

## **Beginnings**

The Ask: In the Spring of 2021, members of the City of Concord City Council approached Ms. Ann Fleming, Bishop Bertram Hinton, Jr., and Dr. Robert Kirk, inviting them to be Co-Chairs of the newly created City of Concord United Committee (hereafter referred to as CUC). Framed by the Council's ultimate vision "to improve the quality of life over which it has responsibility that enables every segment of our population regardless of race," on February 11, 2021, the Concord City Council established a City of Concord Committee with a focus on racial inequities within the City of Concord. Without hesitation and soberly aware of the responsibilities such commitment would require, the three Co-Chairs agreed to assume this role.

### The Training:

Since the CUC was created as a public body under the laws, policies, and regulations for all North Carolina state and local government, the Co-Chairs received excellent training under the able guidance of Ms. Emma Sellers, Coordinator for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and City liaison to CUC for the City of Concord. Spanning the summer of 2021, training sessions took place on July 6, July 9, August 10, September 14 and into the first meeting on September 28.

Such training covered the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a deeper dive into Title VI, open meeting laws, mechanics for conducting meetings, closed session restrictions, administrative issues such as e-mails, committee member's contact information, notice of hearing, among many other critical pieces of information for both effective and legal meetings.

On Friday, July 9, 2021, the "Welcome" e-mail was sent to all 24 members of the CUC advising them that the Co-Chairs had one more session of training to embrace prior to our first full meeting, scheduled for September 28, 2021.

## Execution

The Meetings and Structure: The first full 24-member CUC met on Tuesday evening, September 28, 2021 at City Hall. The packed agenda involved the welcoming remarks by Mayor Bill Dusch, Open Meeting Law Review with City Attorney VaLerie Kolczynski, a period of questions and answers with both City Manager Lloyd Payne and City Attorney VaLerie Kolczynski and greetings by City Council members in attendance. In addition to those in attendance at the initial meeting, we wanted to acknowledge Mrs. Kim Deason for her support in the application processes and assisting with organization of the meeting and room set up.

The full CUC meetings were scheduled for the fourth Tuesday of each month, at 6:00 p.m. Following COVID protocols, the option for hybrid style meetings was established using the City of Concord's zoom media platform.

Realizing that a monthly meeting addressing complex issues with 24 people, either on screen or around the table, was untenable in terms of giving all members a voice, enabling deep dives into challenging topics, a subcommittee structure was created. This subcommittee would meet monthly as well, in the intervening time window of the larger committee meetings, with the co-chairs and City liaison. Keeping the "open meeting law" parameters in mind, the subcommittee was kept to a limit of seven (7) committee members-at-large, so that when combined with co-chairs, quorum would not be met or exceeded.

Subcommittee work was predicated upon members who felt strongly about the topic under review by the larger committee, with the intent to have more open dialogue and creative idea sharing that would then be presented to the larger committee at their next meeting.

Intentionally, the subcommittee meetings were scheduled during the workday, at 2:00 p.m. on zoom. Inherently, those who did volunteer to serve reflected a deeper commitment to the topic, felt strongly about it, and were not afraid of some of the harder work involved with data dives.

The following table captures the dates attended by the full 24-member CUC, the subcommittees, and times when only the Co-Chairs and City coordinator met to review agenda flow and assess metrics reflective of the committee's progress.

Full Committee	Sub-Committee	Co-Chairs & City Liaison
		July 6, 9, 2021
		August 16, 2021
September 28, 2021		September 14, 2021
October 26, 2021		
November 30, 2021		
No Meeting in December		
January 25, 2022	January 4, 2022 [First Sub-Committee Mtg]	January 31, 2022
February 22, 2022	February 1, 2022	February 28, 2022
March 22, 2022	March 8, 2022	March 21 & 31, 2022
April 26, 2022	April 5, 2022	April 25, 2022
May 24, 2022	May 2, 2022	
June 28, 2022	June 14, 2022	June 10, 15, & 23, 2022
	July 12, 2022	July 14 & 21, 2022
	No Sub-Committee Mtg in August 2022	

The following community citizens contributed to the multi-faceted perspectives around the table: Amy Steele, Amos McClorey, Betty Stocks, Ingrid Nurse, Lyndia Gabriel, Rayshion Sashington, Theresa Scott-Stills, Gracie Galloway, Joe DeJesus, Kiran Patel, Lmarie Austin-Stripling, Lisa Matthews, Quinton Locklear, Sandra Torres, Caroline Overcash, Chris Bowe, Cindy Hanson, Douglas Carroll, Greg Mills, Jennifer Terris, Mandy Jones, Bob Anderson, Roy Hawkins, Tina Boyer, Jaymond Bryant-Herron and Michelle Joshua (this listing reflects all past and present members).

