

Racial Equity Commission

Minutes

Attendance

The following members of the Durham Racial Equity Commission met via Zoom on May 18, 2022, from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

- Del Ruff
- Derek Rhodes
- Easmond Codjoe
- Ernest Smith
- Krista Kenney
- Lea Efird
- Ramya Krishna
- Sheila Mullen
- Tarik Woods
- Taylor Walker
- Theodore Rueter
- Tiffany Foster
- Jillian Johnson (City Council Liaison)

The following city and county staff were in attendance:

- Anne Phillips
- Sharon Williams
- Yesenia Merino

1. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

2. Approval of Minutes

Tiffany Foster made a motion to approve the minutes from the April 20, 2022, meeting. The motion was seconded by Sheila Mullen. The commission agreed to proceed via voice voting; the vote to approve the minutes was unanimous.

3. County Racial Equity Activities Report

Yesinia Merino provided an update on racial equity activities at Durham County (DCo). These activities included the authorization of two full-time equity positions and declaration of Juneteenth as a county holiday. In addition, the county has also established a Racial Equity Core Team with representation from departments across the organization; many of the Core Team members have completed training from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity

(GARE). The Core Team meets monthly to advise the Equity Office on how to implement equity initiatives throughout Durham County government.

The foundational activities taking place at the county include:

1. Ongoing curriculum development, coaching sessions, and racial equity trainings for employees
2. Tax Administration is working on addressing racially restrictive covenants
3. the Finance Department has operationalized a Minority and Women owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) Ordinance, including accompanying trainings for employees who participate in purchasing and procurement

Ongoing work includes:

1. Biennial employee survey (started in 2020)
2. Biennial listening sessions on equity issues (started in 2020)
3. Development of communications plan with the Public Information Office
4. Development of racial equity content for DCo website
5. Development of racial equity community engagement plan
6. Refining racial equity metrics and benchmarks.

4. City Racial Equity Activities Report

Sharon Williams, director of the Equity and Inclusion Department, provided an update on racial equity activities at the City of Durham (COD).

Sharon Williams introduced herself and the other members of Equity and Inclusion Department, including Amberlina Alston and Anne Phillips. Sharon Williams noted that the department is in the process of hiring an additional analyst and administrative coordinator.

Sharon Williams defined racial equity as “when access and opportunity are the same across different groups, and race is not a predictor of outcomes.” Sharon Williams stressed the city’s focus on access and opportunity.

Sharon Williams shared that the COD had established a Racial Equity Core Team. The Core Team used input from residents, employees, and a variety of other sources to establish a racial equity vision and a racial equity mission for the COD.

The City of Durham Racial Equity Vision is Durham is a vibrant community in which all residents and employees thrive with power and purpose. Racial equity is an embedded principle, shared economic prosperity is a reality, and race is not a predictor of outcomes.

The City of Durham Racial Equity Mission is the City of Durham intentionally identifies racial inequities, engages the community, and uses a collaborative approach in creating solutions, to ensure race no longer stands as a determinant of outcomes and opportunities.

Sharon Williams noted that the vision and mission established by the Core Team are what drive and guide the work done in the city.

The COD Racial Equity Core Team also developed a racial equity action plan. This action plan has four components: 1) workforce equity; 2) communications and engagement; 3) contracting and procurement; and 4) racial equity tools and training.

Sharon Williams shared an example of the City of Durham's Racial Equity Decision Making Tool, which requires answering the following questions:

- 1) What is being considered and what are the desired results or outcomes?
- 2) What is the data and what does the data tell us?
- 3) How has the community been engaged, and what does the community want?
- 4) Who will benefit and who will be burdened; are there any unintended consequences; and what are our strategies to mitigate harm?
- 5) What are our plans for implementation, and how will we hold ourselves accountable?

Sharon Williams noted that this tool has been applied across departments within the city, most recently in the budget process. City employees are also receiving training on data use and analysis.

Going forward, the COD will be introducing new racial equity teams, pilot projects, departmental equity action plans, and developing metrics. Additional equity actions for 2022 include: conducting a biennial racial equity survey, facilitating a 15-day racial equity challenge, data utilization, budget equity analysis, collaboration, and impact assessment.

5. Excused Absences

Anne Phillips noted that two of the commissioners, Ruth Phillips and Nisha Williams, were unable to attend the meeting, but provided advanced notice. Anne Phillips asked that the commissioners present make a motion to grant their colleagues excused absences. The motion was made by Lea Efird and seconded by Tiffany Foster. The motion was passed unanimously.

