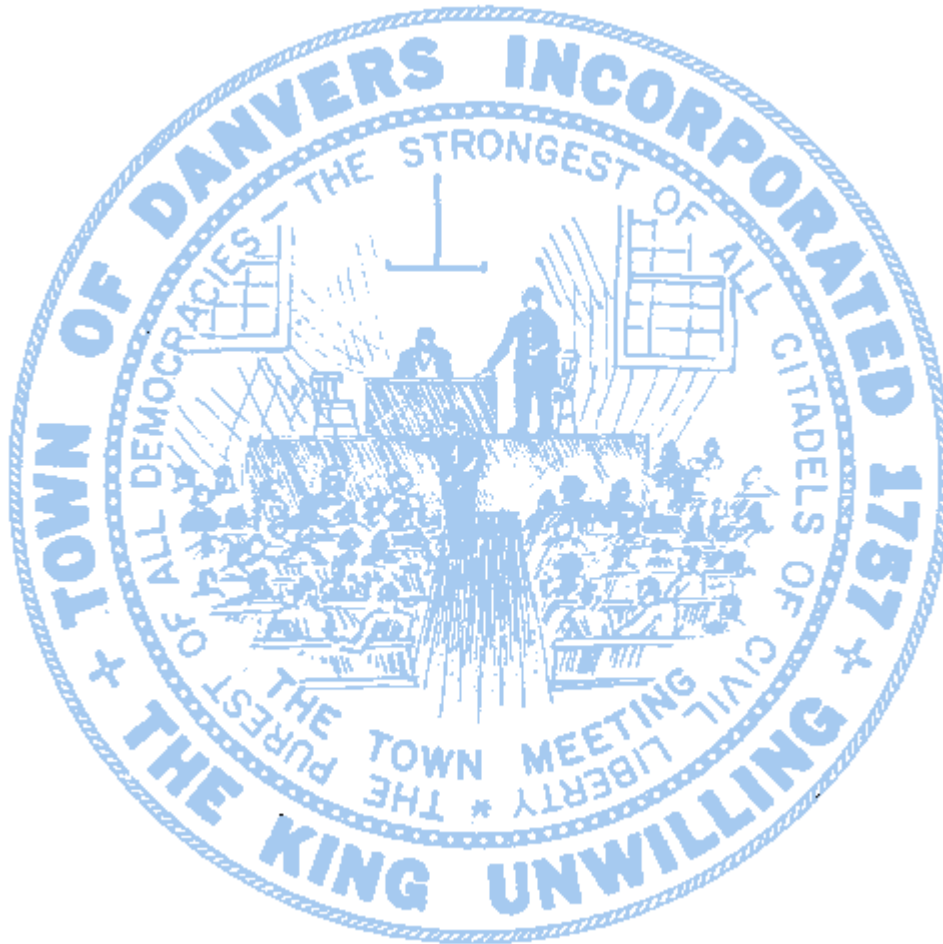


Welcoming Community Working Group



Final Report to the Danvers Select Board

April 20, 2021

Findings & Recommendations



Town of Danvers

Welcoming Community Working Group

Robert Amerault | Steve Bartha | Maureen Bernard | Rev. Pam Cochrane
Adrienne Costa | Dutrochet Djoko | Donna Hopkins | James Lovell
Mike Powers | Nova Samodai | James Shafner | Marshunda Smith
Robert Sullivan | Gardner Trask | Julianny Vittini

M e m o r a n d u m

To: Danvers Select Board
From: Welcoming Community Working Group
Date: March 19, 2021
Subject: Our findings and recommendations

Our group was created by the Town Manager, at the direction of the Select Board, in response to the local controversy caused by the flying, and subsequent removal, of Thin Blue Line American Flags on the back of several Danvers Fire Department vehicles in August 2020 (Section 4).

Specifically, we were asked to look for ways to move the community beyond this specific controversy toward a broader discussion about how we, as a community, can work to ensure (a) that our first responders are receiving the support they need to do their jobs effectively and (b) that marginalized members of our community feel welcome.

In this report, you will find an overview of our work, a summary of our preliminary discussions, a list of resources we reviewed and discussed, and recommendations we believe will advance both goals we were asked to explore and help to create a stronger, more welcoming, and more inclusive community.

Once our group established a common understanding with one another, we then spent several months brainstorming and discussing specific ideas for next steps, including programs, trainings, community conversations, events, speaker series, etc. Our recommendations, which range from individual actions to community-wide events, fell into four distinct categories:

- Dialogue & Engagement,
- Communication & Outreach
- Training & Organizational Assessment
- Recognition

The full list of ideas/recommendations can be found in Section 2 of our report.

From our readings and group discussions at the beginning of this process, we made and identified the following observations and takeaways:

- The first responders in our group made clear that there was no malintent when the thin blue line flag was flown on the fire trucks; it was intended to show support to coworkers and their families. However, there was consensus acknowledgement that this symbol has, over time, come to represent more than just support for fallen officers.

- The Town was swept up in a much broader and emotionally charged debate last summer/fall that made it difficult for people to listen to, let alone understand, different perspectives.
- From the articles/videos we read and watched, the difference between *institution* and *individual* became clear: you can question an institution without condemning the individuals who represent that institution. (Example from Birdcage article: almost all black men experience bad policing even though very few officers engage in bad policing.)
- There was consensus that marginalized members of the community should not be made to feel that the Town of Danvers values some groups over others.
- Communication is key: it is important to hear from our marginalized communities, get them engaged in conversation, and to understand what they need to feel supported, then put that into practice. The same holds true for first responders.
- Everyone wants Danvers to become stronger, more inclusive, and welcoming to all.
- The questions, then, are: What are the things we should be doing as a town/organization? How can/should we support our first responders? Do we need a symbol/celebration?

Three final points.

1. To achieve many (or perhaps any) of the various recommendations that follow, we believe it is critical to engage new resident stakeholders in this work, targeting the youth (where possible), and recruiting and empowering different community groups to participate.
2. A theme that emerged throughout our work was how to incorporate the concept of “Danvers Tomorrow” into all of this – what do we want to be? who do we want to be? Doing justice to this question, we think, will require robust community outreach, engagement, and strategic planning.
3. Related to the first two points, doing this work – the implementation – will require an investment of time, energy, and resources from staff, volunteers, and community organizations alike.

We appreciate having had the opportunity to work on these important issues on behalf of the Select Board and, although our Working Group will dissolve with the acceptance of this report, many of us look forward to engaging in the work ahead while wearing our various other stakeholder hats.

We look forward to joining you for your discussion of this report on April 20, 2021 and will be happy to answer questions you may have at that time.

Resources

Documents, articles, and reports we read and discussed (Section 5):

1. Rethinking our Roles as Servant Leaders, PM Magazine, June 2020
2. Beyond the Birdcage: Insights to Understand, Analyze, and Improve, PM Magazine, June 2020
3. Memo from R. Sullivan to S. Bartha dated January 11, 2021, regarding DPD training / programs
4. Better Together Community Action Plan, Decatur, GA (2015)
5. How to Explain Systemic Racism to Non-Liberals Like Me, Washington Post, July 14, 2020

Videos we watched and discussed (available through the links below):

1. How to Talk about Race: Eric Deggans at TEDx Bloomington (9:46):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UojLHDG_Y4w
2. A Conversation with the Police - Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man (22:31):
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=pM-HpZQWKT4>

List of Ideas

Welcoming Community Working Group

Finalized at the March 19, 2021 meeting

Dialogue & Engagement

1. Create spaces and frameworks for all interested community members to continue to learn about issues related to race, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) both in their everyday lives as well as in the broader context; provide a variety of resources, including guest speakers, video/film, books, community conversations, workshops, etc., related to these topics; work through local boards, our faith community, outside consultants, non-profits, affinity groups, etc.
 - (1) Speakers series to start community conversations on race and inclusion.
 - (2) Create small diverse programs to engage communities – book clubs/play activities.
 - (3) Community Calendar, e.g., open mic nights, speaker series, book clubs, workshops, etc.
 - (4) Partners could include: HRIC, DanversCares, Students United For Acceptance, the Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE), National League of Cities Race, Equity, and Leadership (REAL) program, the Anti-Defamation League, MMA, etc.
 - (5) Conduct surveys with the community to learn what is welcoming or unwelcoming about Danvers, and how to become even more welcoming to underrepresented groups, something like a “Danvers Self Audit.”
 - (6) Include Town info. in Welcome Wagon packets with focus on equity and inclusion.
 - (7) Make the Danvers Website more user friendly, interactive, and useful.
2. Incorporate multi-cultural / DEI elements into established local events & look for new ways to cross-pollinate, e.g., school curricula, international food Fridays in the schools, international events during Family Festival, adding multi-cultural groups to Summer Concert Series, partner with affinity groups to plan library events, etc.
 - o Example: “Danvers Day” (post COVID, of course) where local groups, including first responders, town officials, and all other affiliated groups in our town can have booths, food, activities, etc., to generate conversation, understanding, and community; provide structure and purpose to the event by focusing on the goal of being a welcoming community, developing an awards program, inviting keynote speakers, etc.
3. Consider sign campaign for the business community like Kennebunkport, Maine’s “All are Welcome Here.” →
4. Work with local business and provide tips on how to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all citizens; consider award/recognition program, e.g. Decatur, Georgia’s “Welcoming Business Award” program for local businesses that create a welcoming and inclusive business environment.



Communication & Outreach

5. Document and communicate the good work first responders are already doing to engage and support both the community at large as well as marginalized groups, specifically: social media, website, events, videos, community forums, etc.
 - (1) Educate our citizens about what first responders do, how they serve our community members, and that they are there to help and support residents.
 - (2) Examples of outreach ideas include:
 - (a) hosting use of force forums where public can learn about our policies and ask Qs
 - (b) reporting to the public the results of our annual bias-based review
 - (c) communicating the trainings already in place (e.g., implicit bias, restorative justice, fair and impartial policing, et al)
 - (d) sharing and discussing crime statistics by category with the community.
6. Be intentional when recruiting more diverse groups to join Citizen Police Academies; promote on social media, in the press, and on specific platforms utilized by marginalized groups.
7. Increase police/citizen interaction hosting a variety of events: open houses, national night out, meet and greets, Coffee with a Cop, Cocoa with a Po-Po, Franks with the Fuzz, etc.
8. Work with DCAT or DHS (or both) to create content spotlighting departments/service areas (“Danvers in Action”); encourage other community groups / businesses to do the same. Platforms may include DCAT, Facebook Live, YouTube, and other social media platforms. Recognizing that different platforms cater to different audiences.
9. Support a new program whereby Town employees will be permitted and encouraged to spend up to two or three days per year volunteering with local charitable, non-profit, or social service organizations (from a pre-approved list). Coordinating this program could be one of the responsibilities of the Director of Equity & Inclusion (recommended in #10 on this list of ideas) with input from the Human Rights & Inclusion Committee, Schools, Police, and Social Services. These service days would deepen connection between the community and its local government.

Training & Organizational Assessment

10. Create a Director of Equity and Inclusion position to work on: training, recruitment, staff support, community events/outreach, grants/funding, communication, school curricula, etc.
11. Compile demographic information on the Town workforce, Town Meeting, boards/committees; recruit candidates broadly to ensure our local government reflects the community it serves.
 - (1) Citizens Academy – choose a more diverse group to learn about the Town functions.
 - (2) Expand our recruitment process to find more diverse pools of candidates.
12. Review internal structures, processes, policies, regulations, and outcomes to ensure local government is equitable in its day-to-day practices, and as it addresses future challenges and pursues new initiatives.