The Process: During the first full CUC meeting, the process for determining the priorities of those equity issues the committee members felt necessary to address was established. Affinity

charts were placed throughout the room and each committee member was given “sticky tabs” and a pen and asked to write down those items which they thought were important for the CUC to address, with the reminder that the work before the committee was not one to be dispatched quickly – the committee work would be an on-going venture. After members were given ample time to place their topics of concern on the larger chart pages throughout the room, the following major headings surfaced:

1. Housing
2. Transit
3. Leadership
4. Structures and Infrastructures
5. Homelessness
6. Disabilities
7. Food Insecurities
8. Aging and Youth
9. Training
10. Philosophy in Delivery
11. Departmental Break-out

To date, housing and transit have been the areas of CUC attention, fully understanding that in each of these two categories, the work is ongoing. While the focus shifts, these topics are “always on the table” for additional comments, review, and action. There is no expectation of “one and done” for any area of discussion.

The Work: The CUC meeting held on Tuesday, October 26, 2021, included presentations from Angela Graham, the Executive Director of Housing with the City of Concord and Dr. Patrick Graham, CEO of Concord Family Enrichment Association. Mrs. Graham gave a background on the affordable housing work for the four (4) different low to moderate income housing communities in Concord-Wilkerson, Logan, Mary Chapman, and Larkhaven, the family self-sufficiency program as well as housing choice vouchers, and how the growing need for even

more affordable housing led to the creation of the Concord Family Enrichment Association nonprofit.

Dr. Graham defined affordable as an income threshold of 30-80% area median income. Dr. Graham discussed the Concord Family Enrichment Association's goal of developing affordable housing throughout the City that addresses several issues: affordability that does not sacrifice quality; wealth development with a goal to develop 70% of homes slated for affordable ownership; nimble, leveraging the use of the community land trust and shared equity model along with restricted deed programs; and stability. He also discussed the history of inequity in redlining and inequity in loans granted by demographic, and how more equity in affordable housing potentially improves national economic interest.

Mrs. Graham and Dr. Graham answered questions from the committee on a variety of topics including:

1. Mobility/progression from public housing to affordable homeownership
2. Developer willingness to include affordable or multi-unit homes within their developments
3. Local initiatives and policies
4. Zoning changes
5. Regional housing studies
6. Cross sectional collaboration
7. Best practices for developing a county wide framework
8. Micro level initiatives with the City of Concord.

Steve Osborne, of the Planning and Neighborhood Development department with the City of Concord, was present during the CUC meeting held on Tuesday, November 30, 2021. Steve provided information on planning and development that connected with Mrs. Graham and Dr. Graham's housing presentations and helped the committee have a better understanding on the efforts being put forth by the City with affordable housing.

Mr. Osborne discussed the scope of responsibility of the department, along with stressing that quality is a major priority for building. Building projects cover single family, multi-family, repurposing of existing structures along with owner rehabilitation. He also reviewed the types of units built with federal funds, units managed by the housing department, as well as habitat for humanity houses in the Logan Community. Given current market conditions, strategic focus over the last 5 months has been focused on acquiring lots. This City has also acquired multi-family duplex rental properties and a quad-plex currently being utilized for COVID quarantine. Mr. Osborne informed the CUC that he is also working to address services in his department that overlap with the Concord Family Enrichment Association and Habitat for Humanity.

Mr. Osborne addressed the following questions and concerns from the CUC members during the closing of his presentation.

1. Whether Concord has a fair housing strategy (it does, with semi-annual fair housing seminars), inclusionary zoning (does not) and making sure the voices are getting heard on a broader scale.
2. If there is a racially inclusive requirement for minority-owned contractors for the City's building efforts (large percentage are minority owned and operated but currently not required).
3. Discussed the potential of repurposing mill properties and potential tax delinquencies to help increase the volume of affordable housing, and provide more multi-family units.

