JASON SEALS
& ASSOCIATES

City of Walnut Creek
Listening & Dialogue Session Report Out

Presented to the City of Walnut Creek
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Overview

The City of Walnut Creek began discussions with a community group formed in response to the untimely death of Miles Hall, a resident of Walnut Creek. The group, known as the Friends of Scott, Alexis and Taun Hall, often called FOSATH, requested that the City establish a series of community listening sessions to address concerns of residents. The City and a committee of FOSATH members jointly interviewed and selected Jason Seals & Associates (JSA) to facilitate these sessions.

This document was prepared by Jason Seals & Associates as a report summarizing the process and results of the initiative, along with JSA's analysis and recommended considerations and next steps.

Acknowledgements

Jason Seals & Associates (JSA) is deeply committed to facilitating collective healing and equitable systems change that furthers the progress of marginalized communities. This transformative work is only made possible through the contributions of our partners and the communities that we serve. As such, we would like to acknowledge and thank the City of Walnut Creek and the FOSATH Implicit Bias Committee for jointly establishing the community listening sessions, along with the community members, City employees, and members of Law Enforcement who participated in this initiative. We would also like to acknowledge Miles Hall and his family.

Operating Definitions

In recognition that there may be varying interpretations/definitions of key terms used throughout this document, we are providing operating definitions, as outlined in alphabetical order below, for the purposes of generating shared understanding in the context of this report:
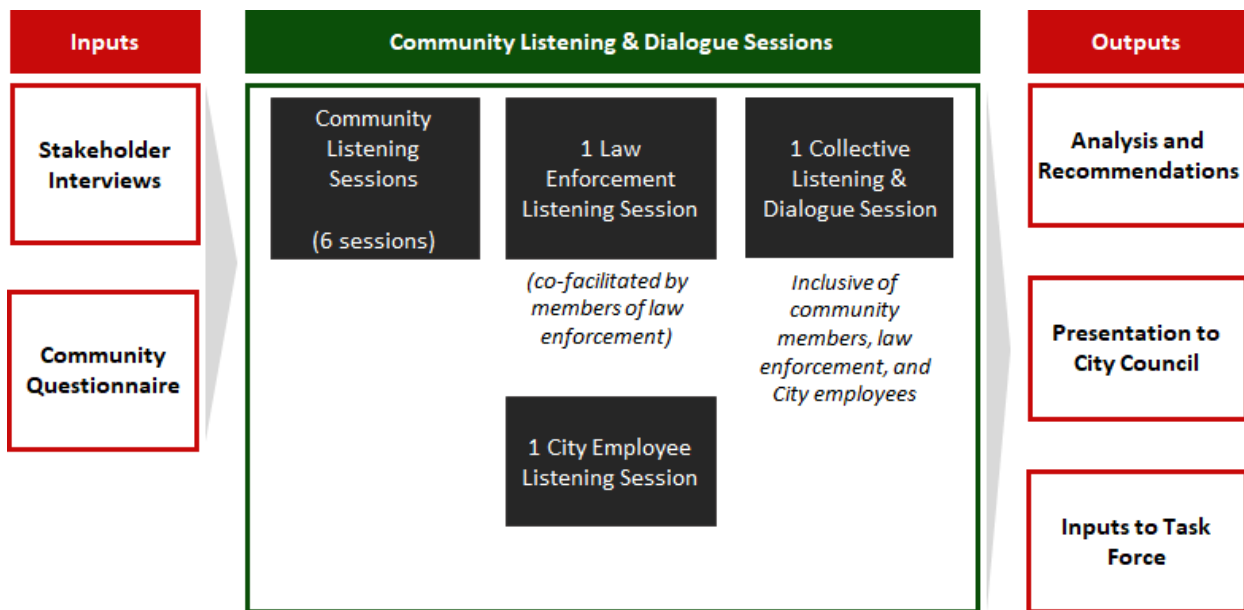
- **5150** - the section of the Welfare and Institutions Code, which allows a person experiencing a mental health crisis to be involuntarily detained for a 72-hour psychiatric hospitalization. A person on a 5150 can be held in the psychiatric hospital against their will for up to 72 hours.

- **Allyship** - the practice of working in solidarity with members of an oppressed/marginalized group, to which one does not belong, in order to support the advancement of social justice and equity for said oppressed/marginalized group (e.g.; a non-Black person may be in allyship with the Black community).

- **Diversity** - the presence of difference as it relates to the ways in which people are perceived and/or identify based on a range of factors including race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, and so forth.

