TASK FORCE ON THE IMPACT OF CITY LEADERS ON RACIAL EQUITY: A REPORT
INTRODUCTION

April 12, 2021

Dear NCLM Board of Directors,

We hereby submit the Task Force on the Impact of City Leaders on Racial Equity Report in response to the charge laid out when you asked us to serve a few months ago. We have done our best to lean in to understanding the history of institutional and structural racism in the United States and North Carolina to examine existing racial disparities in cities and towns and its implication for advancing racial equity. Over the last few months, we've had uncomfortable discussions, asked tough questions, and wrestled with the difficult issues surrounding systemic racism.

In this report, we attempt to provide a framework and recommendations for addressing racial equity and moving toward practical solutions for our richly diverse communities within North Carolina's cities and towns. Specifically, we have identified findings and recommendations centered around housing policy and homeownership, public utilities and infrastructure, police and law enforcement, and leadership and training.

You encouraged us to be courageous and practical, and we hope this report will not disappoint. The obvious bad news is that structural racism is pernicious and persistent, and it requires that we commit to a level of intention and rigor that will not continue the perpetuation of inequities in municipal policies and practices. With your leadership, vision, and commitment, it is the belief of this Task Force that transformational change is possible.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]

Jennifer Robinson
Co-Chair

William Harris
Co-Chair
NCLM VALUES AND RACIAL EQUITY

For more than 100 years, the NCLM has been one voice for cities and towns working for a better North Carolina. Through collective efforts, our values include:

- **Service**: We trust in the effectiveness of cities and towns, led by locally-elected officials, to craft solutions that improve quality of life.

- **Self-determination**: We believe in the ability of all cities and towns to pursue their own visions of their futures.

- **Inclusiveness**: We value every member, the diversity of all, and the diverse nature of each member city and town and their citizenry.

- **Collaboration**: We believe in working together in ways that enhance all cities and towns, through promotion of best practices, and imparting knowledge and expertise.

- **Responsiveness**: We focus on the needs of North Carolinians, answering to the people in meaningful ways that affect their everyday lives.

Perhaps NCLM’s greatest attribute is its diversity, as we see its value across North Carolina every day. Our cities and towns have many differences. They are large and small, urban and rural, mountainous and coastal and agricultural. They are comprised of citizens of all races, ages and backgrounds. And it is because of—not in spite of—these differences that we thrive, both culturally and economically. That is why as a membership organization that provides assistance on all issues impacting North Carolina’s cities and towns, the NCLM believes it is mission-critical to engage in a way that enhances local leadership on race, equity and equity-related issues. By leading with our collective values, the NCLM recognizes we must, first and foremost, understand our own history and role in supporting systemic racism and inequities to move forward in a real and robust way. In order to have future-forward, viable and thriving economies, cities and towns must center racial equity in policymaking to potentially overcome the intergenerational disparities that exists in local communities.
A recent study by CitiGroup, The Citi Global Perspectives & Solutions (GPS) report, estimates that over the past two decades alone, the United States has lost $16 trillion in GDP as a result of systemic racism. The cost of not addressing racial inequities is unsustainable. Achieving racial equity is in alignment with Vision 2030 and requires an intentional, strategic approach to translate into sustainable change.

The findings and recommendations identified in this report will help cities and towns move closer to the goals of NCLM’s strategic plan. We propose two recommendations to strengthen racial equity in housing policy and homeownership opportunities in municipalities. Next, the Task Force proposes two recommendations to improve racial equity outcomes regarding public utilities and infrastructure, especially in decision-making and priority setting. We also propose two recommendations in police and law enforcement that relate to improving community engagement and relations. Finally, we propose a forward-looking recommendation to enhance leadership capacity of city and town leaders.
At the July 2, 2020 NCLM Board of Directors meeting, led by NCLM President Jennifer Robinson, Council Member from Cary, members discussed matters of concern in cities and towns in the wake of George Floyd’s death and the widespread protests that followed. At that meeting, the Board went into small groups and discussed questions surrounding policing, race and the social climate, and municipal employee well-being.