CUC meetings held on April 26 and May 24, 2022, included the presentations entitled, "Welcome to Rider Transit 101" and "Cabarrus County Public Transportation: Today and Tomorrow" from L. J. Weslowski, Transit Director of the Concord Kannapolis Area Transit. The presentations ensued, giving an overview of the transportation structure for the region, case studies of a variety of scenarios and real time challenges for the low-income families in our region who are dependent on the transit system as their means of transportation and the 20-year plan to enhance transit services, economic development, connect beyond, and land use policy changes. Mr. Weslowski also provided the CUC with copies of the Title VI program Plan

for Concord Kannapolis Area Transit (Rider) and, to allow CUC members the opportunity to experience the CK Rider System, each CUC member received 2 CK Rider Transit bus passes.

The Reach: In addition to reviewing the City of Concord's departments for issues of inequities, it has become evident that the CUC has an additional purpose in the community. As a diverse and appropriately represented body of the City of Concord, the CUC has served as an open group for feedback, ideas and support to community organizations in an effort to support the improvement of diversity, equity and inclusion in various community programs and projects including:

- Public Arts Master Plan
- Concord International Festival
- Cabarrus Arts Council
- NAACP

The Advice:

1. Housing

Recommendations addressing *racial and other inequities*

- a. It should be the policy of the City of Concord Housing Department that all programs and materials are available in both English and Spanish
- b. It should be the policy of the City of Concord Planning Department that available affordable housing opportunities are made available in English and Spanish in a variety of advertisement methods, including, but not limited to, website, print, social media.

Recommendations for *affordable housing*

- a. Computer Literacy programs were noted as offered. More emphasis should be placed on financial education and literacy with emphasis on progressing to rental readiness and home ownership. This should be a requirement for program participation. Education should be an outreach effort, taking the information and training to trust places and through trusted people.
- b. After analyzing homes back five (5) years in the records, for the four (4) houses built by the City, three (3) were purchased by African Americans, one (1) purchased by Caucasian. Of the seven (7) grants submitted, six (6) were African American and one (1) was Caucasian. Demographics in the community also include Asians and Hispanics. The City

should ensure equitable outreach of resources and education programs to all ethnic groups in the City.

CUC recommends potentially adding financial outreach/literacy to the International Festival to reach a broader audience of ethnic groups. Additionally, broadening the scope of financial literacy from Logan/public housing which can create a greater reach of the City, perhaps through partnerships with the community colleges and through the faith-based community.

- c. The summary of homeownership programs asserts that these programs promote more self-sufficiency and economic homeownership opportunities. However, the data shows that most who are in the public housing programs are multi-generational program participants. There is little economic mobility/change/transformation for the program participants. Creating a tiered, graduation style approach, partnered with increased financial literacy/competency, allows program 'room' for space to address ethnic diversity in program participation.
- d. If community land trusts are the preferred mechanism to help create permanently affordable housing locations, emphasis should be on blending community demographics so as to avoid segregating.
- e. Changes to the zoning ordinances to allow for land trusts to build more than just single-family homes in new developments where land becomes available throughout the city
- f. Tax incentives for community land trusts; adding a requirement for the larger developers to donate a portion of their development towards land trust usage.
- g. Establishment of a policy for ethnic diversity in the communities established by the land trusts.

## 2. Transit:

Guided by the able L. J. Weslowski, the CUC was led through an amazing amount of data, transit policies, City of Concord public bus routes, examples of both successes of and challenges to the existing system, with the clear conclusion that while there is a working transit system in the City, much more needs to be done to serve Concordians who rely on public transit for engaging all facets life within the community. The volume of shared research on this topic was both riveting and not a little overwhelming, to the extent that the CUC unanimously asked for the presentation be extended to the next scheduled meeting, allowing more time for a thorough grasp of the transit picture in the City. At both the CUC and the sub-committee level, the information sparked many subsequent questions and requests for clarification, which are currently being provided by Mr. Weslowski and the Transit Department. As mentioned previously, the work is on-going, and recommendations will be forthcoming.



While this is so, of note are two highlighted key points

1. The CUC has been reminded that all conclusions need to be data informed, not data driven. By that, meaning to allow data to serve as a check to committee intuition, not a driver for action.
2. Driven home to the CUC amid all the comparable data and transit best practices was the realization that the presented options were all striving for equality – the need to be like Seattle or Atlanta or Stockholm, using their metrics of success, instead of striving for the metrics of equity. The City should strive to meet its community’s specific needs in considering routes and schedules and amenities.