13. Provide staff and volunteers with relevant training, support, and professional development to ensure equity / inclusion exists (a) within departments and (b) in service to the community:
 - (1) How the legacy of systemic racism how that impacts local government policy today
 - (2) Unconscious / Implicit bias and how that manifests itself in service delivery
 - (3) Fair and Impartial Policing & Restorative Justice (PD)
 - (4) Various trainings sponsored by ADA, ADL, NLC, GARE, etc.
14. Let the public know what trainings our employees are completing and why; connect this outreach to the Core Values adopted by Town of Danvers employees in 2018 (Exhibit A).

Recognition

15. Consider establishing a first responder week to recognize local first responders
 - Groups could include Police, Fire, EMS, healthcare/public health workers, DPW/Utilities
 - Design events/actions to say “thank you”
 - Week of October 28, designated by Congress as National First Responders Day in 2018
16. Ask Town Manager to develop a general flag policy, including designated sites and times where approved flags can be flown, and create a landing page on website for policy / description.
 - Example: Rainbow Flag proposal from HRIC to fly pride flag year-round at Town Hall, High School, and Library & at other Town sites each June. (Exhibit B)
17. Engage in a process to develop and design a symbol unique to Danvers to be used to recognize and celebrate local first responders who work every day to uphold the organization’s core values (Exhibit A) in service to the community.
 - Ask DHS student groups (e.g. DECA, SUFA, other?) to develop candidate symbols
 - Symbol to be chosen by a committee consisting of the police and fire union presidents (with input from members), the Police Chief, the Fire Chief, the Town Manager, and the Chair of the Human Rights & Inclusion (HRIC) Committee.
18. Consider flying the National Law Enforcement & Fallen Firefighters Memorial Flags during first responder week and other appropriate times.
 - George Nowak (PD) & Matt Smith (FD)
 - <https://nleomf.org/>
 - <https://www.firehero.org/>



Exhibit A: Vision & Values Statement

Exhibit B: HRIC Pride Flag Request

DANVERS VISION AND VALUES

Vision Statement

“We as employees of the Town of Danvers are fully committed to providing service excellence to every person who visits, works, or resides in our town. In upholding our core values, we are dedicated to inspiring responsible growth while preserving the character of Danvers.”

Our Core Values

Inclusion

Respect diverse ideas, perspectives, and individuals.

Integrity

Act with honesty, trust, and transparency, while respecting confidentiality.

Accountability

Accept responsibility for personal and professional performance.

Positivity

Demonstrate an optimistic, can-do attitude with the goal to achieve best results.

Collaboration

Work cohesively through effective communication to foster partnerships within, across, and beyond the community to attain shared goals.



Town of Danvers Select Board

Daniel C. Bennett, Chairman | Maureen A. Bernard | William H. Clark, Jr. | David A. Mills | Gardner S. Trask III

1 Sylvan Street, Danvers, Massachusetts 01923 | p: 978-777-0001 | f. 978-777-1025
www.danversma.gov

At their meeting of August 20, 2020, the Human Rights & Inclusion Committee voted to adopt the following Rainbow Flag Policy and recommended that the Danvers Select Board consider the same:

Danvers Rainbow Flag Policy

We fly the Rainbow Flag in Danvers to convey hope, peace, inclusion and welcome.

This affirmation is consistent with the June 2017 Statement of the Danvers Human Rights and Inclusion Committee Reaffirming Danvers as a Safe Community, which says, among other things, that “we are committed to assuring that all persons in our town feel safe and welcome” and that “we embrace and proclaim our cherished history, by which Danvers welcomes all peoples.”

It is also consistent with the Core Values adopted by Town of Danvers employees in February 2018; indeed, the very first value was Inclusion, with a commitment to “respect diverse ideas, people, and perspectives.”

Our policy is to fly the rainbow flag year-round at DHS, Town Hall, and the Library, which represent the three main sectors of our local government. Additionally, during the month of June we will fly the rainbow flag at the Police Department, both Fire Stations, the Public Works Yard, the Senior Center, and at the other six school sites. We also encourage other local businesses, organizations, schools, and residences to fly the rainbow flag in support of all citizens of and visitors to Danvers.

--- Danvers Human Rights & Inclusion Committee (August 20, 2020)

11/12/20 Memo to DSB

9/18/20 Statement on Thin Blue Line Flag




Town of Danvers

Office of the Town Manager

Steve Bartha | Town Manager
1 Sylvan Street, Danvers, Massachusetts 01923 | p: 978-777-0001 | f: 978-777-1025
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M e m o r a n d u m

To: Select Board Members
From: Steve Bartha, Town Manager 
Date: November 12, 2020
Subject: Welcoming Community Working Group

The purpose of this memorandum is to update you on recent activity related to the adopted goal of ensuring Danvers remains a welcoming community for all residents, regardless of age, race, sexual orientation, creed, or physical ability.

On October 20, 2020, the Select Board (the Board) directed me to pursue the following goal as one of my five strategic objectives for the current fiscal year:

Work with internal / external stakeholders to pursue the goals laid out in the 9/18/20 Joint Statement – to ensure that Danvers is a welcoming and inclusive community to all

The goals (described in the attached Joint Statement as opportunities) are excerpted below:

- 1. Listen to our first responders, understand their frustration, and find ways to reaffirm our support for them in ways that do not feel unwelcoming to our neighbors.*
- 2. Partner with our neighbors to understand their experience in Danvers and see if we can make Danvers feel as welcoming to them as it feels to us.*

And, the desired outcome, also from the Joint Statement, was expressed as follows:

We want Danvers to be a welcoming community. We want it to be a welcoming place for police officers and firefighters who work hard and deserve to feel supported, and we want it to be a welcoming place for long-time residents, new residents, young residents, old residents, LGBTQ residents, black residents, white residents, and every shade in between.

In parallel to the adoption of this goal, the Board also prepared the following warrant article for consideration at the October 26, 2020 Special Town Meeting. The article was supported unanimously by the Finance Committee prior to the Town Meeting, and was supported unanimously by Town Meeting Members on October 26th:

(1) to express its appreciation and support of Danvers first responders and their families as they work to preserve a safe and secure community, (2) to reaffirm its commitment to providing the training, tools, and equipment necessary to protect their health and safety and the health and safety of community members, (3) to acknowledge the vital role first responders have and continue to play as essential workers in the midst of this global pandemic, and (4) to express its condolences and deep sense of gratitude for those first responders who make the ultimate sacrifice in service to their communities.

Since then, I have recruited a diverse set of stakeholders representing a broad range of viewpoints to join the Welcoming Community Working Group. The membership of the Working Group includes:

- Reverend Pamela Cochrane, Maple Street Church
- Marshunda Smith, North Shore NAACP
- Gardner Trask, Select Board
- Maureen Bernard, Select Board
- Dutrochet Djoko, Human Rights & Inclusion Committee
- Donna Hopkins, Human Rights & Inclusion Committee
- Nova Samodai, Town Meeting Member
- Sonya Shaffaval, Town Meeting Member
- Mike Powers, Town Meeting Member
- Rob Sullivan, Town Meeting Member, Police Lieutenant, current HRIC Liaison
- Pat Ambrose, Police Chief
- Adrienne Costa, Police Patrol Officer
- Bob Amerault, Fire Chief
- James Shafner, Fire Captain
- Julianny Vittini, HR Generalist
- Steve Bartha, Town Manager

Our plan is to hold an introductory meeting after Thanksgiving, and then meet as often as is necessary this winter, until we are prepared to deliver a set of recommendations to the Board (likely in early spring) for how to advance the aforementioned goals. We hope to work quickly, but judiciously, in order to do justice to these important topics.



Town of Danvers

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Joint Statement from the Town of Danvers on the Thin Blue Line Flag

September 18, 2020

To the Danvers Community:

It has been an emotional and educational few weeks for our community, as we've discussed the meaning and power of symbols, how best to make our first responders feel supported, and how best to make every member of the Danvers community feel included. The four of us found ourselves at the center of this discussion, even though the discussion itself is bigger than any of us, the symbol itself, or the Town of Danvers.

A handful of those participating in this discussion were uncivil, but most were not. Comments at the Select Board's September 2nd Community Conversation, and most of the email and phone correspondence we have received, has been well-reasoned, well-intentioned, and respectful. To the hundreds of residents who made their voices heard, we thank you.

Local government is only successful through the active participation of its residents, so we hope that some of those who recently engaged with us for the first time will look for ways to stay engaged, whether that be volunteering, running for Town Meeting, or simply staying in touch with us. Here is a link to get you started on your journey:

<https://www.danversma.gov/documents/talent-pool-application/>

Much of the disagreement these past three weeks was concerning the meaning and power of a *symbol*: its historical meaning, its more recent use, its importance to the first responder community, and the painful connotations it creates for some members of the Danvers community. The *substance* of the discussion, however, was rock-solid agreement on the respect and appreciation this community has for the hard work, sacrifice, and dedication of our first responders. At the Community Conversation, the Select Board members disagreed on the flag (symbol), but all five expressed their unequivocal support of our public safety personnel (substance). The same was true for the hundreds of residents who engaged with us in this process: half expressed *support* for their first responders and *approval* of the flag; the other half expressed *support* for their first responders and *disapproval* of the flag. The theme (support for public safety) was and is clear.

If nothing else, this discussion has helped us to identify several opportunities moving forward.

First, it is clear that the broader debate over police reform, racial justice, and police brutality like we saw this summer in Minneapolis, has landed on our shores in Danvers, and that this debate has taken a toll on the morale and optimism of our public safety professionals. This makes us sad, and we need to address it. We need to listen to our first responders, understand their frustration, and find ways to reaffirm our support for them in ways that do not feel unwelcoming to our neighbors.

Second, we need to listen to what our neighbors are saying. Their negative reaction to this symbol has almost everything to do with what is happening in our *country* and almost nothing to do with what is happening in our *community*. We need to partner with these residents to understand their experience in Danvers and see if we can make Danvers feel as welcoming to them as it feels to us.

Because, ultimately, that is the point. We want Danvers to be a welcoming community. We want it to be a welcoming place for police officers and firefighters who work hard and deserve to feel supported, and we want it to be a welcoming place for long-time residents, new residents, young residents, old residents, LGBTQ residents, black residents, white residents, and every shade in between.

That is something we, and hopefully everyone, can agree on.

Respectfully,

Daniel C. Bennett, Chair of the Danvers Select Board
Robert Amerault, Fire Chief
Patrick Ambrose, Police Chief
Steve Bartha, Town Manager

**Documents, Articles, and Reports referenced
by Welcoming Community Working Group**



Rethinking Our Role as **Servant Leaders**

BY JOHN SHAW, ICMA-CM

In just a couple of months, it will be six years since Michael Brown was shot and killed by a Ferguson police officer, forcing important conversations on racism, policing, and our judicial system. Long overdue discussions were finally taking place on what African Americans experience in their communities. Many of us who are culturally ignorant had little excuse after the summer of 2014 not to view this experience through just about every medium at our reach. Countless initiatives began far and wide in local governments

throughout the U.S. to attempt to address the frightening realities that define a critical part of life in the African American community. So why, nearly six years later, are we looking not only at some of the same concerns and calls for help, but an even more widespread expression of unrest?

As the former city manager of Ferguson, who served that community for eight years, including at the time of the shooting and subsequent social unrest, I cannot begin to explain the feelings running through me over these last few, utterly tragic,



A protest march led by Michael Brown Sr. to mark the one-year anniversary of the killing of son Michael Brown Jr. in Ferguson.

REUTERS / Rick Wilking - stock.adobe.com

weeks. However, to focus on just one area of my profound sadness and frustration, I feel we must all now recognize that not only can Ferguson happen in any community, it is happening in all of our communities. And instead of heaping the responsibility for reversing the failings of our institutions for African Americans onto our police departments, we as managers need to recognize that it is in fact our responsibility, and that working with our elected officials to implement any needed changes must be our top priority.