Fourteen municipal elected officials were appointed to the Task Force on the Impact of City Leaders on Racial Equity. The 14-member Task Force’s composition was intentional in identifying members who represented the racial, gender, age, and geographical diversity that exists throughout North Carolina.

After member appointment, the Task Force began its work in November of 2020 and met virtually each month through March 2021; it was supported by staff from the National League of Cities and the NCLM.
In response to the robust conversation and vast interest of the NCLM Board of Directors in the issues of race in cities and towns, the Board authorized the formation of the NCLM Task Force on the Impact of City Leaders on Racial Equity.

THE TASK FORCE WAS CHARGED WITH IDENTIFYING THE FOLLOWING:

1. Historical overview of policies/practices impacting racial disparity in cities and towns.
2. Impact of wealth and other racially oriented gaps in cities and towns.
3. Ways in which municipal policies and practices impact race.
4. Impact of an elected municipal official on racial equity.
5. Impact of a city council on racial equity.
**TASK FORCE CO-CHAIRS**

Council Member Jennifer Robinson  
NCLM President, Town of Cary  

Commissioner William Harris  
NCLM Board Member, Town of Fuquay-Varina

**MEMBERS**

Mayor Dennis Barber  
NCLM Board Member  
Town of Newport  

Council Member Michael Bell  
NCLM Board Member  
City of Wilson  

Council Member Preston Blakely  
Town of Fletcher  

Council Member Monica Daniels  
City of Greenville  

Council Member Malcolm Graham  
City of Charlotte  

Mayor Pro Tem Valerie Jones  
Town of Sedalia  

Mayor Bobby Kilgore  
NCLM Board Member  
City of Monroe  

Mayor Brenda Lyerly  
Town of Banner Elk  

Council Member Jeff MacIntosh  
NCLM Board Member  
City of Winston Salem  

Council Member Mark-Anthony Middleton  
NCLM Board Member  
City of Durham  

Council Member Steve Rao  
Town of Morrisville  

Mayor Patrick Taylor  
Town of Highlands
THE PROCESS

Task Force members met monthly (a total of six times) from November 2020 to March 2021. An additional meeting was convened in February 2021.

Staff from the National League of Cities’ Race, Equity and Leadership (REAL) initiative made presentations centered around normalizing and operationalizing racial equity in municipal government. In addition, NLC staff led Task Force members through a series of facilitated discussions with the goal of equipping the group with a shared language and understanding of structural racism in the United States. These meetings provided an understanding of the historical overview of the policies and practices that impact racial disparity in cities and towns, as well as the impact of wealth and other racially-oriented gaps in cities and towns.

At the two February meetings, NCLM staff provided presentations on the Historical Primer of North Carolina Municipalities and the Intersection with Systemic Racism. The last two meetings were devoted to facilitated discussions on ways in which municipal policies and practices impact race and the impact of an elected municipal official and city/town council on impact on racial equity.

THE HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES IMPACTING RACIAL DISPARITY IN CITIES AND TOWNS

WEALTH AND RACIAL EQUITY

WAYS IN WHICH MUNICIPAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES IMPACT RACE

IMPACT OF AN ELECTED MUNICIPAL OFFICIAL AND CITY/TOWN BOARD ON RACIAL EQUITY
The first two decades of the 21st century have shown us that the consequences of our historical choices have not been left behind just because the calendar moves forward. In fact, history is built upon ideas and assumed truths generated, perpetuated and institutionalized over time. Once institutionalized, concepts become the basis for governance and social constructs. They inform the decisions we make about small and large matters; they shape and reinforce how our communities develop.

The events which have unfolded across the United States during the past few years have highlighted how historical events have lasting community impacts—it's clear that racial injustice has been a fault line that dividing our nation and our communities. Arguably, May 25, 2020 was the most pivotal turning point for the nation’s consciousness. On that day, George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man living in Minneapolis, was arrested and handcuffed, placed chest-down on the pavement, and subsequently died as a police officer kneeled on his neck. Floyd’s story, in many ways, is not new in America. History is littered with accounts of brutality against black communities, but Floyd’s death sparked a national upheaval across the United States in which long-postponed questions about racial inequity became more pressing.