6. Racial Equity Task Force Report Progress

Anne Phillips provided a brief overview of the Racial Equity Task Force report and the progress that has been made. Anne Phillips noted that there are six areas in the task force report and approximately 116 recommendations. Anne Phillips shared a link to the progress report in the chat and noted that the slides had been broken down into subject areas.

Anne Phillips noted that the progress on some of the recommendations is difficult to capture, in part due to the need for stronger relationships and continuing communications with other organizations, like Durham Public Schools. Anne Phillips encouraged the commissioners to consider the progress report as an incomplete document, and to keep in mind that in the case some updates have not been captured, does not mean nothing has happened.

7. Breakout Activities

The commissioners were put into breakout rooms based on the six areas identified in the Racial Equity Task Force report for 40 minutes. Each group discussed what success looks like, what data is needed, how community voices will be centered, what community assets and resources already exist, and what community assets and resources are needed. Anne Phillips asked

commissioners to document all notes or other identified issues using the Mural platform and to identify a top two or three action items to report out.

Yesenia Merino provided a demonstration of how to use the Mural application.

8. Report Out

Health and Environmental Justice (Del Ruff and Krista Kenney): Krista Kenney discussed the importance of looking at health holistically and examining environmental health in terms of the spaces where we live, play, and work. Krista Kenney expressed excitement regarding the number of updates in this area from the progress report and also stressed the need to lean in to qualitative data in order to have a deeper understanding of the lived experiences across all communities and the need to verify and confirm that the actions being taken are meaningful within those communities. The group also discussed community engagement and communication planning. Del Ruff stressed the importance of building awareness first, and brought up the example of the ambassador program, which he was not previously aware of. He stated the importance of identifying and prioritizing certain groups or themes, like youth or health disparities, and the need to effectively communicate those priorities. Del Ruff concluded by emphasizing the need to outline future plans, strategies, and impact assessments using data.

Public History (Lea Efird and Ernest Smith): Lea Efird discussed the importance of using history as an example for future actions, noting the devastation of Black communities caused by highway 147. She continued to emphasize the importance of not only individual, notable events like the destruction of Hayti, but also the subtleties and patterns of racism that have affected people for generations. In regards to local resources, there was discussion about looking to the Marian Cheek Jackson Center in Chapel Hill and the work done there with the North Side Community, as a guide and source for connections for similar work in Durham. On the topic of data, Lea Efird noted the limitations acknowledged in the report, and the need for more information on what efforts have been undertaken to preserve or present public history for other BIPOC groups, especially indigenous, Latinx, and Asian American communities.

Ernest Smith highlighted the need to focus on listening to marginalized communities and the importance of putting a stop to taking action without understanding or listening to the voices of those who have been marginalized. Ernest Smith stated that he hopes one of the biggest things to come out of the work of the commission is to create ways to effectively listen to and communicate with marginalized communities, as opposed to only giving lip service.

Criminal Legal System (Tarik Woods and Ted Rueter): Tarik Woods discussed how important qualitative, as well as quantitative data is, for making these recommendations, and really getting the information that we need moving forward. He expressed how the need for survey results and qualitative and quantitative research were a frequent matter of discussion for his group. In particular, they discussed interest in what research has been done regarding community attitudes toward the Durham Police Department and Durham County Sheriff Department, the

demographics and residency of the officers in those agencies, the demographics of people being arrested, and the demographics of and selection process for juries. Tarik Woods questioned whether ticket and arrest quotas were still being enforced, and whether the city or county was responsible for them. He discussed the dissemination of public information and that it would be beneficial to make sure the public understands and knows what law enforcement agencies are required to tell you and what they are and are not allowed to do. Ted Rueter discussed the need for more information regarding which, if any, recommendations from the report have been implemented. He also requested additional information on police body cameras, community policing, mandatory police training on conflict de-escalation, recruitment of Black and brown police officers, banning of choke holds, a police residency requirement, and the elimination of qualified immunity for police officers.

