

Equity and Inclusion Leadership Team (EILT) Meeting Notes – 02.01.21

Present: *Mari Lee, Roger Wilson, Rose Chaney, Sherry Angeletty, Dr. Keith Harris, Rev. Ronnie Henry, Thad Goodman, Maria Herrera, Toni Shindlecker, Akiyyah Billups, Peter Brehm, William Reid, Veronica Lowe, Aje Hill, Dr. Xavier Bruce, Latrice Lewis, Solash Aviles, Michael Blue Katie Hall and Margaret Nusbaum.*

Regrets: *Rev. Darren Gerald, Maria Shuck, Dr. Terry Scott, Wayne Howard.*

County Executive Office Attendees: *Michael Hughes and Leyda Navarro.*

Welcome and Introductions

Michael Hughes welcomed all in attendance and thanked them for participating on the team. Members introduced themselves and the organizations that they represent.

Housekeeping/Agreements for moving forward

Michael established the approach the team would take re: terminology and ensuring that all team members are given the opportunity to be heard.

In reviewing notes from meetings the County Executive has had with members of the community on equity related matters, it appears that sometimes a missing element in those conversation was the cultural significance and understanding behind the concerns being expressed by voices in the community. The homework from this meeting is to send Michael Hughes misunderstanding or miscommunications that occur which need clarification.

– Margaret Nusbaum

At the last meeting we agreed to share the reports prepared by previous four leadership teams (Education, Jobs, Community Needs, Seniors) . These reports provide a framework for our report. Each team established a set of community values and a vision. Our charge, is to provide a list of top priorities, outcomes, goals, ideas related to DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion). We should also include public input throughout the process and prioritize our goals.

Along with their goals and ideas, several included strategies for achieving these goals. In response to a recommendation from the Seniors Leadership Team, the County actually established a new division for Senior Services. The Seniors team also recommended the implementation of the actions identified in the needs assessment on senior needs.. Affordable housing was a goal identified by all previous leadership teams, which may also be of interest to this leadership team.

Some of the teams specifically addressed matters within County Government structure. Some matters concerned building partnerships, others were focused on realigning resources, some were high level priorities required much stronger partnerships with and focus by other institutions or other governmental bodies within our County. The priorities identified by the previous leadership teams have been incorporated into County Executive Gardner's plans for her administration..

These reports provide a framework for our report.

Themes from earlier focus groups

Margaret reviewed the themes and topics expressed during the listening sessions conducted with members of the community, specifically the African-American community and the Hispanic community. This same information was previously sent to this team.

The list of themes and topics are attached to these notes.

Feedback from Constituents

Members were asked if there were additional topics and questions posed to them from their communities or organizations they represent. The themes list appears to cover or incorporate the same concerns members of the team have heard from their constituents.

A question was asked about the COVID response and how special outreach was being conducted to reach minority populations.

Early on when we started COVID-19 testing last year, the Health Department set up a testing site at Hillcrest Drive. It became a very busy testing site. This site has been used for providing information re: COVID-19. We are seeing how we can further utilize the Hillcrest site. The Health Department also partnered with churches and other organizations that served the minority community, to educate these communities on COVID. Re: vaccinations, the FCG is asking everyone to pre-register for their vaccinations. The Governor has established priority groups to be given their vaccinations first. We have setup clinics around the community for vaccinations. Our biggest challenge is the supply of vaccines that we receive. The state is open to allow Giant, Rite-Air, Wal-Mart to administer vaccines, but the supply is not being increased. We established a call center for those that do not have a computer or smartphone to register. We're also staffing the call centers with those that speak Spanish.

The County's Joint Information Center sends out daily announcements. We do send daily information to some of our partners in the community. The information is sent in Spanish and English. We're asking people to sign-up via text to then be able to get text messages re: the next eligibility group to receive the vaccinations. The many community groups, including the NAACP and Frederick Progressive, are having Facebook Live session on February 10 to share COVID/vaccine information. The Health Department has hired Shawn Dennis as its Public Information Officer to share information in the county re: how to register. A Spanish event will be held February 9th and in English on the 11th. A similar event will also be held for people of color.