Research indicates race is the strongest predictor of success in the United States.

The historical record and current-day tragedies raise potent and powerful questions regarding how myriad United States institutions impact the livelihood of its citizens. The contrast of one group’s successes, economic benefits and ability to live an enriching existence with the other group’s continued financial, social and systemic failures and burdens shine a glaring spotlight on the real costs resulting from structural racism.

Unfortunately, since the beginning of the United States’ existence as a sovereign nation, systemic racism has been a significant part of its story. For more than 240 years, Black Americans were chattel slaves, which by definition means property that was bought and sold. Shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation and the beginning of Reconstruction, the inhumanity of chattel slavery was replaced with institutionalized systems of peonage, convict leasing and sharecropping. Approximately for the next 25 years, these systems continued the sanctioned practice of labor extraction, especially from Black Americans.
For about 80 years following, the system of Jim Crow was put in place to specifically segregate Black Americans from White Americans, hence, society. Governments in the South, including North Carolina, created, adopted and enforced laws that relegated and dictated the manner and conditions that Blacks could occupy societal spaces including public schools, hospitals, railroad cars, public libraries, public facilities such as bathrooms, water fountains, and pools, restaurants, and hotels, just to name a few. As an example, "The...Utilities Commission...is empowered and directed to require the establishment of separate waiting rooms at all stations for the white and colored races." (A Sampling of Jim Crow Laws, NCpedia). These Black Codes were enacted to deliberately limit economic freedoms.

This denial of basic humanity was coupled with physical violence and lynching, often perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan and with the purpose of maintaining control over Black people and the social order of White advantage. For example, in 1870, Wyatt Outlaw, a Black councilman in Graham and founder/president of the local Union League, was taken from his home by the Ku Klux Klan and hanged from a tree in the town square (Lynching, Bruce E. Baker, 2006).

For about 50 years during the Jim Crow era, laws were enforced locally and upheld by the courts to restrict the movement and access of Black people. For example, in the court case, State v. Darnell (1914), a municipal ordinance was adopted to make it unlawful for any African American to occupy any dwelling when the majority of residents on the street were white. The State Supreme Court strikes down the regulation citing Dillon’s Rule that the local ordinance was outside of authority granted by the General Assembly. The Court left open the question of whether this ordinance is constitutional.

The system of redlining denied Black Americans the access to asset-building opportunities such as homeownership. Beginning in the 1930s, the Federal Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) standardized the practice of credit analysis by identifying the perceived financial risk of investing in neighborhoods. Communities deemed worthy of investment were identified as “green,” and neighborhoods determined to be high risk were marked as “red.” The red or redlined areas were excluded from growth and investment opportunities. In a report by the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute, "Housing Policies 'redlined' Nonwhite communities, preventing homeownership and the flow and benefits of capital investment."

For the last 40 years, the system of mass incarceration, has significantly increased. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, based on 2018 figures, there are 67,000 people in prison and jails in North Carolina. Of that number, 19,000 (53%) are in local jails. Data also shows that Blacks and Indigenous populations are overrepresented in relation to population at large.

According to The Pew Charitable Trust, “social science research has time and again come to the robust conclusion that exposure to the criminal justice system has profound and intergenerational negative effects on communities that experience disproportionate incarceration rates” (Collateral Costs: Incarcerations Effect on Economic Mobility, 2010).

The cumulative effect of the destructive systems of chattel slavery, peonage, convict leasing, Jim Crow, redlining, and mass incarceration are deep and intergenerational—the results of which have left Black, Latino, Indigenous and Asian and Pacific Islanders virtually wealthless, vulnerable, exposed and set up to bear the full brunt of all types of societal disasters, ills, and unjust governmental policies and practices.
RACIAL & ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN PRISONS AND JAILS IN N.C.
Whites are underrepresented in the incarcerated population while Blacks and American Indians are overrepresented.

