



Published July 8th, 2020

Lafayette forms task force; needs community engagement to address systemic racism in city

By Pippa Fisher



The newly-formed task force held its first meeting July 1. Screen shot from virtual meeting vice chair.

Candell was quick to point out that the task force was certainly going to be a group effort. And as the discussion over vision, objectives and strategies progressed it became clear that a main priority was to have community-wide engagement.

Task force members agreed the best way to accomplish that was by listening. To that end a town hall-style meeting was proposed for the end of July, after the public safety committee's similar town hall meeting on police practices. Notably, despite any overlap in subject, the two committees are remaining distinct from one another at this point - a two-pronged approach to examine both systemic problems within the police, and systemic racism and inequality within the community

Next steps include bringing in implicit bias training for the city council and including school board members, eventually offering such training community-wide, finding a facilitator to help run the town hall meeting and trying to reach out to those affected by systemic racism within the city to have them either speak during the town hall meeting or send in letters telling of their experiences, and not limiting it to Lafayette residents but to include those in Moraga and Orinda and those who visit or work in the city.

Gerringer noted that the meeting was a good first start.

Following the meeting Candell commented that she was thankful for all who attended and gave such good feedback, noting that the task force members needed this input to shape how they move forward. "I honestly believe we can bring real positive change and create an even better community for all," said Candell.

"It was only our first meeting," said Burks after the meeting, "and we have a long way to go on this complex and challenging movement, but if Wednesday night was an indication, I truly believe that the community will come together, representing a `collective task force' embarking on one of the most important and meaningful human-centered advancements in the history of Lafayette. I encourage absolutely everyone to be a part of it."

City Manager Niroop Srivatsa emphasized the need for the public's help and engagement and invited people to send accounts of their experiences to her ahead of the town hall meeting.

Details on how to reach Srivatsa are on the city website at www.lovelafayette.com

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