

Citizens of Lee' Summit,

Our citizens have been incredibly challenged the last few months. We have dealt with the physical, mental, and financial hardships brought on by the pandemic, while also feeling grief and anxiety over the racial injustices in our nation. I have participated in many conversations and events including peaceful protests by our citizens. Police Chief Travis Forbes and I attended the first protest in our downtown sparked by the brutal death of George Floyd. We visited with citizens as they exercised their first amendment rights regarding their concern and desire to correct racial injustices and inequities that occur and exist in our nation. Our community has faced our fair share of racial tensions over the years and has struggled to embrace race, inclusion, diversity and equity conversations and policies. Healthy dialogue has not always been facilitated and cultivated. Still, a movement began organically, and our citizens took part voicing their concerns and outrage over racial injustice.

Many citizens have inquired about our police department and policies. Lee's Summit police officers are highly trained in de-escalation and conflict resolution strategies and receive training multiple times per year. Psychological screening is conducted for all police applicants to check for tendencies toward discrimination. The department conducts quarterly checks as part of an early intervention system of every officer's use of force, stop data, and complaints. Additionally, the Lee's Summit Police Department trains a minimum of twice per year on the topic of bias based policing and implicit bias.

While it is comforting to know that our police are trained in de-escalation and implicit bias recognition, this does not check all the boxes for a healthy culture in our community when it comes to race relations, justice, diversity, and equity. Some of our citizens are choosing to peacefully protest rather than post on social media to show their opposition to racial inequities and injustices such as the George Floyd death. Others are expressing concern about peaceful protests escalating while others want to avoid the conversation entirely. However, we are all in this battle together against racial injustice and inequities. We must be a role model city in more ways than having a talented police department.

We must embrace conversations about racial injustice and inequities and come together as a community. We need to have the strength to talk about inclusion and diversity in open formats. We must be a community that supports our youth wanting to share their opinions, boldly take steps in good faith, and not allow ourselves or others to diminish each other's voices. Social media, email, and text are fine to get a conversation started, but nothing takes more courage than face-to-face conversations and taking a stand for what you feel is right while also taking a moment to consider other viewpoints.

I know America is better than what we witnessed in the death of George Floyd. I know America is better than the violence that we have seen across the nation. I know that in America, peaceful protests are time-honored traditions that must be maintained if we are to retain our right to speak. But, in order to move forward in a way that prevents these types of deaths and violence, we must begin engaging bravely in conversations accepting that which many of us do

not understand such as the fact that we all see color. We all see color, but we can learn, train, and hold ourselves accountable so that we judge others by their character and actions and not by discriminatory means. I know we all can do this because our police officers and legions of our teachers are educated and trained in this manner. But the police officers and the teachers cannot do it alone. We must accept our role in this and be willing to listen and learn. We are still trying to understand how to achieve what Dr. King talked about fifty plus years ago when he dreamed of a day when people are not judged by the color of their skin, but the content of their character. To move forward I believe we must accept that we all see color, so we can then pause, reflect, be mindful, and make preparations for the next step of learning how to judge based only on the actions and the content of one's character.

As a mayor of a great city in this great nation, I want an America where humanity, compassion, and respect define our culture. We can do our part by starting here in our caring city. Our city is in the final stages of a long-term strategic plan. During the meetings and breakout groups such as the health and wellness committee, we have overwhelmingly heard our citizens and stakeholders emphasize the need to prioritize inclusion and diversity in all that we do as a community. Today I am announcing the formation of a Commission for Diversity and Inclusion. This commission will help us build and facilitate an inclusive framework and culture for convening public conversations and developing long-term strategies to be the healthiest and most supportive community we can be as we embrace our diversity and flourish from its benefits.

I would like to thank the following persons for their advocacy and willingness to serve the community at one of the most historic and pivotal times our city has ever faced. I am pleased to announce that the commission members are:

1. Sadia Mahmood
2. Claudia Meyer
3. Karen Schuler
4. Tina Ellsworth
5. Lashawn Walker
6. Dr. Emmanuel Ngomsi
7. Dale Beasley
8. Ryana Parks-Shaw
9. Levi Holland
10. Melanie Harding
11. Lorenzo Harrison

If you would like to be a part of the continued conversations, planning, and activities to support diversity and inclusion please contact City Administration at 816.969.1010.