Ferguson will forever be a defining characteristic of who I am, because I simply cannot let go of what happened. This is because I know our organizations can be better. Lives need not be lost, nor communities destroyed, in order to get there. Although I am not currently serving in a local government role, I continue to devote time to discussing my experiences with other managers around the country, attempting to develop solutions to how we can make our communities better and safer for everyone. Although one thing I continue to find surprising is how many professionals still feel that what happened in Ferguson would not happen in their communities, for whatever the reason.

If you have heard me present at any number of association conferences, you have heard me describe Ferguson prior to August 2014. If you looked at Ferguson on paper prior to that time, and read about the various initiatives we had in play, you can see why many didn't think Ferguson would happen in Ferguson. It was not an overtly divided community, controlled by nefarious people and staffed by racist police officers, but quite the contrary. Ferguson is a city full of good people, who honestly thought we were heading in the right direction in a number of ways. Unfortunately, it wasn't until the events of that summer and the following fall and winter, that it became clear we in fact were wrong in a number of ways. I was wrong in a number of ways.

When it comes to law enforcement, we implement and engage in various activities to better "connect" the people with the police. We have school resource officers in the schools; we organize programs like "coffee with a cop" or barbecues in the park with pickup basketball games. Sometimes we even have robust community policing initiatives to allow our officers to get to know the residents more personally. But why do we feel that is enough, and why are we putting so much of the

We must begin with introspection, and honestly look within ourselves and our communities.

responsibility on one classification of employee? If our problems are systemic, and come from deep within our systems, the responsibility should lie with the city manager to identify and personally take action.

As a city manager, you have a lot on your plate already, and in a time of crisis, it can be near unimaginable. We are responsible for our residents, our city councils, our employees, as well as our families (who lest we forget experience the crisis first-hand along with us). So, let's start to incorporate a conscious effort to address this crisis, well before we are presented with a tragedy in our towns. We must begin with introspection, and honestly look within ourselves and our communities. Take ownership of the reality we discover. Get out of our comfort zone and engage your residents. Commit to understanding different races and cultures by building it into your life. Develop a true support network with community leaders by literally attempting to live side-by-side and understand their experience. Then engage them, along with your police, your councils, and your staff in reviewing your ordinances and policies to recommend changes. Work internally with your councils and department heads on what you have been collectively missing and give your staff the resources and support they need to do their jobs in a way that's better for them and everyone else. And make sure to communicate this to residents who may still not understand what this crisis is all about.

When city managers first step into their position, there is a list of priorities handed to them by their city councils. These include very real needs such as economic development, addressing old facilities and failing infrastructure, and righting budgets in dire need of realignment. I would argue that while you must certainly continue to work on those issues, there is nothing more important right now than focusing on how your organization can better serve those who are suffering due to our existing systems. Take the necessary steps forward to restore trust and hope so that your community can come together in times of tragedy and crisis. At this moment, we should rethink our role as "servant leaders" and reimagine a new path forward for us to truly live up to that title. **PM**



JOHN SHAW,
ICMA-CM



[Home / News](#)

Beyond the Birdcage: Insights to Understand, Analyze, and Improve

We can take decisive action today to address racial injustice. [PM Special Supplement, June 2020]

By Kurt Wilson, ICMA-CM | Jun 24, 2020 | ARTICLE

I've never met George Floyd. I don't know much about him or the events of May 25. In fact, I haven't even watched the video. Not because I don't care, but because I feel like I've seen it before. Not because it doesn't matter, but because it's so relatable. Mr. Floyd was a 46-year-old Black man who was more than 6 feet tall and whose autopsy listed him as 223 pounds. I too am a 46-year-old Black man who stands more than 6 feet tall and weighs close to 223 pounds.



I literally don't know a single person who looks like me who hasn't experienced the ugly side of policing. But it's an important distinction that while every Black person has been negatively impacted by bad policing, not every police officer has engaged in or condoned bad policing. That's the difference between the institution of policing and individual officers.

Marilyn Frye's analogy illustrates a fictional birdcage used as a punitive device designed to restrict a bird's movement. That's its purpose and it carries out this oppressive mandate unforgettingly. The cage, though, is made of individual bars. Each individual bar has a different mandate — to hold onto the next bar or to provide a climbing platform for the bird. The individual bar helps the bird by protecting it from cats and supporting its toys, cognitively disconnected from the nefarious intentions of the cage. The individual bar may not concur with the cage's mission, but it's the collective efforts of those individual bars that carry out the mission of the entire cage. Good individual officers are like those bars, often well-intentioned and dutifully helping people, while also being associated with something out of their control. One could argue the cage is the institution of policing, but it's also plausible that, since racism is larger than policing, the cage represents something larger.

While my personal background "fits the description," my professional background is very different. I'm a credentialed manager and Cal-ICMA board member with a law enforcement background that includes front line, oversight, and regulatory roles. This means that the policing of Black America rests at the confluence of my personal and professional life. That's a heavy weight to bear. A few years ago, after recognizing the value of my perspective, I conducted my own research on this topic as part of my doctoral

dissertation. Even though it didn't leave me with the quick global solution I hoped, it provided the framework in which I now analyze the issue. It also verified that the history is too impactful to ignore.

Many people are reluctant to consider the historical context because they weren't the ones personally responsible for what happened generations ago. I call this the "It wasn't me" defense. From an individual perspective, it's absolutely true. Law enforcement officers aren't wrong for wanting to be judged on their own actions instead of the actions of some other person, in some other place, at some other time, just because of the color of their uniform. After all, that's the same thing Blacks have been seeking for years — not to be stereotyped or targeted based on the color of their skin.

The difference with cops is that they have a dual role. In addition to their individual capacity, they are a symbol representing the institution of policing — a practice steeped in traditions of both pride and problems that had nothing to do with the individual officer. That means today's officers get to take responsibility for all the good things that other police have done — all the people who have been helped, crimes that have been solved, and lives that have been saved. It also means taking credit for the embarrassing origins, actions, and injustices credited to policing — and that's a long list.

That history fuels the frustration. The rate of abusive policing has not increased. Even a cursory review of complaints clearly demonstrates that it's not a new phenomenon. The heightened awareness is owed to the prevalence of cameras to capture, and social media to distribute, the evidence. If you're wondering what would have happened if there were no video in the Floyd case, just ask anyone who's been abused. For them, the video is vindication for when they told their own story and no one believed them. "Oh, come on, they wouldn't do that!" It's part of the reason that Black people are less likely to trust police and more likely to believe stories of brutality than people whose personal experiences don't align with injustice.

It always looks easy from the outside looking in, but there's no substitute for walking a mile in someone's shoes. Reading a book or subscribing to a predominantly Black entertainment channel is not a substitute and can't tell you what it's like to be Black. Alternatively, being arrested or watching cop shows on tv can't qualify you to understand what it means to be a cop.

Each group's perspective is genuinely understood by members of each group, but few outsiders truly understand what the groups go through. That's precisely why their perspectives are so important and should be represented by those people themselves. It means policies intended to improve the lives of Black people should include input from actual Black people. The same is true of policing. Police accountability boards that prescriptively prohibit participation by police are excluding a critical viewpoint that can't be reproduced by other people.

In order to make progress we must first define what success actually looks like. That definition varies based on our own interests and experiences, but it's more complicated than that. While people on the front lines of the conflict have a vested interest, those not directly affected are apathetic. Progress is difficult to define or achieve when the majority of people are disinterested in the outcome. Awakening a critical mass of people and getting them off the sidelines is a function of capturing their hearts and minds to make them aware of and interested in the benefits of progress. However controversial, releases and protests are designed to do just that.

Protests

The concept of protesting is intentionally disruptive and goes outside the boundaries of traditionally accepted expression, but that's the point. People who have deep-seated beliefs will risk it all to defend them whether or not everyone agrees. People who are on the opposite side of those beliefs and people who are otherwise not engaged tend to be bothered by those protests. But for those seeking to engage the unengaged people, this tactic is effective. Popularity in the moment isn't necessary if the cause is later proved to be just. Modern protests are judged against the standard set by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., but the comparison omits the 1966 Gallop poll showing that two-thirds of America had an unfavorable opinion of King. Sadly, he had to die to become popular and gain support.

As the saying goes, when your only tool is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. We must expand the toolbox of stakeholders in order to get the best results. Passionate protests and reactive legislation shouldn't be the only tools at our disposal. When people feel voiceless or unheard, they reject diplomacy.

Sometimes it's not about what people say, but why they say it. Sometimes it's less about how they express it and why they are expressing it. For some, this is an unacceptable excuse for recent racial protests. Was it equally unacceptable, though, when it applied to armed White protestors at the Michigan statehouse? Their deep-seated belief was to oppose the state's COVID-19 quarantine restrictions. Should the rules be different for the two groups? Should the ability to protest be conditioned on value judgments from public servants?

Protests are rarely the starting point for expression. Rather, they tend to occur when more traditional methods have been exhausted. It's like two people starting with a conversation. If one person doesn't feel heard they may raise their voice and eventually shout in an attempt to be heard. Behavioral science explains that desperation and fear cause people to react irrationally so cranking up the stress won't produce rational behavior.

Within Reach

Progress is within reach. We tend to focus on our differences, but we actually agree on so much. Most officers will concede the problems associated with the institution of policing. The disagreement is more prevalent on the conduct of individual officers. Even with that, though, it's not as if cops have argued that no officer has been wrong or that Blacks accuse every individual officer of being awful — that rage is directed at officers in their capacity as the face of the institution of policing. The disagreement is in the number of bad actors, not the existence of them.

It's about quality, not quantity. We get hung up on assigning labels like "isolated incident," "systemic problem," and "99 percent of them...". If it were about ratios, we would focus on leading causes of death and some controversial results of that for each side. Instead, it's a qualitative problem. Even if there were only one abusive authority figure in America, it would be one too many. Rather than fighting over the prevalence, we should acknowledge that the mere existence of racism is wrong and must be addressed.

A Path Forward

Challenges in the policing of Black America began a long time ago. It means those waiting on a solution are tired of waiting, but it also means that a solution may not be instant. Even if the results can't be immediate, the action spurring those results can be. We can take decisive action today to make improvements. Specifically, we can:

Prepare to be humbled. Take an honest look at the actions of yourself, your community, and your organization. Acknowledge your own limitations and don't pretend to fully understand the needs and perspective of a group if you're not a member. Your own viewpoint has limitations. Not every incident is on your radar and not every incident on your radar is legitimate.

Get people off the sidelines in support of what's right — win hearts and minds to solicit the support of the disinterested and disengaged. Then seek to include them rather than alienate them. This includes good officers who possess the insights and technical expertise to evaluate tactics. As the saying goes, "Nobody hates a bad cop like a good cop."

Recognize that voiceless people will find a way to be heard. Acknowledge that rational behavior diminishes in the presence of fear, anxiety, and frustration. Focus less on what they say and more on why they say it. Hear the source of frustration without getting defensive or passing value judgments.

Take a stand against those who choose to abuse their authority, rather than lumping all officers together and allowing bad behavior to hide behind good behavior. Reject the convenience of trying to fix this problem from a safe distance by using the broad brush strokes that tend to under punish bad behavior and over punish good behavior. Get your hands dirty and collect firsthand data to take aggressive action against individuals with bad behavior.

Don't rely solely on legislative remedies and don't target technical issues without consulting technical experts. Treating symptoms won't cure the disease. Punish the bad behavior of individuals and transform the institution — not the other way around. Short-term political pain may be the path to long-term progress.

These are difficult conversations and even more difficult policy challenges, but just because some of it may be new to you doesn't mean it's actually new. Borrow from the expertise and experiences of people in your community who have relevant insights. I'm happy to help any way I can.



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This article appeared in the PM Special Supplement, [Moments of Change: Leading with Courage and Commitment for Racial and Social Justice](#). If you would like to contribute to future publications on racial and social justice, contact us at pm@icma.org.