- **Equity** - ensuring fair access to opportunities and resources while recognizing and eliminating unfair advantages and barriers, particularly those caused by prejudice, racism, and other forms of bias.

- **Inclusion** - creating a climate where all people feel they are able to actively engage while feeling safe, welcomed, and valued.

- **Justice** - taking accountability for and repairing harm in a manner that centers the restoration of those who experienced harm.

- **Mental Health** - refers to an individual's psychological and emotional well-being as it relates to their thoughts, feelings, and ability to solve problems and overcome difficulties.

- **Mental Health Crisis** - any situation in which a person's behavior/psychological state puts them at risk of hurting themselves and/or others, and/or prevents them from being able to care for themselves or experience healthy functioning.

- **Mental Illness** - medical conditions that disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning (NAMI)

- **Policing** - the enforcement and maintenance of laws and regulations as carried out by members of law enforcement.

- **Prejudice** - a preconceived feeling/judgement directed towards an individual or a group based on a perceived characteristic such as race or gender.

- **Public Safety** - Safeguarding and protecting all people (the public) from violence, disaster, and other potential dangers and threats while supporting the necessary conditions to cultivate physical and psychological well-being.

- **Racism** - a form of racial discrimination that stems from conscious and unconscious prejudice (Henry & Tator, 2006).

- **Systematically Marginalized People/Communities** - people/communities that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political and economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions (National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health).

- **Systemic Racism** - public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms embedded within systems that reinforce racial group inequity based on historical social, economic, and political systems.

Approach & Inputs

JSA co-designed the listening and dialogue session approach with input from a cross-section of stakeholders from the following groups:

- FOSATH

- Members of the Walnut Creek City Staff

- Members of the Walnut Creek Police Department

- The Mental Health Evaluation Team (clinical and law enforcement MHET team members)

- Members of the Walnut Creek Police Chief's Community Advisory Board

- Staff members from the Contra Costa County Health Services Department's Behavioral Health Services division

- A representative from the Family Justice Center

Inputs	Community Listening & Dialogue Sessions			Outputs
Stakeholder Interviews	Community Listening Sessions (6 sessions)	1 Law Enforcement Listening Session (co-facilitated by members of law enforcement)	1 Collective Listening & Dialogue Session Inclusive of community members, law enforcement, and City employees	Analysis and Recommendations
Community Questionnaire		1 City Employee Listening Session		Presentation to City Council
				Inputs to Task Force

Questionnaire

JSA developed a brief, anonymous questionnaire that was made public on the City of Walnut Creek's website and shared via email/the City's official social media channels. We also encouraged stakeholders to share the survey link with other relevant parties across their networks.

Survey Questions:

- What is your vision for public safety and wellness in the City of Walnut Creek?

- What do you see as the biggest challenge in terms of law enforcement in the City of Walnut Creek?

- How would you describe the current climate in Walnut Creek as it relates to race, racism, and/or racial/justice?

Survey Respondents Connection to Walnut Creek

What is your connection to Walnut Creek? (check all that apply)

65 responses
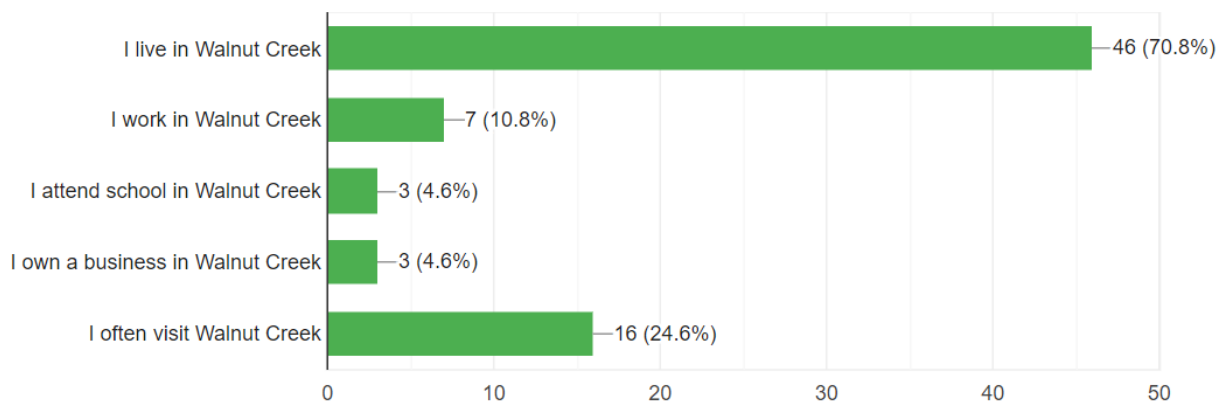
Note: Some respondents were unable to check all options that applied due to a technical error when the survey was initially launched.