FIG. 1

NORTH CAROLINA INCARCERATION RATES BY RACE / ETHNICITY, 2010
(Number of people incarcerated per 100,000 people in that racial/ethnic group)

FIG. 2

In the following chart, the historical context shows the roles municipalities have served during various timeframes as the United States has developed. Direct services such as water, sewage, public spaces, police and fire services, taxes, zoning, recycling and many other essential municipal services were established as institutional racial policies were developing. The impact of institutional policies inevitably influences local decision-making, since federal and state policies provide a framework for local governance.
### Municipalities' Role and Responsibilities

**PRE-1865** (91 YEARS)
Non-existent as a governmental entity. The county served as the primary political and geographical unit on behalf of the state.

**1865-1877** (12 YEARS)
- Created as part of "innovative" governance structure after Civil War
  - Roads, bridges, taxes, and finances

**1877-1900** (25 YEARS)
- Became "convenient" administrative subdivisions"
  - Road building and maintenance

**1900-1955** (55 YEARS)
- Inspections
  - Water / Sewer
  - Roads
  - Public Parks / Spaces
  - Transportation
  - Police / Fire
  - Zoning and Land Use
  - Annexation*

**Post-1955** (66 YEARS)
- Inspections
  - Water / Sewer
  - Roads
  - Public Parks / Spaces
  - Transportation
  - Police / Fire
  - Zoning and Land Use
  - Trash / Recycling
  - Services that reflect community needs

### Unencumbered Access to Municipal Services

- White People
- Wealthy slaveowners
- Political elites/landowners

### Systemic / Institutional Racial Policies

**DATE / POPULATION US vs. NC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>1860 Census</strong></th>
<th><strong>1880 Census</strong></th>
<th><strong>1900 Census</strong></th>
<th><strong>1960 Census</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>White:</strong> 86% vs. 67%</td>
<td><strong>White:</strong> 87% vs. 62%</td>
<td><strong>White:</strong> 88% vs. 67%</td>
<td><strong>White:</strong> 75% vs. 70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black:</strong> 14% vs. 36%</td>
<td><strong>Black:</strong> 13% vs. 38%</td>
<td><strong>Black:</strong> 11% vs. 25%</td>
<td><strong>Black:</strong> 12% vs. 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other:</strong> 03% vs. 01%</td>
<td><strong>Other:</strong> 03% vs. 01%</td>
<td><strong>Other:</strong> 09% vs. 08%</td>
<td><strong>Other:</strong> 10% vs. 12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WEALTH AND RACIAL EQUITY

Over the past four decades, wealth inequality has continued to rise, with significant disparity between White and Nonwhite households. Fast-growing wealth inequality threatens to destabilize economic stability and growth. Economic stability is a factor that impacts government and services at a municipal level. Issues such as housing, education and labor markets impact the health and infrastructure of local communities.

Although income is important in meeting day-to-day obligations, wealth is a very significant measure of economic well-being. It is through wealth that people handle unforeseen emergencies, buy a home, start and run a business, pay for college, go on vacation, and undertake all of the things that denote a high-quality life. High-wealth communities are more stable and are not as impacted by general disruptions (weather, job loss, etc.).

According to research, the racial wealth gap exists because of intergenerational transfer of wealth. Due to systemic racism, Black people and Nonwhite communities have been deliberately excluded from opportunities to build and transfer wealth, especially during periods of national, state, and local expansions of growth. In Wealth privilege and the racial wealth gap: A case study in economic stratification, pooled data from 1995 to 2016 reveal that 88% of individuals who received an inheritance or living trusts transfers were White. While wealth is typically transferred from a parent or grandparent to the next generation, in Black and Latino households, financial support is twice as likely to be given by children to a parent or older family member than White households.
The following charts demonstrate that as institutional policies were implemented, there was a direct impact on economic inequality as well, and those impacts currently trend on a national scale. A direct line can be drawn from Chattel Slavery to current-day systems that manifest the advantages and disparities. Although data shows the consistent target of systemic racism are Black people, intergenerational systemic racism impacts all Nonwhite communities.

