

[https://www.sanfordherald.com/news/city-equity-task-force-launches-subcommittees/article\\_551457c9-7f34-58b8-b3f6-96a663efe679.html](https://www.sanfordherald.com/news/city-equity-task-force-launches-subcommittees/article_551457c9-7f34-58b8-b3f6-96a663efe679.html)

## City equity task force launches subcommittees

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

Jan 19, 2021

Sanford's racial equity task force narrowed its focus over the holidays, launching seven subcommittees to focus on different areas of racial disparity in the city.

The 12-member task force was established by the Sanford City Council last year to identify racial inequities and recommend solutions. During a meeting Thursday, the first this year, members of the task force heard reports from the subcommittees about their priorities moving forward.

**Housing**The two main issues that concern the housing subcommittee are housing affordability and homelessness, said member Katrina Garrison. Members discussed the city's redevelopment initiative in East Sanford as well as their work to combat homelessness. The group wants to work with the city and local businesses to expand programs that may already exist, such as the home-buying class run by the Brick Capital Community Development Corporation, Garrison said.

**Wages and Income**One of the top priorities for the wages and income committee is to ensure that people of color have an equal opportunity to step into new jobs coming to Sanford, said member Felicia Crittenden. With several biopharmaceutical and advanced manufacturing companies coming to the area, some 1,500 new jobs will be available.

The committee wants to ensure that information about job requirements and training programs are given to the people who need it, Crittenden said. Part of that involves increasing the number of minority students at Central Carolina Community College, she said.

"We are missing the mark as an institution when it comes to reaching our minority students," she said.

**Education and Workforce Development** Priorities for this committee include: addressing discipline disparities among Black children in Lee County schools, building workforce development programs at CCCC, and increasing hiring diversity for leadership roles in various community sectors, said member Jermaine White.

**Criminal Justice** The priorities of the criminal justice committee include bail bond reform, to allow those charged with less serious crimes to await trial outside of jail; the provision of counseling or education to people in jail; and the formation of a pretrial release policy by the city, said member Fred Webb Jr. The committee also wants to look at reducing gun and gang violence and providing more mental healthcare for inmates, Webb said.

**Health** The health committee is currently considering three main issues — access to healthcare, the opioid epidemic and mental health, said member Vonda Reives. In addition to filling gaps in services, the committee wants to combat social barriers to healthcare such as income, transportation, housing and food resources, Reives said. The committee talked about how they might start a free clinic for people in the community. Members also hope to spread awareness about healthcare resources to people in need, Reives said.

**Representation and Inclusion** One of the main issues for this committee is to ensure information about service opportunities and openings in local government are spread to Black communities, said Jermaine White. Building an outreach program and educating people about how they can get involved is one of the main ways the committee can increase diversity in decision-making groups, White said. He also raised the idea of providing financial or other resources to people wishing to run for office, and developing a city office of equity and inclusion where people could turn to for information and resources.

“We’re really looking at opportunities to meet people where they are,” White said.

**Communications and Community Responsibility** In addition to reducing inequality in various areas in the community, the task force also wants to inform people about their work, educate people about racial inequities and build relationships with stakeholders to create change, said member Jeanette Peace. The impact of the committee should stretch beyond just its members, Peace said. The committee wants to ensure people across the city know what the task force’s final recommendations are and hold city officials accountable to acting on them, she said. Another of the committee’s goals is to educate people and empower them to advocate for themselves, Peace said.

At the end of the meeting, many committee members agreed they want to make a lasting impact on city, not just submit a report. Although it will be the responsibility of city officials to decide whether to enact the task force's recommendations, said facilitator Charles Mellette, the task force doesn't intend to simply drop off their report and then walk away.

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