Listening & Dialogue Sessions

Listening & Dialogue Session Objectives:

In response to the concerns elevated by the Friends of Scott, Alexis and Taun Hall (FOSATH), the City of Walnut Creek engaged Jason Seals & Associates (JSA) to lead a series of community listening and dialogue sessions as a means of:

- Providing those personally impacted by mental illness, racism/anti-blackness, and/or the intersection of these two experiences with the opportunity to express their perspectives and opinions.

- Providing residents from marginalized racial/ethnic groups a safe space to discuss their experiences and perceptions regarding potential inequitable treatment in the City, while engaging in collective healing to rebuild hope.

- Acknowledging harm and identifying how harm may be reduced, while identifying hopes (possibilities) and needs (urgencies).

- Exploring the distinction between policing and public safety and the overall goal of these efforts.

- Exploring options for response to mental health crises that are not principally dependent upon police actions.

- Identifying the challenges and concerns that police personnel (dispatchers, supervisors, and officers) have in responding to mental health crisis events.

Stakeholder Groups:

JSA facilitated a total of eight listening and dialogue sessions for the following stakeholder groups:

● One session for members of Law enforcement attended by ~19 members of WCPD

● One session for City Employees attended by ~21 City employees

● Six sessions for community members, to include Walnut Creek residents, business owners, students, mental health professionals, and those who frequently visit Walnut Creek.

   ○ Approximately 115 community members self-selected to participate in these sessions based on interest.

   ○ Invitations to participate in these sessions were shared through the City of Walnut Creek's general communication channels (e.g.; email, social media, website); members of the FOSATH Implicit Bias Committee and community members also shared the invitation with their networks.

   ○ Two sessions were open to the full cross section of community members, and four were held for members of specific marginalized groups and those in allyship with these marginalized community members:
      ■ Black, Indigenous, and other people of color and allies
      ■ High school and college aged youth
      ■ Those impacted by mental illness and allies

Listening & Dialogue Session Flow

Each session was two hours in length and consisted of the following:

Framing ● Introductions ● Context (why these listening sessions were formed; what's going to come out of the them) ● Creating safe space (Construct group norms that foster healthy, constructive dialogue) ● Grounding & alignment (Create shared understanding to establish operating definitions of core concepts/terms, etc.) ● Framework (gap analysis)
Exploration of current state ● Breakout groups: Exploration of challenges ● Breakout groups: Bright spots (strengths and assets)
Visioning of future state ● Collective brainstorm: What does community safety ideally look like? ● Collective brainstorm: What does wellness and healing look like?
Closing & Next Steps

Barriers, Challenges & Concerns - Key Themes & Insights

Based on input from the community listening & dialogue session brainstorms and the anonymous questionnaire, we have identified several key themes and insights specific to **current barriers, challenges, and concerns** key stakeholders perceive, as outlined below.

It is important to note that given the volume of insights shared, and in the interest of ensuring anonymity, the themes outlined below represent recurring patterns vs. specific insights shared by each individual.

We would also like to recognize that across the board that there was an acknowledgement within each stakeholder group that the death of Miles Hall was tragic and that there is a general desire to prevent tragedies like this from recurring in the future.

Mental Health Crisis Response

- Across the board (among community members, law enforcement, and city employees), there is a general consensus that police officers are not best equipped to handle mental health crises, with the exception of those trained to serve on the Mental Health Evaluation Team (MHET) team.
    - To this end, the fact that there is only one police officer and one clinician assigned to support the MHET team in the City of Walnut Creek is seen as a barrier given their limited bandwidth.
- There is a perception among some community members that the presence of police during a mental health crisis may further escalate the situation and/or criminalize mental illness.
    - While there is some general agreement among law enforcement and clinicians that police presence is not always necessary, there are some concerns that clinicians may be endangered if police are not present in the event that violence occurs.
- Among community members, there seems to be a perception that there are no alternative mental health crisis response options that dispatch within the City of Walnut Creek to support those experiencing a mental health crisis.
    - The Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) is a service provided by the County that offers mental health crisis response with the stated objective of "prevent(ing) acute psychiatric crises from becoming emergencies that require law enforcement involvement or involuntary hospitalization"; Depending on staff's assessment of safety needs, law enforcement may or may not accompany the deployed crisis-trained clinician and community support worker.
    - While the MCRT provides an alternative mental health crisis response option, it is not available 24/7. MCRT is currently available from 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 p.m., Monday through Friday and Saturday and Sunday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
    - It also appears that some community members within the City are not aware that this option is available to them, which is reflective of a broader challenge: The lack of awareness of the full breadth of mental health resources available to Walnut Creek residents through various County agencies and community-based organizations; There may also be a lack of

awareness of the full scope of mental health services available to community members with private insurance through their providers.