#### The S.O.A.R.

##### **STRENGTHS:** *(What are we doing right)*

This collection of diverse individuals is making impactful strides surrounding the forward movement of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (D.E.I.) within the systems and structures of the City of Concord. One of the major strengths of the CUC is the committee itself. Professionals ranging from Healthcare to Education to Industry to Religion to Community Activists, etc. gather monthly (and semi-monthly) to bring their expertise to the table. The experience of the Committee is an advantage as well. The balance of seasoned Concordians to Concord transplants bring a diverse perspective to the challenges facing the City. Good communication is paramount to the success of any organization and the CUC is balancing communication well. Throughout the year together, the CUC placed personal bias aside to forge a path towards greater D.E.I. in the Housing sector of the City with energy now being geared towards Transit.

##### **OPPORTUNITIES:** *(Where can we improve)*

With every strength, there is an equally balanced opportunity for improvement. Due to the nature of being human, the CUC has noted areas where the opportunity for improvement

exists. Primarily, there is an opportunity for continued exploration of individual strengths. Abiding by legal statutes and the pleasure of the City Council, the CUC holds one major meeting monthly. With this slight restriction, it is not fully possible to explore the depth of the individuals of the CUC, at large without creating additional meetings throughout the month. As an aside, the introduction of sub-committee work began to bridge the time restraints in exploration of the strengths of the Committee. Even with this inclusion there is yet an opportunity for greater insight into the skill-sets of the CUC members. With the transition of our City Liaison, Ms. Emma Sellers, a new opportunity births for the CUC to establish a working connection with the pending liaison. One of the greater successes of this past year must be attributed to Ms. Sellers. She not only “connected the dots” between the CUC and the City, she also freely shared her wealth of knowledge surrounding D.E.I. in order to help the CUC frame recommendations. The CUC welcomes the opportunity for establishing connection with the shadow of remembrance of Ms. Sellers etched in their minds. As alluded to earlier, there is an opportunity for continued commitment to sub-committee work. The demands of time are upon each member of the CUC at large. There are obligations from work, home, and community so the Co-Chairs are grateful for all those that stretch the bounds of their schedules to extend an additional day to sub-committee work. The most recent sub-committee lacked the participation of the first. While the lack of participation did not hinder effective communication, the danger of limited participation in sub-committee work going forward could potentially lead to less robust recommendations from the CUC to the City Council.

**ASPIRATIONS:** *(What’s our end game/Where do we want to be)*

Simply put, this CUC desires to see change. An ancient proverb states, “the only thing in this life that remains the same is change, those who adapt persevere, those who do not merely fade away.” The CUC longs for this proverb to hold true in the City of Concord. The time put into meeting and gathering information warrants effective change in the areas addressed. While the CUC understands it is simply a cog in a much larger vehicle, the hopes are that this cog aides in production. Additionally, the CUC does not want to be nor become a “paper tiger.” Being the only committee of its kind within the State of North Carolina, the CUC intends to be a

foundational tool that other cities and towns can emulate. Beyond being a collection of names on a roll with titles that look impressive, the CUC yearns to be a true advisory board to the City. The aspiration is not to become the voice of the City, the Council has been elected to carry that torch, the CUC only desires to be used as an asset and avenue through which true, unbiased wisdom can flow.

**RESULTS:** *(How do we know we've achieved our aspirations)*

On August 28, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King stated, "now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children." The justice Dr. King spoke of equates to the heart of D.E.I. work today. This Committee seeks to embody this statement made almost sixty years ago. These are the results being pursued, seeing a more equitable Concord. There is not the delusion that things will change, and all inequities are rectified now, the CUC desires to see equal justice administered towards all citizens. D.E.I. work, as so eloquently presented by Ms. Sellers, is like an arrow shot at an ever-moving target that it never totally lands. The CUC wishes to simply make up the gap between the target and achievement. It is the CUC's intent that change will happen organically not just through policy.

**Reaching a place of true Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion will be seen before it is known.**

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the City of Concord United Committee,

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Ms. Ann Fleming, Co-Chair

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Bishop Bertram Hinton, Jr., Co-Chair

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Dr. Robert Kirk, Co-Chair