As the racial wealth statistics in the charts above clearly illustrate, the racial wealth gap is substantial. Median household wealth figures show enormous disparity between white and non-white households. Even when accounting for education, the wealth gap persists.
WAYS IN WHICH MUNICIPAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES IMPACT RACE

Throughout the history of the United States and North Carolina, laws, policies, resources, economic opportunity and the power of the state have been created and used to establish and maintain a social order that advantages White people and disadvantages Black people. Based on the historical record, unfortunately, cities and towns have played a role in widening the advantages and disparities.

Examples

- Redlining
- Restrictive zoning based on racial segregation
- Urban renewal and highway projects
- Limiting or prohibiting access to public spaces

Although there may not be explicit municipal policies and practices in place, the cumulative impact of systemic policies and practices built on/around race are already “baked in” to the situation. As an example, when considering street repair priorities, does current capital improvement process take into account how old the street is and how long it has not been invested in? A policy that takes into account those built-in factors will lead to different outcome. In this example, perhaps, that particular street may need to be moved to the top of the list, or instead of being repaired, it needs to be rebuilt because it is beyond its life cycle.

These types of considerations center equity, which according to the National League of Cities, means providing people with the resources and opportunities they need, given their history and set of circumstances. This type of targeted decision-making approach can start to redress historical, structural, and systemic barriers based on race.
IMPACT OF AN ELECTED MUNICIPAL OFFICIAL AND CITY/TOWN BOARD ON RACIAL EQUITY

Since municipal officials are closest to the people and are looked upon to provide leadership, especially during periods of crisis and unrest, it is important that they are equipped with the right information and tools to lead their communities during challenging times, including on matters involving systemic, institutional racism. The Task Force recognizes that committed municipal leaders and governing boards can help to bring about more equitable outcomes for groups systemically impacted by inequities and disparities through deliberate, intentional, and engaged action.

According to research, there are key elements that cities and towns should consider.

Municipal leaders must set the tone for the city/town institution by beginning to normalize conversations on race. Elected and municipal officials must be comfortable in talking with each other and constituents about race and systemic racism. These conversations can be achieved through shared language and understanding.

Municipalities are encouraged to publicly declare commitment to racial equity. As with instituting any municipal-wide initiative, a public declaration is a bold stance that builds connection between Nonwhite communities and governing bodies.

It is critical that today’s municipal leaders understand all areas of their communities. To gain understanding, municipal officials and governing boards must commit time and space to listen to the lived experiences of systemically marginalized communities and intentionally consider these experiences in city/town decision-making processes.

Municipal leaders and governing bodies must commit, dedicate, and align existing or dedicate new resources, where available, to a system capable of bringing about change. Capacity building at the local level to address the impacts of racism throughout local government institution is a necessary step toward achieving real progress. Local elected officials need to provide the leadership to generate a municipal-wide coordinated effort and infrastructure to carry out these functions.
The Task Force acknowledges that the cumulative historical impact of redlining, Jim Crow segregation, exclusionary zoning and other multi-institutional and multi-generational practices based on race have led to inequalities in homeownership and housing policy at the municipal level where access to equitable housing options and choices and asset appreciation have been restricted for Black, Latino, and other Nonwhite communities. For example, data shows that “A home is one of the only assets in which the race of the owner affects the rate of return.” The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our government Segregated America, 2017.

The Task Force recommends that cities and towns consider an examination of their own historical practices related to redlining and other policies that may have harmed minority homeownership rates, home values and wealth accumulation. Tools such as Mapping Inequality let visitors browse more than 150 interactive maps and thousands of 1930s area descriptions. This resource from the Center for Investigative Reporting maps statistical analysis and tracks modern-day disparities in metro areas across the U.S.

The Task Force recommends that cities and towns, as they can afford to do so, provide incentives that encourage investment in historically redlined neighborhoods or others disadvantaged by past discriminatory policies.
As the historical record demonstrates, neglect, exclusion through law, lack of investment, and land/zoning practices that relegated Black people to low-lying, flood-prone areas have led to insufficient access to public utilities and infrastructure in Black and other Nonwhite communities. According to researchers from the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, “some of these communities are like donut holes in the middle of cities and towns… There’s evidence from previous research by demographers that shows how past majority white town governments, in some instances, intentionally excluded these areas from city services, and in some cases those historic structural disparities remain.”

