

Observer: Pat Blumen (Sue Brenner was also present)

Aldermen Present: Delores Holmes

Staff Present: Evonda Thomas-Smith, Dr. Patricia A. Efiom (Equity & Empowerment Coordinator), Steve Hagerty (Mayor-Elect), Marty Lyons.

Media Present: Daily Northwestern, EvanstonNOW

Meeting Began: 10:45am

Meeting Ended: 12:03pm

Agenda:

- Introduction
- Role of Equity and Empowerment Coordinator
- Expectations
- Understanding Diversity
- Equality vs. Equity
- Empowerment
- Equity Lens
- Discussion

Summary of Comments:

– Patricia discussed her role as E&E Coordinator to develop & implement policies **for equity and empowerment in Evanston**; said “diversity” is a 90’s word and is different from “equity”. Said we need to move from putting out fires to leadership and coordination and there is no one right way. The question is: “What are the barriers of marginalized people from fully participating. There are multiple problems, not just one. Diversity + variety. We have to nurture and welcome diversity by being inclusive. Equity is not equality. Equality leads to inequity. Equity means that everyone gets folded in in a way that meets their needs We need to learn to ask others for what they need, not what other people think they need. Guarantee of fair treatment, access, inclusion, app..., and advancement for all residents while striving to identify & eliminate barriers that have prevented full participation of marginalized groups.” We have to stop talking and listen to what others need. Don’t ignore problems, but go to the root. Equity invites all people to be active participants. Empowerment is the authority or power given to someone to do something. Process of becoming stronger & more confident, especially in controlling one’s life & claiming one’s rights. “I went, I spoke, somebody listened.” City Council attendees are predominantly white? How can we get more people to come? Historically, we have given others what we want them to have. In order to achieve equity, we need to ensure that marginalized groups are empowered to speak for what they want.

– Challenges: Marginalized groups are not at the table; if they are, they are often underrepresented or are spoken for; are challenged by policies, laws, ordinances that limit their participation. We survey minorities, but they don’t have much weight relative to the responses of the greater majority as there are fewer of them.

- Patricia asked those present what are issues we need to attack? Suggestions: school achievement gap (Holmes said that is an issue the schools need to deal with, not the city); low income housing (however, this assumes that all minorities are low income, which is a biased assumption); policies re access to beaches (giving free beach tokens assumes that minorities would go to the beach if income were not a barrier, but minorities may not want to go to beaches at all.)
- An audience member stated that Evanston is good at inviting diverse representatives to the table, but there is often no follow-up after the voices are heard; Evanston must be willing to take action on what is said.
- We have to admit that we are racist.
- Can we invest in something that we can't see what we are getting? We invest in the things that we can count (ex. the achievement gap).
- There are implicit biases (ex. assume black people don't go to the beach if we give free tokens.) Someone in the beach asked why we charge people to go to the beach as we already pay taxes (Beaches in Chicago are free.)
- Introduce the idea of an equity lens to City Council: ask a series of questions for any new project: Who does it impact? How does it impact? In the past, city has assumed impact.
- Thomas said that to listen, you have to build trust.
- Sue Brenner said that there is no dialogue during citizen comment at City Council. Holmes said that dialogue is allowed at committee meetings where issues are discussed prior to Council mtg.
- Comment from audience that surveys on the city's website are useless: who reads the website?
- Audience member from South Africa suggests that Evanston adopt the Truth & Reconciliation model used in South Africa.
- What do marginalized people really want? Town Hall Meetings are meant to shift the narrative and get to a place where we can suspend the mistrust.
- City of Evanston recognizes the need so hired Patricia to lead the city to be livable for all; she works for the city's elected officials; Patricia admitted that she does not have the answers but she does have the skill set to shift the narrative.
- Goal of seeking input is to develop an Equity and Empowerment Plan that the City Council will vote on.
- We must do this with a spirit of collaboration (agree to disagree).
- We must consider ways to address the historical "mess". How is the City of Evanston going to "own up"? Says the South Africa model (which Patricia is trained in) is very powerful.
- Inclusion Solutions: What is the language? (what is offensive and what is not?).
- We have to put aside our personal needs.
- Audience member noted that there were no Hispanics/Latinos in the room. Patricia said there will be a Town Hall meeting in Spanish.

- The Plan must include a set of goals that are measurable and include ordinances.
- One of the hardest parts is learning not to speak on behalf of others, but to learn to really listen to them.
- We need to establish ground rules: If people feel “stepped on”, they must be willing to forgive.