January 11, 2021

To: Steve Bartha
From: Rob Sullivan

Re: DHRIC Notes

Sir:

I believe Dee and David were speaking about a presentation I made to the committee in February or March after attending the Massachusetts Civil Rights Symposium. I spoke from notes/outline and some highlighted slides. I presented information that I learned at this training and pointed out that, while some of this is new, at DPD this is something that we have been involved in for a long time. Here are some of the items we talked about:

MA Civil Rights Symposium was a training held on February 11th for police and prosecutors. There was a large turn out with well over 100 attendees and during the day we had a chance to work with each other in smaller breakout work groups. There was a great amount of diversity even among the attendees who were officers or prosecutors who were black, white, Hispanic, straight, gay, lesbian and transgender.

The training was sponsored by the Matthew Sheppard Foundation, Municipal Police Training Committee, Executive Office of Public Safety & Security, International Association of Chief's of Police and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights.

The conference was opened with remarks by Lt. Governor Polito and included presentations by staff of the U.S. Attorney's Office, MA Attorney General's Office, Middlesex District Attorney's Office, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, Stop Hate Project, Public Rights Project and the Matthew Shepard Foundation. We also had a chance to meet with and receive a presentation from Dennis and Judy Shepard.

The goals of the conference were:

- Develop a greater understanding of the need for effective and prompt hate crime enforcement.
- Proficiency in recognizing and identifying bias indicators when responding to a hate crime and enhancing the skills necessary to engage with the victim in a sensitive and respectful manner.
- Enhancing ability to determine what facts are necessary to substantiate the criminal charge and the bias motivation, how prosecutors and police can work together effectively to obtain a conviction, and how to accurately report data.

The training began with an activity where a question was asked, and the attendees could text in a response that was displayed on the screen to the room without identifying the respondent. One of the questions asked was, "Do we need hate crime laws?" I was angered to read two responses. The first was we don't need HC laws because we already have laws that address the underlying crimes being

committed and HC laws punish more severely for a belief or motivation. I noted a counter argument to this response because I had never thought of it in this way. Most people seem to accept that laws regarding terrorism, despite that we already have laws for murder, punish a terrorist who kills based on motivation more severely. And in both types of crimes, terrorism and hate motivated, a single victim may have been involved, but entire communities are put in fear and victimized because so often that is what the crime was intended to do.

The second response was that the law itself is discriminatory because it only protects certain individuals or groups. This is simply untrue. Hate Crime laws protect everyone. We all have a gender, we all have a race or ethnicity, and even in the case if religion it can be argued that we all either have religion or are atheist, and both are equally protected.

What angered me so much was that these were replies from police officers or prosecutors, a group who I would have expected to be more educated or understanding. I'm not completely convinced that these were not planted responses by instructors to get conversations going. But if they were not, it certainly shows that we have a lot of work to do within our own law enforcement community.

There was a ton of information covered –

- Gaining an understanding of these crimes. Hate has widespread impact. Appreciate the impact on the victim, their family and their community. Violence motivated by hate destroys your community and the community you serve.
- Police response to an alleged hate crime sends a clear signal to the community. What if the first statement made by the police chief was “No reason to believe it is a hate crime” vs. “We are investigating the matter fully, including whether it may be a hate crime”.
- Covered federal and state hate crime / civil rights statutes and case laws as well as ways to utilize the MA Civil Rights Act through the AGO.
- Importance of and difficulty with accurately identifying and reporting hate crimes - local, state and national levels. For MA in 2018, the Commonwealth reported 352 hate incidents. However, 283 agencies reported zero data to the FBI's UCR including 43 colleges and universities. 359 agencies submitted data with 79 reporting at least one incident. Nationally, property crimes decreased, but assaults against people were up, accounting for 61% of the 7,120 incidents reported. Personal attacks reached a 16-year high in 2018, with a record number of hate crime homicides (24 murder victims). It is important to report each criminal act that appears to be motivated by bias, regardless of whether hate crime or civil rights charges are referred or prosecuted. Just because a case was not prosecuted due to issues like lack of evidence or lack of victim cooperation, it does not mean that the crime did not occur.
- Reviewed case studies of actual incidents in working groups and presented the groups findings back to the entire class.

We were fortunate to have Dennis and Judy Shepard speak with us. I have been to countless trainings and conferences, met subject matter experts and heard very important and influential people speak – I've been at conferences where we had the director of the secret service, FBI director, SJC Justices and I've been at two events where then Vice President Biden has spoken. But to have a mom and dad stand in the room and tell you about their family, where they lived and worked, about their children growing

up, and the kidnapping, brutal attack and murder of their 21-year-old son, what the police and community response was and where this event has taken them was so moving. In a room of over 100 attendees, you could have heard a pin drop. The only sound that was heard from the audience was the occasional clearing of the throat from someone trying not to cry. It was so powerful, and I think an answer to those who would ask, why do we need hate crime laws.

This training came about as part of the reestablishment of the Governors Task Force on Hate Crimes. This task force was originally formed in 1991 by Governor Weld. After a number of years of inactivity, it was defunded and disbanded by Governor Romney. It was reaffirmed and restructured by Governor Baker in 2017. In 2018 recommendations were made to law enforcement. Among the recommendations were to designate at least one officer to serve as a point person on hate crimes and to serve as a liaison to participate in community outreach, review reports and serve as a resource to the agency. Recommendations were made on to ensure hate crime data is accurately reported and available to the public. A commitment was made to provide specialized training to these officers, regular officer in service training and new recruit officer training through the MPTC at no cost to the local agencies.

This may have been new for many departments, but not Danvers. Here it is what we have been doing for years. In 1998, now retired Lt. Bill Carleton and I took the Governor's Task Force on Hate Crimes training course. Interestingly, the topics then were similar to those taught today – comprehensive overview of hate crimes, legal overview, reporting requirements, response of law enforcement, investigative techniques, policy and protocol, hate crimes in and around schools and effective community response.

The department has had an officer assigned as a liaison to the Diversity Committee, now Human Rights and Inclusion Committee, since its inception. Lt. Carleton was a previous liaison and I now serve in that role.

This liaison has always reviewed reports and worked closely with our crime analyst to ensure the accurate reporting of incidents.

I have conducted in service training for our officers on hate crimes investigation. In training I presented the cases of Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, the cases that would become the Shepard Byrd Act. We covered hate groups and groups active in MA. To counter the – *that could never happen here* – thought, I presented the very little-known Danvers nexus to a planned bombing of the Holocaust memorial in Boston. Leo Felton, when out of prison was living in Ipswich, along with his girlfriend, were communicating with other like-minded individuals through a prison outreach program ran by the hate group, World Church of the Creator. Felton passed counterfeit notes to purchase bomb making materials. He obtained supplies to produce his counterfeit notes from an arts and crafts store in Danvers. Fortunately, Felton was discovered and arrested before he could complete his plans – If I recall correctly the story goes there were warrants for his arrest and an officer stopped at a Dunkin Donuts to get a coffee and recognized Felton in line.

This is an area that the DPD has actively been engaged in and leading the way for years.

During a more recent meeting, I had the opportunity to speak about our community policing and school resource officers. The department has had officers assigned to this role for longer than I have worked for the department. When I started, we had one officer. That role was later expanded to two officers and today there is a sergeant and three officers assigned. At a time when we see some large school districts in the country have eliminated SRO from their schools, we continue to have a strong and positive relationship with our schools, students and parents. Once again, our state and department appear to be ahead of the curve. Recently, the state enacted juvenile justice reforms which codified the notion that SRO are not school disciplinarians. The reform act even decriminalized certain acts when conducted by a student in a school. While in a time of school and mass shootings, SRO's do serve to provide a safe and secure school environment and they also serve as a resource and mentor to students. As a family's needs are specific and not cookie cutter, our SRO's have worked closely with parents, teachers, clinicians, the courts and probation to find the best possible services for each student in need. Many of our SROs are also coaches furthering their ability to connect and mentor students. I pointed out to the committee that at the same time school districts were eliminating all SRO's with comments like they were militant authoritarians over policing minority students, our SRO's had just completed specialized training on mentoring students.

As I am writing some of these details from past meetings, I know that these are not isolated events. Because it is who we are as a department. We have taken so many steps in all areas of our organization towards positive change. We have always been forward looking and more than willing, instead wanting to find better ways that we may provide a service and be impactful in our community. Sure, we don't always get it right or hit it out of the park every time we are up, but we keep working at it and when we get it right, we continue to ask, how can we improve.



THE BETTER TOGETHER COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN FOR EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ENGAGEMENT

ACCEPTED DECEMBER 7, 2015 | DECATUR, GA



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When the City of Decatur released its 2000 Strategic Plan, included among the plan's guiding principles was, "Encourage community interaction." Beneath this broad directive was a goal that stated, "Maintain and encourage racial, ethnic, economic, cultural, and other types of diversity." The 2010 Strategic Plan placed an even stronger emphasis on diversity, with the second of its four guiding principles reading, "Encourage a diverse and engaged community."

VISION: The City of Decatur Will Attain a High Quality of Life for its Residents, Businesses & Visitors Both Today and in the Future		
<p>Introduction: The City of Decatur requested a Strategic Plan that included physical and economic planning while incorporating social goals. The Vision, Principles, Goals and Projects listed below were developed through a collaboration of residents and government, business and institutional leaders. Goals and Projects are aligned under the Principles that they most appropriately support. It should be noted that many of the Goals and Projects do not fit neatly under a particular Principle. In fact, many of the Goals and Projects are interrelated and could support more than one Principle.</p>		
<p>PRINCIPLE A: Manage Growth While Retaining Character Accommodate commercial and residential growth while retaining a small town character within an urban environment.</p> <p>Goal 1: Retain and Enhance The Existing Character Of Commercial Districts Project A: Refine Standards for Development. Project B: Develop and Adopt Standards For Neighborhood Commercial Districts. Project C: Adopt Standards For Fast College Avenue.</p> <p>Goal 2: Encourage A Diversity Of Business Types With Particular Focus On Small Businesses Project A: Diversify the Office Trasee Base. Project B: Encourage Owner Occupied Retail.</p> <p>Goal 3: Protect Existing Neighborhoods While Identifying the Potential For Selected Growth And Adopting Standards That Guide Future Growth Project A: Adopt Standards for New Residential. Project B: Consider Guidelines for Residential Renovation.</p>	<p>PRINCIPLE B: Encourage Community Interaction Develop methods to maximize communication and connection between residents, businesses, institutions and government.</p> <p>Goal 4: Maintain And Encourage Racial, Ethnic, Economic, Cultural And Other Types Of Diversity Project A: Diversify attendance at public events. Project B: Support and expand volunteer activities. Project C: Expand distribution of and promotion community publications.</p> <p>Goal 5: Reinforce Neighborhoods And Develop Connections Between Neighborhoods Project A: Support Decatur Neighborhood Alliance or Similar Organization.</p> <p>Goal 6: Strengthen Communication And Connections Throughout The Community Project A: Improve Communication between residents, the City and Schools. Project B: Support New and Existing Programs that Strengthen Community Connections.</p>	<p>PRINCIPLE C: Provide Quality Services Within Fiscal Limits Provide housing, transportation, environmental quality and public services to Decatur's residents and workers.</p> <p>Goal 7: Increase Opportunities For Economically Diverse Housing For Persons Who Live In White & Decatur Project A: Identify Tax Relief & Other Programs To Aid Elderly. Project B: Provide Housing For People Working In The City. Project C: Develop Programs To Attract Minority Residents. Project D: Develop Programs To Improve Rental Housing.</p> <p>Goal 8: Enhance Mobility In And Through Decatur Project A: Identify Reduce Traffic Volume and Speed. Project B: Improve Sidewalks and Crosswalks. Project C: Improve Sidewalks and Crosswalks. Project D: Improve Bicycle Paths.</p> <p>Goal 9: Continue The Commitment To Environmental Quality Project A: Improve Linkage between Green Spaces. Project B: Preserve and Expand Green Spaces, Wetlands & Trees. Project C: Study Air and Noise Quality Programs.</p> <p>Goal 10: Continue To Provide Quality City And County Services Affordable To The Community Project A: Address Concerns Regarding Taxes For General Operations. Project B: Address Concerns Regarding Taxes For School Operations. Project C: Address Concerns Regarding Quality Of Services. Project D: Improve Quality Of Buildings, Public & Recreational Facilities.</p>



PRINCIPLE B: ENCOURAGE A DIVERSE AND ENGAGED COMMUNITY

Protect and expand diversity among Decatur residents, businesses, and visitors while promoting an innovative, engaged, and informed community.

