

[https://www.sanfordherald.com/news/city-equity-task-force-holds-first-meeting/article\\_36669539-6705-5900-b720-1f28cbcd7b2d.html](https://www.sanfordherald.com/news/city-equity-task-force-holds-first-meeting/article_36669539-6705-5900-b720-1f28cbcd7b2d.html)

## City equity task force holds first meeting

By Jasmine Gallup [jgallup@sanfordherald.com](mailto:jgallup@sanfordherald.com)

Nov 7, 2020

The city's new racial equity task force held its first meeting via video conference Thursday.

The 12-member task force was established by the Sanford City Council to identify racial disparities in the city and Lee County and recommend solutions. The task force is expected to complete its work within six to 12 months — compiling information, identifying community needs, expanding opportunities for all citizens and preparing a report with recommendations for the city council.

The three at-large members of the task force are Sanford attorney Kevin Foushee; Jermaine White, assistant superintendent of Student Support Services for Harnett County Schools; and community activist Margaret Murchison. The local facilitator is Bishop Charles Mellette of Christian Provision Ministries.

"I want to say what a great privilege and honor it is to have been selected to be a part of what I believe is a significant, life-changing opportunity for the residents in the city of Sanford," Mellette said at the start of the hour-long meeting. "I believe we have an excellent opportunity here to do some real good work."

The task force didn't take any action during their first meeting. Members were eager to start working and many said they thought the formation of the task force could mark a turning point in lives of Black people in the city and county. Some members mentioned their deep ties to Sanford and their love for the community, saying they wanted it to be the best it could be for them and their children.

White said one of his main interests was in looking at the "the plight of the African American male." As an administrator for Harnett County Schools, White said, he has been examining the disproportionate number of suspensions Black students are subject to and is making an effort to put employees through training addressing implicit and explicit bias, he said.

The economic disparity Black people face in North Carolina was a subject touched upon, as well. Attorney Fred Webb Jr., who represents criminal justice on the task force, said he believes the way to empower African Americans is to “prepare them for economic opportunity and provide opportunities for them to be employed.”

Another member, Jeanette Peace, who represents employment, wages and income on the task force, said she has witnessed many of the roadblocks Black people face in her position as an attorney focused on social security disability.

“I see those people who are often the ones who are underserved and overlooked,” Peace said. “I see people who are oftentimes at their wits end economically. I see the disparities in wage-earning, I see the disparities in opportunities for healthcare.”

Peace said that conversations about racial equity are “never easy,” but that if members come into the task force with the right attitude, they can make Sanford an example for the state.

The task force will continue to meet at 6 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month.

Other members of the task force are:

- Ciera Dixon, a guidance counselor at MINA Charter School of Lee County, representing education;
- Felicia Crittenden, associate dean of Workforce Development & Continuing Education, and Career and Technical Programs, at Central Carolina Community College, representing workforce development;
- Jimmy Randolph, CEO of Sanford Area Growth Alliance, representing economic development;
- Vernadette Williams, with Main Street Realty Group, representing housing;
- Vonda Reives, a family practice physician, representing health care;
- Katrina Garrison, with Lee-Moore Capital Company, representing nonprofits; and
- The Rev. Bob Bridwell of St. Stephen’s Catholic Church, representing the faith-based community.