Housing (Ramya Krishna, Easmond Codjoe, and Jillian Johnson): Ramya Krishna stated that, for the long term, success with housing looks like changing the structures that limit access to safe and affordable housing for the people of Durham. For the short term, success looks like making sure that those who are most affected by these policies are able to access information, resources, and avenues to share their perspectives and needs. Easmond Codjoe stated that he had gone through the report and it told him how difficult the housing situation is, and he could see that the task force struggled to come up with recommendations because it is a very tough topic. He discussed the history behind housing policies and how they were pushed through by government agencies. He stated that because government policies have created the current housing structures, it is not something that can be simply talked about and solved easily. He discussed the issue of evictions and how it disproportionately affects minority women and children trying to make ends meet, who often do not have legal representation. He stated that housing is the heart of the problem, because without it people are unable to have any stability in their lives. He stated that there was a case from Durham that went all the way to the Supreme Court, where a woman lost her case against Durham Social Services and was denied legal representation. He stated that some aspects of the housing issue are day-to-day problems and others are larger and more structural. In order to be more pragmatic in approach, Easmond Codjoe suggested looking at court records.

Wealth and Economy (Sheila Mullen and Tiffany Foster): Sheila Mullen reported that there were three recommendations from the report: 1) a racial equity fund; 2) reparations; and 3) a Durham guaranteed job development act. She stated that it is necessary to not only clearly articulate what is needed, but also to establish how it will be implemented, which requires a lot of information—including research and actions already conducted in other places and a lot of digging to get the necessary information. In addition to the three recommendations in the Task Force Report, Sheila Mullen and Tiffany Foster also identified other areas that could help with wealth and economy. Sheila Mullen stated that education for financial literacy, for both adults and children, is necessary and suggested partnering with the Board of Education to address education around financial literacy as well as job hunting and job development in Durham. She went on to say that we have a lot of jobs coming to this area, but questioned how many Durham residents are qualified for those jobs and what is being done to address that. She elaborated to state that it is much more difficult to apply for jobs online, and to get through the system—even

if you are qualified—than many people think, especially if you do not have a referral. Sheila Mullen stated that their group would continue working to develop holistic list and then try to prioritize and bring more information back to the Commission in the future.

Anne Phillips thanked Sheila Mullen and noted that she had a great idea she wanted to share. Anne Phillips stated that Sheila Mullen had asked if it would be possible to speak to the original groups that put this information together, and Anne Phillips told her she would do her best to connect her with that group and requested other commissioners let her know if they are also interested in this.

Education: Taylor Walker stated that for the education group, there was an overall consensus about supporting the whole child by providing more holistic services to prevent gaps, but that the conversation was short due to technical difficulties. There was discussion about the foundation of creating educational equity, with a focus on early childhood intervention. She noted that Task Force Report focused on universal high-quality Pre-K education for all families and there was discussion about what that would look like. There was discussion about the need for awareness about the benefits of Pre-K education and how a lot of people don't know or have access to the information and all of the research done around students and children who benefited, and how a lot of times they—for lack of a better word—show more success in school long term, when they have attended Pre-k schooling. There was discussion about how to make Pre K. more accessible and how to eliminate existing barriers. She agreed with the report regarding the need for affordable, or more accurately free, Pre-K education which would, in a perfect world, be based within the public school system, with transportation provided for students. In addition, there was discussion on providing before- and after-school care. Regarding the necessary data, there was discussion about needing information on the cost of Pre-K, the number of families who do not currently have access to Pre-K, the number of families currently using before- and after-school care, the cost of a living wage for Pre-K educators, the cost of transportation, and the current salary information.

There was discussion around getting community input, creating focus groups, and facilitating interest group meetings within the communities that are lacking access to the services in addition to the partners working with the public school system. There was discussion about engaging with families who already have children in the system, but may have younger children, or could possibly in the future, and the need to tap into those communities and hear those voices. Lastly, there was discussion of assets, what already exists, and what is needed. She stated that we have facilities, buildings, and transportation programs outside of the public school transportation programs, including church organizations and other private and public systems that provide bussing services. There was discussion around existing Pre-K teachers and assistants who are already doing the work, and then in grants and other sources of funding to help people start programs. They also discussed the importance of Pre-K educators who are reflective of the communities that they serve as well as needing updated technology, toys, and engagement resources to ensure that facilities are high-quality. Lastly, they discussed the need to pay teachers and their assistants living wages in order to be successful and have appropriate

student-to-teacher ratios. Taylor Walker finished by saying that they were only able to discuss Pre-K education before experiencing technical difficulties.

9. Updates and Housekeeping

Anne Phillips and Yesenia Merino agreed that housekeeping updates would be sent out via email.

Anne Phillips provided a brief summary of what the commissioners could expect at the next meeting, including the election of co-chairs. She stated that they have a list of candidates and requested that commissioners inform them if they would like to be on the list but are not already.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.