A truly sustainable community is one that can adapt to a changing world by drawing on the passion, energy, and knowledge of its citizens. For these efforts to be most successful, the community should reflect the diversity found in society as a whole. It is equally important for citizens to feel that they have a stake in the future of their community and that they play an active, engaged role in making it a reality.



Naturally occurring retirement communities allow people to grow old around friends and family in a familiar environment



Decatur should strive to be a place that is accessible and visible for people with disabilities

GOAL 5: MAINTAIN AND ENCOURAGE DIVERSITY OF RACE, ETHNICITY, INCOME, CULTURE, AGE, FAMILY TYPE, AND OTHER KINDS OF DIVERSITY

Task 5A Promote Decatur as a lifelong community that is welcoming to people of all ages and supports programs that allow older residents to stay in their homes, stay in the community, and age in place. Explore options like Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORC) or Senior Village Support Networks that address this task.

Task 5B Continue to encourage the participation of artists and performers that represent a broad range of cultures at festivals and special events. Expand outreach efforts to encourage diverse audience attendance and find methods to measure the results.

Task 5C Develop an outreach plan targeting diverse population groups, including expanded marketing efforts and media outlets, to encourage diverse cultures to live, work, and play in Decatur.

Task 5D Support efforts to expand diversity in community leadership roles.

Task 5E Support programs that help elderly, low-income residents remain in the community.

Task 5F Adopt universal design guidelines to allow new commercial buildings, businesses, and homes to be visitable by those with mobility impairments.

Even the most able-bodied members of society will one day reach periods in their life where their mobility is impaired. Creating housing that is accessible or visitable to a wide range of citizens would benefit both current and future residents, and make the city resilient in the face of demographic changes.

GOAL 6: STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN AND AMONG NEIGHBORHOODS, CITY GOVERNMENT, VOLUNTEER BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS, INSTITUTIONS, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, LOCAL BUSINESSES, AND DECATUR AS A WHOLE

Task 6A Provide communication in a variety of formats to reach a broad audience. Expand the use of social media and electronic tools such as Open City Hall to encourage citizen participation.

City leaders had all of this in mind when they invited a group of 19 residents and business people to work with them to engage the community more deeply in this important work. Given the City of Decatur's documented priorities, the focus of this initiative — named "Better Together" — was not ground-breaking. The approach, however, was because it was envisioned as a way to collaboratively identify specific actions for individuals, organizations, and local government to undertake together and independently. It would also encourage and empower individuals and community-based organizations to take a lead role in making Decatur a more welcoming, inclusive, and equitable place to live, work, and visit.

The volunteer steering committee was called the Better Together Leadership Circle, and it first met in December 2014. After learning more about the themes and issues surrounding Better Together and working as a planning group for several months, the group invited the full community to join in developing a Community Action Plan. This effort began in July 2015 when the Leadership Circle released a community survey to gauge respondents' perceptions of their community and invite them to share their ideas and observations about what makes or does not make Decatur a welcoming and inclusive community. In six weeks, 724 people responded.

The next round of community participation was a facilitated conversation held Saturday, August 29, at the Ebster Recreation Center. More than 250 people attended, and the conversation centered on the broad theme of encouraging a diverse and engaged community, plus two narrower but timely topics: racially-just community policing, and diverse and affordable housing. Participants deliberated in small groups to develop specific action ideas. By the end of the day, they had generated 625 ideas.

The Leadership Circle also invited community members to review and help prioritize a draft set of action items distilled from the survey and the community conversation. **All told, approximately 800 community members invested more than 1,300 hours in the public input phase of the Better Together initiative.**

The resulting Better Together Community Action Plan for Equity, Inclusion, and Engagement enlists individuals, community organizations, and local government in a collaborative effort to make the City of Decatur more welcoming to people from all backgrounds and all walks of life.

Excerpts from Decatur's 2000 and 2010 Strategic Plans. Collaboratively created in partnership with the community, the city's ten year plans provide a prioritized to-do list for city leadership.



In a unanimous vote at their July 20, 2015 meeting, Decatur city commissioners officially endorsed the recommendations of the Better Together Leadership Circle, clearing the way for a broad community process to cultivate a more just, welcoming, inclusive, equitable and compassionate experience for all who visit, live or work in the City of Decatur.

The Plan is organized around six focus areas:

1. Support community participation and engagement among all members of the city's population
2. Prioritize racially-just community policing by improving relationships between community members and law enforcement and ensuring all community members are treated in a just way with equity and respect
3. Ensure the availability of diverse and affordable housing in order to prevent the displacement of existing residents and provide for a variety of housing types and prices
4. Cultivate a welcoming and inclusive retail environment for serving a diverse clientele
5. Maximize the use of public spaces for the enrichment and well-being of all Decatur residents, workers, and visitors
6. Facilitate low-cost transportation options for people of all ages and abilities

The plan spans a three-year period, beginning the first quarter of 2016, and it includes a set of 60 action items that support these focus areas. The detailed Implementation Plan is included as Appendix A, and includes target completion dates, prospective partners, and resources needed.

BACKGROUND

The City of Decatur's Better Together initiative is an outgrowth of the city's 2010 Strategic Plan, the largest public planning process in Decatur's history, which involved more than 1,500 community members sharing their concerns, hopes, and priorities for their city. Over a 12-month period, they contributed to the master plan for Decatur's growth and community development through surveys, town hall meetings, and facilitated conversations, and the resulting plan reflects their shared vision for the City, supported by four guiding principles:

Vision: The City of Decatur will assure a high quality of life for its residents, businesses and visitors both today and in the future.

Principle A: Manage growth while retaining character

Principle B: Encourage a diverse and engaged community

Principle C: Serve as good stewards of the environment and community resources

Principle D: Support a safe, healthy, lifelong community

The current Better Together initiative focuses on Principle B, which encompasses four goals:

- » Maintain and encourage diversity of race, ethnicity, income, culture, age, family type, and other kinds of diversity
- » Strengthen communication and involvement in and among neighborhoods, city government, volunteer boards and commissions, institutions, community organizations, local businesses, and Decatur as a whole
- » Support, expand, and develop programs, services, events, and opportunities that respond to diverse interests, encourage community interaction, and promote a stronger sense of community
- » Promote a culture of creative innovation and expression

Encouraging a diverse and engaged community was also a priority in the City's 2000 Strategic Plan, and in recent years the City has accomplished a number of achievements related to Principle B, including:

- » Establishing a Lifelong Community Advisory Board and creating the Lifelong Community Coordinator position
- » Partnering with the Decatur Arts Alliance to host the Sidewalk Saturdays program to provide free street entertainment with a focus on international performers
- » Expanding the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Service Project
- » Launching the Go60+ Shuttle for residents aged 60 and older
- » Expanding the homestead exemption
- » Tracking diversity of Decatur 101 participants
- » Installing community exhibits at the new Beacon Municipal Center

However, as the midway point of Decatur's current 10-year plan approached, City leaders recognized both a need and an opportunity to expand on this important work by re-engaging the broader community. Echoing language that was used in the strategic planning process, "Better Together" was established to involve individuals and organizations as partners with local government to create a shared community action plan and build the human capital to achieve and sustain the goals of Principle B.

The Leadership Circle



In November 2014, City leaders invited a group of Decatur residents and business people to serve as a steering committee for the Better Together initiative. However, from the beginning this group was never intended to be a traditional planning committee. The invitation process was very intentional and personal, setting the tone for the upcoming conversations and shared work. Participants were encouraged to participate fully and assured that different, even controversial, perspectives were welcome. Organizers were mindful of the group's composition and particularly wanted to ensure a mix of established community leaders along with newer faces and voices. The creative and inclusive approach was different and uncomfortable for many prospective Leadership Circle members, including those on the City staff.

Ultimately, however, 19 individuals signed on, representing a mix of races, ages, faiths, neighborhoods, and income levels. (Three participants later resigned from the group due to job-related moves.)

As the Better Together Leadership Circle, their job would be to develop a process for engaging individuals, organizations, and businesses in a

An excerpt from the invitation to serve on Leadership Circle can be found on the facing page.

As the Better Together Leadership Circle, their job would be to develop a process for engaging individuals, organizations, and businesses in a



community conversation around Principle B and oversee the creation of the Community Action Plan for pursuing Principle B's four goals. Equally important, each Leadership Circle member also agreed to the following:

- » To commit to self-reflection, deep listening, learning, active participation, and cultivating authentic relationships
- » To shape the overall focus and process for engaging the community
- » To actively contribute his or her gifts by co-designing and co-leading the work

The City hired two consulting firms: The Art of Community, to design and facilitate what would be a yearlong community process; and PlaceMakers, to lead outreach communications. The Leadership Circle and consultants first met in December 2014.

Addressing diversity issues is tough and complex because individual experiences and perceptions frame how each person experiences and feels about community. This means that the Better Together process had to be thoughtfully designed and planned in order to provide an opportunity for people representing the diversity of the City to come together and hear a broad perspective of community experiences, both good and bad.

As envisioned, the Circle will serve as an intergenerational and intercultural learning community, ultimately helping to steward Decatur forward. An emergent process of deep listening and learning about diversity, inclusion, equity and compassion. Together, over the coming months, we'll co-design and activate an initiative that will engage the broader community and invite them to join us on the journey.

When all is said and done, we'll have a broader, more complete narrative of our City and a Community Action Plan to guide next steps.

We invite you to bring all of who you are into this circle with the many pieces of your own story. We also invite you to bring eager ears, an open heart, and a willingness to forge meaningful, trusting relationships. Make no mistake, this will take time, so the Leadership Circle will likely meet once a month over the next 12 months. And additional leadership and engagement needs will likely emerge during that time.

You've been invited because you embody a vital piece of our collective story. Who you are matters. Your leadership and commitment matters. Please consider this invitation carefully to ensure your ability to commit.

Leadership Circle invitational text.

Race, diversity, and equity are topics that are difficult for many people to discuss, especially with others whom they do not know well, so early meetings were focused on building relationships among the Leadership Circle members and hearing different perspectives from each other and outside sources. The Leadership Circle served as the laboratory for the broader community engagement process, practicing and modeling on a small scale what could be possible on a larger scale.

As is always the case when working across differences, tensions arose. Some participants in the Leadership Circle were initially distrustful of the process. Others wanted to elevate taking action over building trusting relationships. The pace was too slow and deliberate for some, while others wanted more time to reflect on the issues and build trust. These struggles were welcome in the Leadership Circle. As tensions came up, members worked with them, challenging themselves and each other.

From the beginning, Leadership Circle members agreed that a community that works, works for everyone; therefore, the Better Together community action plan and process was intended to yield a more just, welcoming, inclusive, equitable, and compassionate experience for all who visit, live, or work in the City of Decatur. They also agreed that it was important as a city to constantly reinfuse the values of diversity and inclusion and not assume that these tenets are understood or immediately embraced by everyone. Better Together would be an intentional act to prioritize long held values of being a diverse, inclusive, and welcoming community.

