

Report of the Durham Racial Equity Task Force: An Urgent and Loving Call to Action

Executive Summary

In a city born during Reconstruction and reared under Jim Crow, shocking inequities between white people and people of color are still evident in 21st century Durham. If we reject the notion that these disparities are normal, due to differences in capability or culture, it is imperative that we take significant strides to undo the negative legacies that haunt our local and national history. We need to be not merely anti-racist in thought, but actively and continuously anti-racist in deed.

At the request of Mayor Pro Tempore Jillian Johnson, the city of Durham formed its first racial equity task force in October 2018, and appointed 17 volunteer members from across the city of Durham.

The Durham Racial Equity Task Force (RETF) has spent the last 21 months developing trust, openness, and honest internal relationships that the work of racial equity demands and deserves. We began our first conversations about how each of us understood racial equity, and came to a consensus on how we would use the term and apply this to our work as a group. From these conversations grew the development of six subcommittees to address specific areas of programming within the city of Durham: Wealth & Economy, Criminal Legal System, Health and Environmental Justice, Housing, Education, and Public History.

We recognize the intimate interconnections of these areas and assume that we need to act simultaneously on multiple fronts. We have been able to dig deeply and feel confident in making specific policy recommendations on some issues. In other equally important areas, we have identified crucial issues that need to be addressed even as we are not yet ready to make specific proposals. We see our efforts as seeding further, ongoing work.

We entered into this work with some lived experiences and expertise in this arena. However, we were educated by the many others who helped deepen and expand our views. We have come to lean on the expertise of our community.

Our work concludes with a detailed report, which is to be presented to the Durham City Council on July 22, 2020. This report seeks to address, develop, and implement policies and actions to ensure a more equitable Durham community.

Contents

- The Data, the Stories, the Receipts: Centering Racial Equity in Durham
 - A narrative of Durham
 - Defining and addressing racial equity
 - The formation and scope of RETF
 - The importance of language usage

- Task Force members
- Tell It Like It Is: The Water We Swim In and Naming Whiteness
 - Contextual overview of our racial reality
- Let the Record Show: Stories, Data, Transparency, and Accountability
 - RETF data requests: You can't fix what you don't measure.
- Limitations of the report
- This Is How We Do It - Making the Vision a Reality: Our Recommendations
 - Introduction, recommendations, limitations, and summaries:
 - Wealth & Economy
 - Criminal Legal System
 - Health and Environmental Justice
 - Housing
 - Education
 - Public History
- What's In the Toolkit: Building Blocks for Racial Equity
 - Racial equity checklist and impact tool
- Not A Conclusion, but a Beginning: Reimagining, Realigning, and Sustaining an Equitable Infrastructure
 - Sustainability and the advancement of racial equity work
- Acknowledgments
- Appendices-including a glossary

Conclusion

Racial equity work in the city of Durham must be permanent, appropriately funded, and institutionally supported by the city, county, and all community stakeholders. RETF is concerned about issues of accountability and long-term sustainability in carrying out this work. Dealing with racial inequity is not the mission of one city council or one mayor. The work is ongoing and long-term. Anti-racism practices and racial equity benefit all residents of Durham. We as a community should be intentional about equity in every aspect of our lived experience to dismantle systemic racism.

The Durham Racial Equity Task Force has dedicated itself to the work, putting in countless hours as we tried to both understand the scope and depth of racial inequity in our city and figure

out how to overcome it. But this is the work of the whole community and not just elected officials. Our document is intended not to be read-only, but as a spur to action.

We call on you, as individuals, neighborhoods, institutions, and communities, to become active participants in the struggle to end racism. With the development and sustained implementation of racially equitable policies, we look to becoming the city we know we can be; where all residents are truly free. Finally, we thank the people from across Durham; the community members who attended meetings and provided input; local resources who shared their years of expertise and helped us in our thinking and in our own growth.

Our Recommendations

This Is How We Do It: Making the Vision a Reality

Wealth & Economy

INTRODUCTION

Deep commitment to racial equity requires significant and long-term reallocation of resources. Centuries of [white supremacy](#), systemic racism, and segregationist policies have resulted in an enormous and still-growing [racial wealth gap](#) that contributes to the perpetuation of racialized outcomes in education, housing, health, employment, and other quality of life indicators. This reality is not unique to Durham, but here it is exacerbated by rapid economic development and gentrification that further marginalizes, displaces, and impoverishes Durham's communities of color.