The Task Force recommends that cities and towns consider targeted approaches and strategies, such as Target Universalism, to address inequities created by past policies and decisions that has had and continues to have the effect of causing residents in those areas to suffer economically, educationally, socially and from a health standpoint.

The Task Force recommends that cities and towns make investments in social infrastructure, like parks and libraries, in historically neglected or redlined neighborhoods, or those disadvantaged by less desirable targeted public facilities or geography.
Residents in predominantly Black neighborhoods routinely face more scrutiny from law enforcement and other enforcement agencies. Government actions such as increased code enforcement, zero tolerance policies for drugs in public housing, and disproportionately targeting Black neighborhoods for traffic stops result in Black residents facing more local government fines or other minor punishments (Governing, 2019). Data shows that Black people are overrepresented in the criminal justice system in relation to overall population. Additionally, according to a report in the Washington Post, “roughly half of those fatally shot by police are White, but Black Americans are fatally shot at a disproportionate rate compared to their representation in the US population.”

The Task Force recommends that cities and towns consider assessments of their policing that examine approaches to racial equity and a shared sense of community.

The Task Force recommends that cities and towns create intentional spaces and forums for brave and courageous engagement about race, equity, justice and policing. These efforts should include ways to strengthen partnerships with stakeholders inside and outside of law enforcement.

The Task Force recommends that cities and towns work with the NCLM and state partners to better identify, utilize, and win the extensive grant awards available at the federal level that support better training and education for officers.
LEADERSHIP AND TRAINING

Dialogue around systemic racism is difficult and uncomfortable especially since it is a societal norm to not talk about race. According to a 2019 Pew Research Center study, two-thirds of U.S. adults think local elected officials care about the people they represent at a higher level than federal officials. To effect transformative change, city and town leaders can build upon that community goodwill to spearhead normalizing difficult conversations around race. However, to be effective change-makers, education and training are key.

The Task Force recommends establishing education and training opportunities for city and town officials to establish a shared and common understanding and language from which to have dialogue at the local level. From there, it is possible to create antiracist policies, practices, and procedures that produce and sustain racial equity among racial groups.

According to a 2019 Pew Research Center study, two-thirds of U.S. adults think local elected officials care about the people they represent at a higher level than federal officials.
RESEARCH / RESOURCES


https://www.nlc.org/racial-equity-resources-and-reports/


https://sph.unc.edu/sph-news/researchers-conduct-first-quantitative-analysis-of-water-sewer-access-disparities-in-75-nc-counties/

https://ui.uncc.edu/sites/ui.uncc.edu/files/media/articles/RWTry2.pdf


FIG.1 Source: Compiled from 2010 Census, Summary File 1.

FIG.2 Source: Calculated from U.S. Census 2010 Summary File 1. Incarceration populations are all types of correctional facilities in a state, including federal and state prisons, local jails, halfway houses, etc. Statistics for Whites are for Non-Hispanic Whites.

FIG.3 Source: Prosperity Now & Institute For Policy Studies

FIG.4 Source: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

FIG.5 Source: Corporation for Enterprise Development: Assets & Opportunity Local Data Center

TERMS

Equality - Policies of equality provide the same thing for everyone. This type of policy only works when people start from the same place, history, and set of circumstances.

Equity - equates to justice, is about fairness, and providing people with the resources and opportunities they need, given their history and set of circumstances.

Individual Racism - Pre-judgment, bias, or discrimination by an individual based on race.

Institutional Racism - Policies, practices and procedures that work better for white people than for people of color.

Structural Racism - A history and current reality of institutional racism across all institutions, combining to create a system that negatively impacts Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islanders.


The North Carolina League of Municipalities is a member-driven organization representing the interests of cities and towns in the state. Through their collective efforts, League member cities and towns better serve their residents and improve quality of life.

For more than 100 years, the League has been one voice for cities and towns working for a better North Carolina.