In addition to Principle B, the Leadership Circle's work was influenced by several recent trends and events directly related to diversity and community engagement:

- » Decatur's population has grown and changed dramatically over a short period of time, becoming significantly less racially and economically diverse. (Appendix B)
- » A surge in housing values is making the City increasingly unaffordable for older residents, young people and low and middle-income families.

- » Community policing has moved to the forefront as several Decatur residents have reported being targets of racial profiling in their neighborhoods.
- » The City recently completed its annexation plan. If the plan is approved, the City will be welcoming new neighbors — many of them more diverse than the current population.
- » In 2014, the City Commission adopted the Compassionate Cities Charter expressing a commitment to being a compassionate community. This was a significant commitment for a community located in one of the most diverse counties in the country.

Through a series of conversations about these key points, the Leadership Circle ultimately identified three focus areas that addressed both the Strategic Plan's broad directive and the pressing issues the community currently faces:

- » **An Equitable and Inclusive City:** Cultivating relationships across differences and creating conditions for all community members to thrive and participate fully in city life. This includes applying an equity lens in matters of leadership and decision-making and conducting community outreach in culturally relevant ways.
- » **Racially-Just Community Policing:** Improving relationships between community members and law enforcement by addressing racism, bias and privilege to ensure all community members, especially people of color, are treated in a just way with equity and respect.
- » **Diverse and Affordable Housing:** Preventing displacement of existing residents and supporting the development of a variety of housing types and prices.

In addition to shaping the focus areas for the Community Action Plan, the Leadership Circle also helped determine the timeline of activities and brainstormed a number of creative ideas for engaging the broader community. External factors that affected the final process included previously scheduled community events and community rhythms related to school ending and summer vacations. By July 2015, the Leadership

Circle was ready to shift its focus outward, with an eye toward engaging the larger community in a discussion around these focus areas for the purpose of developing a Community Action Plan for achieving a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable Decatur.

The Community Action Plan

"We plan and we follow through. It's fundamental to who we are," announces decaturnext.com, the website maintained by the City to provide background information and track progress related to each of its plans and major initiatives, including the 2000 and 2010 Strategic Plans, the Transportation Plan, and the Town Center Plan. decaturnext.com also documented each phase of the Better Together initiative and the evolving Community Action Plan.

Like the Transportation Plan and the Town Center Plan, the Community Action Plan supports the current Strategic Plan. The Community Action Plan is different, however, in that it addresses a less tangible goal: a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community. It seeks to change the strategic direction of the everyday activities of the city and is a road map for implementing community change by clarifying what will be done, who will do it, and how it will be done. It describes what the community wants to achieve, what activities are required during a specified time period, and what resources are needed to be successful.

Strategic plans typically cover a decade or more and consist of broad, overarching goals supported by high-level objectives. In contrast, community action plans have a short timeframe and consist of distinct, usually finite, action steps. Strategic plans for many communities are the responsibility of the local government, while community action plans call for shared responsibility among local government and community members, both individuals and organizations. Strategic plans set the general direction; community action plans provide the details on how to get there.

The Better Together community action plan supports the City's 2010 Strategic Plan by providing recommendations and suggestions for more specific actions that will help to deliver on Principle B, "Encourage a diverse and engaged community."



THE PROCESS

Timeline




The Better Together initiative spanned slightly more than a year, from the City Commission's approval of preliminary plans to the Leadership Circle's presentation of the completed Community Action Plan:



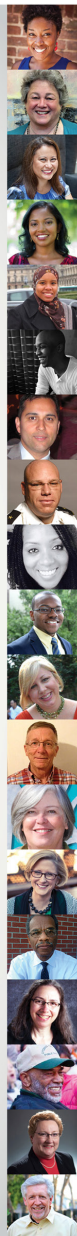
WE MIGHT EACH BE BRIGHT OR STRONG OR BOLD. BUT TOGETHER, WE CAN BE BRILLIANT.

We're cultivating a more just, welcoming, inclusive, equitable and compassionate experience for all who visit, live or work in the City of Decatur. And we're doing it together.

BRING YOUR VOICE TO THE TABLE

-  **AS A PARTICIPANT:** Share your story, listen as others share theirs, and begin to chart some common ground. Kick-off conversation, August 29, 10am-3pm.
-  **COMPLETE A SURVEY:** Detail your perspective, online or on paper.
-  **AS A VOLUNTEER:** Join our one-day leadership and facilitation training event to learn how to help people learn across differences, respond to complex problems, and use inclusive approaches to make an impact. Training happens August 22, 9am-5pm.

Learn more and get involved:
decaturnext.com



THE STRENGTH OF OUR COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN WILL BE ROOTED IN ITS "ACTION."

IDEAS FOR FOSTERING A MORE WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ARE IN. NOW'S YOUR CHANCE TO TAKE A LOOK.

Hundreds of residents have contributed their ideas and now those proposed "action items" are available for your review and comment.

Visit Open City Hall online via decaturnext.com or share your thoughts in person. The 71 action items, together with comment forms, can be found at City Hall, the Decatur Rec, Ebster Recreation Center, or the Decatur Public Library.

Public comment ends
 Monday,
 November 30.



Outreach and Communications

The City of Decatur has a well-established communications routine for engaging community members in planning processes, special events, and other community-based initiatives. Many residents and business people are responsive to the City's efforts, and historically, participation numbers have been impressive for a city of this size.

Outreach and communications strategies are most effective when they reinforce each other. Communications is about creating compelling and relevant messaging and visuals for different audiences within a community. Outreach focuses on how to strategically recruit different community members and involve them in the process.

As plans began to take shape for Better Together events, Leadership Circle members reviewed the City's communications practices with an eye toward equity and suggested that a targeted outreach effort would bring a more representative array of voices to the community action planning process. A sub-committee of the Leadership Circle met weekly throughout July and August to manage the outreach effort.

Organizers set three goals for community outreach:

1. Education — to provide diverse resident populations with informative presentations and paper media about Better Together and the community action plan.
2. Invitation — to provide a welcoming verbal, electronic and/or paper invitation to diverse residents to come to the Better Together Community Conversation on August 29, 2015.
3. Data Collection — to collect feedback from diverse residents during outreach efforts about the three community action plan focus areas.

Additionally, they met or exceeded target numbers set for the survey and community conversation. The target number for the survey was 500 people; 724 participated. The target number for the community conversation was 200 people; 250 attended.

The City's resource list, also known as an asset map, was updated to reflect all of the neighborhood groups, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, civic groups, and educational institutions in the city. Leadership Circle members made connections with various groups through short presentations at meetings as well as engaging people at popular community events.

WE MIGHT EACH BE BRIGHT OR STRONG OR BOLD. BUT TOGETHER, WE CAN BE BRILLIANT.

What would happen if we could take a walk in someone else's shoes and fully experience the differences—in culture, race, age, abilities, politics, or economic resources—that make us who we are? Would we feel differently about what it means to be neighbors?

We're convening a community conversation to try and find out. In doing so, maybe we'll find some common ground on challenging issues like **fairness**. Or **inclusion**. Or **equity**. As a city and as individuals.

Every voice, every experience, makes us stronger so please make plans to join in.
See reverse side for details.

PLENTY OF WAYS TO PARTICIPATE. REGISTER TODAY!

BETTER TOGETHER
BUILDING OUR CAPACITY TO THRIVE

NEARLY A THOUSAND DECATUR RESIDENTS CONTRIBUTED TO BETTER TOGETHER.

Now's your chance to explore where the discussion took them.

Online and in person, Decatur really turned out during the Better Together process to share their thoughts on community diversity — ideally and in practice. What do we value? What's worth protecting? How do we tackle tough challenges like **fairness**. Or **inclusion**. Or **equity**.

Please join us **Thursday, November 12 from 6:30-8:30pm** in the Marriott Courtyard's Decatur Conference Center, Ballroom B for a first look at what was said and how it's taking shape as our **Community Action Plan**.

JOIN US FOR AN INFORMATIVE 2-HOUR PROGRAM!

See reverse side for details.

In addition to both broad and one-to-one outreach efforts, two promotional postcards were sent to every city address, ensuring all households, regardless of circumstance, were alerted to Better Together's two key public input opportunities.

Working Across Differences Training Session

This one-day training for people interested in supporting the Better Together process as facilitators was held on August 22, 2015 at the Decatur Conference Center. Registration was free and open to all, though participation was capped at 70 to ensure a manageable group size. Participants learned how to help people work across differences and respond to complex problems using inclusive participatory approaches. Nearly all participants expressed an interest in a longer training with more time for practicing and role playing. To date, 55 of these men and women have put their skills to use at Better Together events.



On August 29, 2015, a diverse crowd of more than 250 Decatur residents gathered to discuss issues of inclusion and fairness, devoting five hours of their Saturday to the Better Together mission.

Better Together Community Action Planning Conversation

On August 29, 2015 the Leadership Circle welcomed more than 250 people to the Ebster Recreation Center's gym for a Community Action Planning Conversation. This event was designed to first connect community members across differences and invite them to share their experiences, highlighting both the pride and the challenges in the city, and second, invite them to contribute their action ideas for making the City of Decatur a more welcoming, inclusive, and equitable place for all. The event lasted from 10 am to 3 pm.

Participants used electronic polling devices to submit their demographic information and respond to questions regarding their attitudes toward the community and the Better Together initiative (Appendix D). Though not all participants responded to all questions, the responses recorded indicate that:

- » The percentage of older participants was much greater than in the survey, with 53 percent age 55 or older.
- » Twenty-six percent of participants had lived in the City five years or less; 21 percent had lived in the City 25 years or more.
- » Most participants were white (60 percent), though the percentage of black participants was twice what it was for the survey. (Table 1)

The program consisted of a series of presentations and videos interspersed with opportunities for participants to converse with their tablemates about an equitable and inclusive city; racially-just community policing; and diverse and affordable housing. Each participant had a participant guide (Appendix E), which included background information on the Better Together initiative; an overview of the City of Decatur at present and plans for growth; background information on the three focus areas identified by the Leadership Circle; and a resource list. Participants also received a Community Conversation Toolkit with tips for organizing and hosting their own Better Together conversations with friends and neighbors.

Following the presentations, facilitators asked participants to contribute their own action ideas for addressing the three focus areas. Participants were encouraged to think about actions that could be taken by individuals, organizations, and local government. By the end of the day, 625 ideas had been submitted. These are presented in Appendix F and form the basis for the Better Together Community Action Plan.

