



TOWN OF
AMHERST
MASSACHUSETTS

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To: Town Council

Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager

Dt: March 18, 2021

Re: Update on Funds Appropriated to Address Systemic Racism

The Town's FY21 budget commits \$80,000 to "explore, plan, and implement strategies to confront systemic racism." Specifically, the funds were intended to explore, identify, and implement strategies to move toward racial and social justice.

After establishing the Community Safety Working Group, my first priority has been to support the initiatives of the Working Group, which is a Town public body that is comprised of a majority of members of the BIPOC community. The Working Group determined which services it needed from the Consultant and a contract has been signed for these services. To date, the funds have been committed as follows:

- \$ 9,000: Stipends for members of the Community Safety Working Group (9 members @ \$1,000)
- \$58,347: Contract for consultant to support the work of the Community Safety Working Group
- \$67,347: Total Committed
- \$12,653: Total Available

The Town Council adopted goals for the Town Manager on September 14, 2020 which were then revised on January 25, 2021. The goals can be found here:

<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/54621/FY21-Town-Council-Performance-Goals-for-the-Town-Manager---Adopted-by-the-Town-Council-09-14-2020-amended-1-25-2021>

One policy goal is titled "Racial Equity and Social Justice". This goal includes the following objectives:

To explore, recommend, and implement policies and procedures that address racial equity and social justice consistent with the Town Council Resolution in the Aftermath of the Death of Mr. George Floyd adopted on June 1, 2020, and the Town Council Resolution Affirming the Town of Amherst's Commitment to End Structural Racism and Achieve Racial Equity for Black Residents adopted on December 7, 2020, and the Town Council Resolution Condemning the January 6, 2021 Insurrection and Violence at the U.S. Capitol adopted on January 25, 2021 that (1) ensure all community members feel and are a part of Amherst and feel and are protected, listened to, and served by their public servants, (2) foster a community free of

fear, intimidation, and violence, and (3) incorporate significant involvement of BIPOC residents in shaping these policies and procedures.

Incorporated into this objective is the Town Council resolution from December 7, 2020

<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/54310/2020-12-07-Resolution-Affirming-Commitment-to-End-Structural-Racism-and-Achieve-Racial-Equity-for-Black-Residents>.

In this resolution, the Town Council affirmed “its commitment to eradicating the effects of systemically racist practices of Town government and Town-affiliated organizations” and committed the Town to “review and revise its policies, procedures, bylaws, values, goals, and missions through an anti-racism lens to foster an unbiased and inclusive environment that is free of discrimination, harassment, and negative stereotyping toward any person or group.”

The resolution also committed the Town Council to engage “in a path of remedy for Black Amherst residents who have been injured or harmed by discrimination and racial injustice.”

To further address this goal and these objectives, I have developed three options:

- Core Equity Team: To address Town’s commitment to address systemically racist practices in Town government policies, procedures, and practices we have established a Core Equity Team. The Town’s Core Equity Team is a volunteer group of Town employees who have taken on the mission of working to address structural racism within the workings of the Town government. This staff led team is forming its plans to move forward with work with Town staff. The Town has an existing relationship with Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE - www.racialequityalliance.org/) which provides a pathway to entry for communities seeking to initiate racial equity work. The Core Equity Team believes it is important to begin the change within the Town government itself. The Core Equity Team is reviewing options with two groups - Healing Racism Institute of Pioneer Valley (www.healingracismpv.org/) and the Sojourner Truth School (www.truthschool.org) – to learn more about options going forward for the Team. Funds are needed to support the work of the Core Equity Team as it moves forward with its work with Town employees. Supporting the work of this Team is an important priority.
- Reparations Education: Members of the community have been engaged in an important discussion of the role of reparations to as a tool to help address the Black Amherst residents who have been injured or harmed by discrimination and racial injustice. Reparations for Amherst (www.reparationsforamherstma.com/) has requested \$5,000 to support racial disparity research, specifically to compensate people of African descent for their participation. They state that the data they collect will serve the public good of our community and will be made available for the use of the public. Their argument is that if the Town is committed to repairing the structural damage caused by historical and present-day racism, it cannot measure success without determining a baseline of what exists now. The \$5,000 would begin the work of developing that baseline and seeking input on how inequities could be best addressed. The group was also seeking to by offering stipends for participation. Funds could also be allocated to organizations engaging in racial reconciliation projects on behalf of the Town.
- Data Collection: In a report titled “Indicators of Racial Equity and Justice for Amherst” the Amherst League of Women Voters called on the town to provide better public records on various matters, such as the racial and ethnic diversity of town staff and municipal boards and

committees, and the race and ethnicity of the residents and visitors who police interact with, along with the specific reasons for those interactions. This research would support the development of a strategic plan with a program, budget, and actions supported by public data and information. Such a policy and plan will depend on quantitative and qualitative information. The League has stated that until the Town can acquire objective information on racial equity and justice that is available and transparent to the public, policy, planning, and program action are impeded. The report notes that the systematic development and use of data for Amherst, across a wide range of topics would be a significant undertaking, requiring organization, budgets, resources and staff. It is therefore important to focus on specific strategic goals, objectives, and targets, and ask what data are needed to illuminate and track performance for these goals. Where can the Town make a difference for those who have experienced the greatest inequality and injustice? The answer to that strategic question will require consultation and partnership with Black and other underserved members of our community, as well as with community organizations. Both quantitative and qualitative data are important in answering that question, and for planning, action, and accountability. Quantitative data provide metrics for assessing progress, while qualitative data, such as focus groups and interviews with residents and social service agencies, provide the context and deeper understanding of racial equity and injustice in Amherst.

I welcome any thoughts members of the Town Council may have on these options for this remaining sum of the budget.