Topics for future discussions

There is an interest in the County's hiring process and policies. There is also interest in finding a way to use existing initiatives and resources to achieve expressed equity goals, putting movement to what has already been recommended, and being strategic in our approach. Constituents were concerned with economic justice issues around procurement. There are existing economic resources available through County Government. Other constituents are concerned with such things as equity for our children and young people.

It was expressed that the image of our County, outside of its geographic borders is mixed. We're often referred to as "Fredneck." Some promotional and community relations may not give the appearance of being inclusive and welcoming.

County employee demographics show a lack of diversity and do not match that of the County's population. A diversified workforce would facilitate cross-cultural conversations and interactions. The County needs a marketing program that goes beyond image. There is also concern re: Commissions and Boards, several of which are all white whose members seem to simply get recycled. Thought also needs to be given to how we reach people in the public that might be interested in working for the County, or serving on boards and commissions. Because our commission are volunteer bodies, we will need to figure out a way to market within the community.

Perception must be addressed. People can sometimes feel that they are in committees, but may not feel that they are being heard. Word about this like this can spread, then people will often decide not to want to be bothered to volunteer or to work in FCG. A strategy is needed to change that perception.

Relationships and perception by minority and youth populations of law enforcement appear strained.

Economic justice must also be prioritized. Providing business opportunities must be made available. Economic power, brings community power. Increase the ability of the County to reach out to minority business people.

Subject matter experts will bring an expertise and perspective to further educate us on certain topics. Experts can also assist us in identifying gaps. It was specifically recommended that that Sherman Colman from the Office of Economic Development be invited to share about the Minority Business Program. Additionally, Dr. Keith Harris who has expertise and experience around equity in our schools should also be invited.

Members of this team know the concerns of our constituents, and have been in previous conversations that have been held. We have the information needed from our constituents from observing and listening. Strategies are now needed to achieve these objectives.

The purpose of the leadership team to recommend a set of priorities and strategies to deliver to the CE at our final meeting. The CE will then determine how to incorporate them in her plans and budget. Hiring a Chief Equity Officer is a big step for the County. Identifying where we fall short re: equity is important in moving forward. Once we do identify our top priorities, we can then establish goals.

Reviewing data and statistics, as well as information on current and previous equity efforts, will assist us as we prioritize for each topic area. There may be items that would be considered “low hanging fruit and could be accomplished timely. If there are problems obtaining data, then maybe the collection of data needs to be a priority. County data is available for some topics such as employment demographics, but we may not be able to immediately access data for every subject. The data will sometimes need to be provided after we have begun prioritizing our topics. Some topics such as health care disparities are complicated, and we may be limited in terms of what we can recommend.

To determine our agenda topics for our future meetings we will use a survey tool. . This survey will help frame our conversations and identify our priorities for discussion.

We have 90 days to complete our work though this a relatively brief period of time. We will continue to meet every two weeks to complete our work by the end of April at the latest. We will present our report during a town hall. After that the CE will take that information and meet with her management team to determine how to best implement our recommendations.

When we discuss the County’s long term commitment to DEI, we may include a recommendation to introduce legislation to require a DEI commission that reports to the CE on these issues. We may also recommend that the County initiate legislation to incorporate the CEIO position into law.

The County’s Equity and Inclusion webpage will house our minutes and other information concerning the work of this team. We will be adding additional content to beef up the webpage.

Next Steps

We will conduct a survey to identify topics we want to consider as priorities. This will then allow Michael to organize our agendas and arrange for experts to attend our meetings. From conversations with these experts we will be able to either receive the data we need on a particular topic as well as identify where we need to improve our collection of data.

Action items from this meeting are sharing of data, design and delivery of a survey to assist in prioritizing topics discussed, and any follow up needed to clarify anything that has been discussed. All members are encouraged to reach out to Michael should they have any questions or concerns. By the end of our meetings we need to also provide a list of County resources that are available to support goals that we are establishing.

Our next meeting will be held on February 15, 2021. Meeting adjourned.