TABLE 1: Racial Demographics of Survey and Community Conversation Participants v. City of Decatur

RACE	SURVEY	CITY	COMMUNITY CONVERSATION
Asian	2%	4%	2%
Black or African American	16%	20%	32%
Hispanic or Latino	3%	1%	1%
Native American	1%	0%	0%
White or Caucasian	75%	73%	60%
More than one race	3%	2%	4%
Some other racial identity	0%	N/A	1%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Action Plan Preview Meeting

Once the 625 action ideas had been distilled down to a draft list of 71 action steps for inclusion in the community action plan, the Leadership Circle invited the community to preview the list and help prioritize the action steps. The preview meeting was held November 12 from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at the Decatur Marriott Courtyard Conference Center. Approximately 120 people attended. Most had participated in one of the earlier engagement opportunities, but about a third indicated they were participating in Better Together for the first time.²

The first half of the meeting included an overview of the Better Together Initiative and the announcement of the Plan’s six focus areas that had emerged during the planning process:

- » Support community participation and engagement among all members of the city’s population
- » Prioritize racially-just community policing by improving relationships between community members and law enforcement and ensuring all community members are treated in a just way with equity and respect
- » Ensure the availability of diverse and affordable housing in order to prevent the displacement of existing residents and provide for a variety of housing types and prices



- » Cultivate a welcoming and inclusive retail environment for serving a diverse clientele
- » Maximize the use of public spaces for the enrichment and well-being of all Decatur residents, workers, and visitors
- » Facilitate low-cost transportation options for people of all ages and abilities

The second half of the meeting included an interactive exercise designed to prioritize action steps by giving participants opportunities to assign points to the action steps they thought most important. Though the results should only be considered anecdotal, the action steps that scored highest were mostly consistent with the priorities previously expressed through the survey and the community conversation:

1. Advocate for the General Assembly's approval of the City's proposal to increase its homestead exemptions for low- and moderate-income seniors. (Individuals)
2. Host community forums with experts to examine how other cities have managed growth to maintain cultural, economic and generational diversity and discuss feasible options for Decatur, including those the City is currently exploring. (Local Government)
3. Require the Fair and Impartial Policing training course for all officers. (Local Government)
4. Produce a comprehensive guide that covers existing tax exemptions, forms of assistance, and other strategies for aging in place. Make it available in print, online and keep it up to date. (Local Government)
5. Establish Better Together as a permanent City initiative to nurture and sustain a culture of inclusion, equity and justice. (Local Government)
6. Establish an ongoing Better Together column in the Focus and other local media outlets to keep community members informed of progress on the Community Action Plan, Strategic Plan, and other initiatives and ways in which they can support them. (Local Government)



7. Provide City department leaders with the training, professional development and coaching needed to apply an equity lens to their work. (Local Government)
8. Host community conversations on race, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Refer to the Better Together Community Conversation Tool Kit for discussion questions and resources. (Organizations)
9. Publish and distribute a flyer with guidance for citizens on when and how to report suspicious activity and/or a possible crime. Post prominently on website also. (Local Government)
10. Convene a task force to develop a plan for workforce housing (for police officers, firefighters, teachers, and other community public servants), based on a mix of zoning strategies, financing options, and incentives that have proven successful in other communities. (Local Government)
11. Develop a Welcoming Decatur Checklist for planning city-sponsored events in order to guide organizers in creating events that are inclusive in terms of volunteer participation, entertainment, activities, and costs. (Local Government)
12. Through a relevant and compelling outreach effort, invite more people of color to participate in the Citizen Police Academy. (Local Government)
13. Make studio space available for adults and youth to create and display art. (Organizations)

14. Attend public meetings, read relevant publications, and/or utilize resources available through the City website to learn about local issues and the City's decision-making process. (Individuals)

Public Comment Period

On November 17, the City posted the draft action item list online for public review and comment and placed hard copies of the lists with comment forms at Decatur City Hall, Decatur Recreation Center, Ebster Recreation Center, Decatur Housing Authority, and Decatur Library. Community members were informed of the opportunity to provide final comment through an email blast sent to the City's more than 4,000 e-newsletter subscribers; a post on the City's website, DecaturNext.com; and a blog post on the Decatur Minute. In addition, Leadership Circle members contacted their different constituencies to let them know how and where to comment.

Online comments were collected through Open City Hall, an online platform that the City has used previously. By the close of the comment period on November 30, 224 people had reviewed the list online and 45 had provided comments. Twelve additional people submitted their comments on paper or by email. All comments received are included in Appendix G.³

Engaging Partner Organizations

The earliest conceptions of the Better Together process and Community Action Plan included cultivating partnerships to ensure a collaborative and sustainable



effort. Welcoming America, a national nonprofit organization headquartered in the City of Decatur, partnered with the City in early 2015 providing guidance based on their work with other cities across the country. Welcoming America and the City partnered to secure \$25,000 in grant funding for Better Together from The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. These two early partnerships provided a foundation for engaging additional partners.

On October 15, City staff and Leadership Circle members hosted a meeting for organizations they thought might have an interest in taking the lead or partnering on some of the ideas and programs that were beginning to emerge from the community action planning process. The goals of the meeting were:

- » To create connections among potential partners, Leadership Circle members, and City leaders
- » To share what the Leadership Circle had learned from the Better Together Community Action Planning Process
- » To harvest group wisdom that could support the implementation of the Community Action Plan

About 35 people attended, many of whom had already participated in some aspect of the Better Together initiative. Organizations represented included Agnes Scott College, Compassionate Decatur, Decatur Community Coalition, DEAM, Decatur Education Foundation, Decatur Housing Authority, Decatur Makers, Decatur Presbyterian Church, First Baptist Church of

Decatur, First Christian Church, First United Methodist Church, Hathor Consulting, Interaction Institute for Social Change, Oakhurst Baptist Church, Oakhurst Presbyterian Church, Partnership for Southern Equity, Welcoming America, Woodland Gardens, Zeist Foundation, and several unaffiliated community volunteers and artists.

Most of these organizations and individuals are already actively working with diversity, inclusion, and equity. They affirmed the challenging nature of this work and the need for “continuous maintenance” as one participant stated. Another participant spoke of the importance of an inclusive city narrative and moving from “my Decatur” to “our Decatur.” The group generally agreed that Decatur had a tremendous opportunity to build on what has been started with Better Together.

From their own experiences in working collaboratively to implement plans, some spoke of the need for “owners” for each part of the plan, resources to get things done, and engaging a “backbone” or anchor organization to lead the implementation. Storytelling and accountability were described as critical elements of implementing the plan.

Working with these and other potential partners and requesting their leadership on specific action items will be essential to successful implementation of the Community Action Plan.





THE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

Shifting from community engagement to creating a Community Action Plan began with the 625 action ideas contributed by those who attended the August 29 Community Conversation. Using keyword analysis, consultants first sorted the action ideas into 38 categories. Those categories were analyzed individually and then edited down to six focus areas:

1. Support community participation and engagement among all members of the city's population
2. Prioritize racially just community policing by improving relationships between community members and law enforcement and ensuring all community members are treated in a just way with equity and respect
3. Ensure the availability of diverse and affordable housing in order to prevent the displacement of existing residents and provide for a variety of housing types and prices.
4. Cultivate a welcoming and inclusive retail environment for serving a diverse clientele.
5. Maximize the use of public spaces for the enrichment and well-being of all Decatur residents, workers, and visitors.
6. Facilitate low-cost transportation options for people of all ages and abilities.

These focus areas were compared to the comments collected via the Community Survey and found to be highly correlated.

Once the action ideas were sorted by focus area, it was possible to eliminate duplicates, combine closely-related ideas, and identify ideas and comments that were unclear or unrelated to the purpose of the Better Together initiative. There were a number of recommendations for the City Schools of Decatur, which has a separate governing body from the City of Decatur; those items were relayed to the school superintendent.

Leadership Circle members, City staff, and consultants worked collaboratively to determine which ideas would be included in the Community Action Plan. Their decisions reflected community members' priorities, as indicated by the survey and feedback received through public meetings, and also factors such as funding availability (or the likelihood that grant funding or sponsorships could be secured) and interest among prospective partner organizations. In the case of ideas assigned to the City, they also considered whether those ideas were aligned with the City's existing work plan.

Ultimately, the following 60 action ideas were included in the Community Action Plan **(for the detailed implementation plan with target dates, progress indicators, etc., see Appendix A)**. The plan represents a three-year timeframe, though as with all plans, it will shift as needed in response to internal and external factors that are not yet known.



FOCUS AREA 1: SUPPORT COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT AMONG ALL MEMBERS OF THE CITY'S POPULATION

A. Individuals

- 1 Attend public meetings, read relevant publications, and/or utilize resources available through the City website to learn about local issues and the City's decision-making process.
- 2 Make a point to welcome new neighbors and introduce yourself to others whom you do not know.
- 3 Share important community news and information through social media platforms.
- 4 Bring your perspective to community events, celebrations, and city governance by volunteering to serve on volunteer boards, commissions, and task forces; planning committees; and neighborhood association boards and committees.
- 5 Participate in your neighborhood association.

B. Organizations

- 1 For neighborhood associations: Develop community welcome packets with neighborhood and City information. Establish system for timely delivery of welcome packets to new neighbors. (See I.C.7)
- 2 Build community through conversation by organizing small, diverse groups of residents to get together socially (i.e., supper clubs, book clubs, play groups).
- 3 Build community through creativity and storytelling by organizing opportunities for citizens from different walks of life to share their stories in different ways, such as making and displaying art, recording interviews with each other (e.g., StoryCorps), performing in front of live audiences through open-mic nights,
- 4 Provide training and resources to help community members learn how to have respectful, meaningful conversations across differences.
- 5 Help interested community members continue to learn about issues related to race, diversity, equity, and inclusion in their everyday lives and at the national level by providing a variety of resources, including guest speakers, video/film, and books, and hosting a series of community conversations on these topics.
- 6 Complete organizational self-assessment of leadership and membership base and reach out to key groups or demographics that are underrepresented.

C. Local Government

- 1 Utilize the Decatur Focus, Decaturga.com, Decaturnext.com, and other media resources to share timely information on upcoming events; provide updates on plan implementation; share tools and activities used in different settings over the course of the initiative; and highlight opportunities for community members to get involved.

2	Measure community members' attitudes and perceptions related to equity and inclusion by including relevant questions in the City's biennial community survey.
3	Ensure that all online forms and applications (e.g., MyDecaturGA app for reporting problems) are augmented with contact phone numbers as a supplement to web internet access.
4	On the City website, provide a printable calendar listing of recreational, educational, and social activities.
5	Develop a Welcoming Decatur Checklist for planning city-sponsored events in order to guide organizers in creating events that are inclusive in terms of community participation, volunteer participation, entertainment, activities, and costs.
6	Regularly update the community's resource network (i.e., asset map) to ensure a current list of organizations, places, and online resources to meet the various needs of the community.
7	Create a new resident packet and make it available on the City's web site. Encourage individuals and neighborhood associations to print and share with new neighbors. (See I.B.1)
8	Consider establishing a Better Together Advisory Board (similar to other advisory boards such as Environmental Sustainability, Lifelong Community and Active Living) to provide recommendations to the City Commission and staff and to establish, organize and implement activities that nurture and sustain a culture of inclusion, equity and justice. Establish a Better Together Network of residents, partner organizations, and community leaders to help sustain the effort and implement the plan. Explore opportunities for partnering with an anchor organization to help achieve stability and consistency.
9	Develop a means for receiving and addressing community members' concerns and complaints related to issues of equity and inclusion to ensure that problems are thoroughly documented and responded to appropriately by the correct staff person.
10	Consider incorporating an update on Better Together plan implementation during the State of the City address.
11	Work with a diverse group of citizen volunteers to develop a strategic, integrated citywide outreach plan aimed at involving a broader spectrum of community members in city life through participation in Volunteer! Decatur and on boards, commissions, and task forces.
12	Review the City's internal structures, processes, policies, and outcomes to ensure local government is equitable in its day-to-day practices and as it addresses future challenges and pursues new initiatives. Process should establish specific goals and a means for tracking, reporting progress.
13	Provide City staff with training and support, professional development on how to ensure equity and inclusion within their departments and in how they serve the community.
14	Partner with a foundation to begin a small grants program to support community members taking creative action together to further the goals of Better Together.