The downtown development plan, including American Tobacco Campus, directly resulted in the re-segregation of downtown Durham and environs. While the City applied equality to the plan, it did not apply equity to ensure the growth and success of Black businesses. This is a re-traumatization of the experience of [Hayti](#) and a failing that the City needs to immediately address.

The racialized impact of the Covid-19 pandemic only heightens these systemic inequities. RETF calls upon major institutions in the City of Durham and Durham County, including city and county governments, banking institutions, philanthropic institutions, and Duke University, to invest and reallocate resources to communities of color in order to build an inclusive economy where we all thrive.

We envision a bold city and county racial equity development fund that is sustainable, accountable to community oversight, and ambitious enough to effectively address racial inequities in areas of housing, economy, criminal legal, healthcare, education, and public history. This bold plan must meet the challenge of the racial wealth gap. Other cities have gestured in this direction, including [Sacramento](#); while we do not endorse any of these plans, they do offer some precedent for what we are proposing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are three of several interrelated recommendations the Wealth and Economy Committee believes could help address the racial wealth gap in Durham and beyond:

- **We recognize a need for the city to proactively address the city's growing racial wealth gap. To this end, we recommend that the city engage with local partners to create a Racial Equity Fund.** Communities of color will work in inclusive partnership with municipal leadership within all aspects of a project, including the development of fund priorities, decisions about fund distributions, and creating and maintaining community accountability mechanisms, to undertake projects aimed at closing the racial wealth gap.
- This Racial Equity Fund must be sustainable and of such a scale as to enable the creation of wealth in communities of color over time in the broadest possible way. The fund would serve as the centerpiece of a massive, interconnected, and ongoing racial equity effort that touches all aspects of Durham life, including education, housing, health, environment, and criminal legal.

- **We would like to see our city leadership take an active role in helping push forward national policies aimed at ending the racial wealth gap, including a national [reparations](#) program, [guaranteed basic income](#), and raising the [minimum wage](#).** We note with interest the [Asheville plan](#) to develop a local reparations program, and encourage city and county leaders to engage the broader Durham community around the need for such reckonings [locally](#).
- **We envision city and county leaders establishing a municipal jobs guarantee to end working poverty in Durham, much in line with the proposed [Federal Jobs Guarantee Development Act](#).** Along with the jobs guarantee, the city/county must invest in apprenticeship programs aimed at creating pipelines for leadership and entrepreneurship in communities of color.

LIMITATIONS

- We recognize that there may be challenges to the implementation of these recommendations. Many of the questions stem from the source of revenue for such recommendations. We believe that our elected officials should treat these projects as a high priority in city and county planning and budgeting, and address challenges to implementation in consultation with local communities of color and local experts on addressing the racial wealth gap.
- Questions also arise around understanding the vocabulary and concepts of systemic racism surrounding the need to focus on education, conversation, and reconciliation.
- Still, further questions flow from specifying exactly what accountability structures would need to be in place for a racial equity fund to be managed, implemented, and evaluated.
- We also did not fully investigate, but want to draw attention to, the situation of city workers--mostly Black and people of color--who have been 'essential' workers in the wake of COVID-19 and did not receive promised wage raises in this year's city budget. We urge a thorough review of their wages and work climate.
- There exists a plethora of unearthed ideas that are worth consideration and vetting to reduce the likelihood of our local economy to predict outcomes solely based on race. Some ideas include the creation of "resiliency funds", which are alternative forms of credit/loan opportunities through a municipal banking service. Another idea is the development of programming neighborhood grants to help refurbish homes in traditionally [underserved communities](#), and the investment of supporting the development of community ownership models.

SUMMARY

RETF believes this work calls for a bold economic plan that will meet the challenge of the long-standing racial inequities starkly notable in the racial wealth gap. If you believe in the necessity of genuine anti-racist action, then we urge you to **Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is**. The first step towards progress would be institutionalizing a city/county racial equity commission. The current Durham Racial Equity Task Force could evolve into such a commission to support accountability measures for the implementation of the Racial Equity Fund and related projects. This commission could be aided by a stipend-supported think tank of local government experts, area specific researchers, and education specialists to report on Racial Equity Fund deployment.