FOCUS AREA 2: PRIORITIZE RACIALLY-JUST COMMUNITY POLICING BY IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AND ENSURING ALL COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE TREATED IN A JUST WAY WITH EQUITY AND RESPECT

A. Individuals	
1	Educate yourself about racial profiling and the role citizens play in community policing.
B. Organizations	
1	Using resources provided by the Police Department, share information with neighbors regarding community policing and when to report suspicious activity and/or a possible crime.
2	Invite or continue to invite police officers to participate in community events in order to build relationships.
C. Local Government	
1	Use the existing Police Department annual report to help the community get to know its officers and the police department by continuing to include information on the number of officers, police force demographics, priorities for the year, etc. Post the report online in a timely manner and announce availability in the Decatur Focus and other media outlets.
2	Post quarterly on the department website information on arrests, stops, and related data (including demographics). Indicate how those statistics compare to DeKalb County, Metro Atlanta and/or other jurisdictions as appropriate.
3	Publish and distribute a flyer providing guidance for citizens on when and how to report suspicious activity and/or a possible crime. Post prominently on website and distribute through neighborhood associates and other media outlets.
4	Post anti-racial profiling policy and procedures on front page of the police department's section of the City website. Make sure that this information is stated in language that is simple and straightforward.
5	Through a relevant and compelling outreach effort, invite more people of color to participate in the Citizen Police Academy.
6	Provide information to residents about training officers receive, especially as related to diversity, community policing, and mental health.
7	Incorporate "Fair and Impartial Policing" training course into Department training curriculum.

FOCUS AREA 3: ENSURE THE AVAILABILITY OF DIVERSE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN ORDER TO PREVENT DISPLACEMENT OF EXISTING RESIDENTS AND PROVIDE FOR A VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES AND PRICES

A. Individuals	
1	Advocate for the General Assembly's approval of the City's proposal to increase its homestead exemptions for low- and moderate-income seniors.
2	Advocate for the General Assembly's approval of the City Schools of Decatur property tax exemption.
B. Organizations	
1	Develop a program for organizing and training volunteers to host workshops to assist seniors in reviewing financial options that could make aging in place more affordable.
C. Local Government	
1	Update information on the City website regarding proposed annexation to include implications in terms of growth and diversity.
2	Improve upon the City's existing density bonuses to encourage developers to build affordable condominiums and apartments.
3	Host community forums with experts to examine how other cities have managed growth to maintain cultural, economic and generational diversity, and discuss feasible options for Decatur, including those the City is currently exploring.
4	Consider establishing a task force to make recommendations for a workforce housing program (for police officers, firefighters, teachers, and other community public servants), incorporating a mix of zoning strategies, financing options, and incentives that have proven successful in other communities.
5	Produce a comprehensive guide covering existing tax exemptions, forms of assistance, and other strategies for aging in place. Make it available in print, online and keep it up to date.
6	Utilize the Decatur Focus and other existing communication channels to regularly update citizens on ongoing initiatives related to housing and property taxes.

FOCUS AREA 4: CULTIVATE A WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE RETAIL ENVIRONMENT FOR SERVING A DIVERSE CLIENTELE

A. Organizations	
1	Publish a "welcoming and inclusive" handbook and distribute to Decatur businesses that interact with the public.
2	Provide ongoing training opportunities for Decatur businesses on how to offer a welcoming and inclusive experience for customers. Recognize businesses with signage or a window decal when their employees have completed training.
3	Build awareness of the various roles that people with disabilities are capable of performing and encourage business owners to consider hiring disabled individuals.
4	Encourage existing businesses to expand their inventories to help address the basic needs of older residents.
B. Local Government	
1	Explore the possibility of bringing a variety store to downtown (i.e., Richards' Variety Store) to expand the range of household and basic items available to residents.
2	Provide opportunities for business owners to learn about handicap access and options for modifying their places of business to be more accessible.
3	Collaborate with property owners and leasing agents to offer a diverse array of dining and shopping options, representing different cultures, price points, and generations.

FOCUS AREA 5: MAXIMIZE THE USE OF PUBLIC SPACES FOR THE ENRICHMENT AND WELL-BEING OF ALL DECATUR RESIDENTS, WORKERS, AND VISITORS

A. Individuals	
1	Take ownership of the community's public spaces by placing trash in provided containers, picking up litter, and reporting maintenance problems through the MyDecaturGA mobile app or by calling/texting (404) 377-5571.
2	Help the City expand and diversify its public art program by supporting the Decatur Arts Alliance as a volunteer and/or financially.
B. Local Government	
1	Provide signage to direct downtown visitors to public restrooms.
2	Consider installing more seating downtown and other neighborhood commercial centers, possibly in conjunction with public art installations.
3	As the county seat for one of the nation's most culturally diverse counties, consider utilizing public spaces to honor cultures past, present, and future through art and signage.

FOCUS AREA 6: FACILITATE LOW-COST TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND ABILITIES

A. Individuals	
1	Offer rides to elderly neighbors and others who do not drive.
2	Support assistance organizations like I CARE (Interfaith Companion And Ride Express) by volunteering and/or providing financial support.
B. Local Government	
1	Publish and distribute a guide to various public and private transit options available to seniors, youth and those who are disabled.
2	Increase awareness of and access to the Go60+ Shuttle in order to better serve seniors.



MOVING FORWARD: INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND GOVERNMENT

Like the planning process, the implementation phase is meant to be collaborative. The senior staff of the City of Decatur will assume responsibility for monitoring the plan, engaging the community, and implementing many of the action items, but there are a number of other action items for individuals and organizations to pursue independently or in partnership with others. Anyone interested in working on these action items is invited to contact Linda Harris, who directs the City's Division of Civic Engagement, Education & Communication, at linda.harris@decaturga.com or 678-553-6512.

As with any plan of this nature, building and maintaining momentum will be challenging. In order to get off to a strong start, the consulting team recommends City leadership moving forward immediately on the following:

- » I.C.8. Consider establishing a Better Together Advisory Board (similar to other advisory boards such as Environmental Sustainability, Lifelong Community and Active Living) to provide recommendations to the City Commission and staff and to establish, organize and implement activities that nurture and sustain a culture of inclusion, equity and justice. Establish a Better Together Network of residents, partner organizations, and community leaders to help sustain the effort and implement the plan. Explore opportunities for partnering with an anchor organization to help achieve stability and consistency.
- » I.C.9. Develop a means for receiving and addressing community members' concerns and complaints related to issues of equity and inclusion to ensure that problems are thoroughly documented and responded to appropriately by the correct staff person.
- » I.C.13. Provide City staff with training and support, professional development on how to ensure equity and inclusion within their departments and in how they serve the community.
- » I.B.4. Provide training and resources to help community members learn how to have respectful, meaningful conversations across differences. Offer learning and training opportunities utilizing a variety of regional and national resources, including guest speakers, video/film, and books.
- » I.C.12. Review the City's internal structures, processes, policies, and outcomes to ensure local government is equitable in its day-to-day practices and as it addresses future challenges and pursues new initiatives. Process should establish specific goals and a means for tracking, reporting progress.
- » I.C.11. Work with a diverse group of citizen volunteers to develop a strategic, integrated citywide outreach plan aimed at involving a broader spectrum of community members in city life through participation in Volunteer! Decatur and on boards, commissions, and task forces.
- » I.C.6. Regularly update the community's resource list (i.e., asset map) to ensure a current list of organizations, places, and online resources to meet the various needs of the community.
- » Though not specified in the plan, also recommend that City leaders inform this important work by reviewing resources from related initiatives ongoing in the City of Decatur and similar initiatives in other cities (Appendix H).

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NOTES

¹ Participation time is calculated as follows:

- » Community Survey: 60.5 hours. The survey software tracks time from the moment a respondent opens the survey until he or she either hits submit or closes the browser, so it is not possible to have an accurate total for the time individuals spent on their survey responses. Before the survey was released, testers took between five and 10 minutes to complete the survey. Multiplying the shorter time of five minutes by the 724 respondents results in a conservative estimate of 3,620 minutes or about 60.5 hours spent responding to the survey.
- » Community Conversation: 1,062 hours (236 participants at five hours each, less 10 percent to account for late arrivals and early departures).
- » Community Action Plan Preview Meeting: 216 hours (120 participants at two hours each, less 10 percent to account for late arrivals and early departures).
- » Community Action Plan public comment period: 2.3 hours total, calculated by the online survey platform.
- » Total: 1,340.8 hours

² Because demographic information was collected for only about half of those in attendance, it is not useful for comparison and is not included in this report.

³ The online platform used for this process does not collect demographic information.

How to explain systemic racism to non-liberals like me

Opinion by **Megan McArdle**

July 14, 2020 at 6:56 p.m. EDT

Why is covid-19 killing more black people than white people in America?

For many on the left, the answer is easy: “systemic racism.” That answer drives conservatives bonkers. Covid-19 comes from a virus; it does not care whether victims are white or black and, indeed, doesn’t have eyes to distinguish.

Conservatives, I understand why you feel this way. But on this issue, the left is, well, right.

Already, your blood pressure may be rising at the idea that the left might have something to teach you. Mine certainly does when people suggest I’ve missed something important. But give me 600 more words to prove that systemic racism exists and hurts people. If you’re not convinced by then, you never have to read me again.

Let’s start with what “systemic racism” is, which is *not* “systems full of racists.” Black people aren’t dying in such numbers because all or even most white people around them hate them and want bad things to happen to them. But they probably are dying because we enslaved their ancestors.

I say “we” even though my personal ancestors never, as far as I can determine, enslaved anyone or even set foot in the South. But I am a U.S. citizen, and the United States legalized slavery, even to the extent of helping some whites pursue runaways into free territory. “We,” as a nation, did that. They, as a people, suffered.

All modern Americans inherit a legacy stained by that suffering. But black Americans also inherit the suffering, which did not end when slavery was abolished. It went on and on, through the legal strictures of Jim Crow and through rampant private discrimination, which still unfortunately continues in diminished form.

Well-designed studies show that discrimination against various signifiers of “blackness” persist in our labor markets. That’s one reason black Americans are disproportionately concentrated in lower-skilled, lower-paid service and manufacturing jobs that require their physical presence, and where many of them were exposed to the coronavirus, while the whiter office workforce safely telecommuted this year.

Note that this could happen *even if the people making discriminatory decisions have no particular animus toward black people*. All it takes is a slight preference for people whom they perceive to be “like me.” That even slight preferences can cascade into dramatic effects is illustrated by something that many of us on the right complain about a lot: the left-wing skew in mainstream cultural institutions. The enduring legacy of slavery is a uniquely stubborn and pernicious problem in American history, of course, but some of the social dynamics operate similarly.

That is to say, media and academia aren’t leaning ever further left because a bunch of lefties got into a room and

decided to oust the conservatives. Mostly it happened because human beings tend to think that others who agree with them must be especially fine people. That “affinity bias” influences hiring decisions, often unconsciously. The fewer conservatives there were, the more pronounced the skew came, a process that sped up as it advanced.

Now, of course, there is a muscular young generation that is explicit about wanting to “cancel conservatism”. But that’s a new phenomenon, and the tilt is decades old. If anything, the causation is reversed: Only when almost all the conservatives were gone did it become feasible to say that universities, magazines, awards ceremonies and the like should be explicitly left-wing projects. And if they do succeed, the skew will become self-maintaining; no one will voice a commitment not to hire conservatives, because conservatives won’t apply to places they see as hostile to their interests, their ideas, their selves.

If you understand how those institutions could arrive at a stable, no-conservatives equilibrium even without overt hostile action, then you understand part of the social dynamics behind systemic racism. The way small decisions cascade into major social forces is how Americans who profess no racial hatred — and declare their implacable hatred for racism in all forms — could nonetheless end up contributing to patterns of residential, educational and employment segregation that left the average black American with fewer opportunities for well-paid office work than the average white person.

In a world with covid-19 racing around, that disparity isn’t simply unjust; it’s deadly. I think the public health experts who condoned protests against racial injustice, but not those against lockdowns, dangerously risked their credibility. But one part of their message was indisputable: Systemic racism kills.

One can acknowledge this without endorsing every solution advanced by social justice activists. But if you think that it is a major social problem when large numbers of people are pushed to the margins of important aspects of American life — well, then you should believe that it’s a problem even when you aren’t one of those marginalized. And if you believe in the ideals of the American founding . . . in the American Dream . . . then you should believe that we must keep working at this problem until we’ve finally kicked it.

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