- Some community members also indicated that they are afraid to call 911 when a family member is experiencing a mental health crisis given the potential risk of escalation (e.g.; the risk of force--particularly lethal force--being used against a family member).
    - A common sentiment shared by family members of those impacted by mental illness is that past experiences of police interactions with family members experiencing a mental health crisis were highly variable; in some instances, officers seemed well equipped to respond in a helpful way; in others, officers did not seem equipped to handle a mental health crisis and escalated the situation in a manner some described as frightening.
- Members of law enforcement indicated that they often are not called to respond to a mental health crisis until the situation has already escalated, at which point, they are often mandated to "5150" the person experiencing the mental health crisis.
- In other instances, law enforcement may be called to resolve social/interpersonal matters where crime is not a factor and/or lives are not on the line; some officers believe it would be a better use of their time/resources if community members leveraged different channels to work through these interpersonal, non-violent, non-criminal conflicts. At the same time, there is a concern that not responding to such calls may create a liability issue if a relatively low grade conflict were to escalate to the point of violence.
- Across the board, members of the community, law enforcement, and other city employees expressed frustration with the lack of adequate long-term care for those experiencing mental health crises; in their experience, "5150" can become a revolving door for people experiencing chronic mental health crises. They indicated that this challenge is compounded by:
    - The lack of sufficient funding for mental health treatment;
    - The lack of alignment between government officials/different levels of government and mental health experts on how to provide/sustain adequate, long-term mental health treatment;
    - Coordination challenges across the multiple agencies that provide mental health care/resources.
- Those experiencing mental health crises often experience stigma, which can serve as a barrier to seeking out care.
    - For example, high school students indicated that while mental health support is offered through their schools, those who need it sometimes opt out due to stigma.
    - For some community members, the lack of access to and/or awareness of culturally resonant mental health care options can be further stigmatizing.

Racial Climate

- Many community members shared the opinion that Miles Hall was at greater risk of lethal force because he was a young, Black man; they expressed concern that racial bias was not acknowledged as a significant factor in the shooting of Miles Hall.

- ○ Community members also shared increased concern for the safety of Black and Brown people within the City of Walnut Creek given the shooting of Miles Hall and subsequent response by City Leadership and Law Enforcement.

- ● While the vast majority of community members who attended the listening sessions believe that systemic racism is a real issue that has impacted the Walnut Creek community for decades, some community members who responded to the anonymous survey believe that concerns specific to racial injustice are not valid and/or not reflective of reality.

  - ○ Those who see systemic racism as an issue within the City of Walnut Creek expressed feelings of frustration and pain; in their perspective, they often experience dismissiveness, mockery, and/or hostility when sharing these experiences with City Council and other members of the community who do not view systemic racism as an issue. Some expressed concern that as a City that is ~78% white, the concerns of racially minoritized residents are minimized and that rhetoric such as "vocal minority" reflects bias and the devaluing of minority voices/experiences.

  - ○ Many community members indicated that while Walnut Creek has become slightly more racially diverse within the past two decades or so, they believe that the City is still relatively lacking in racial diversity and wish to see more racial diversity, inclusion, and equity

  - ○ Some community members also shared their perspective on the role that historic redlining (the discriminatory pattern of obstructive home lending practices) and racially restrictive covenants played in creating segregated conditions in Walnut Creek through the mid-20th century; these community members also shared their perception of the ways in which these historic practices continue to influence the racial climate in Walnut Creek.

  - ○ Those who do not see systemic racism as an issue within Walnut Creek see this concern as being reflective of a vocal minority; some cite this is as a non-issue because they believe the City of Walnut Creek is already relatively diverse and accepting; others cite this as a non-issue because they believe that inequality/racism does not exist and that what is attributed to racism is a result of personal responsibility rather than any form of bias.

- ● There seems to be a major dissonance between how certain members of the community and law enforcement interpret the disproportionate rate at which Black and Brown people are arrested in Walnut Creek (based on per capitas):

  - ○ There are some members of law enforcement who expressed that this is reflective of the fact that Black and Brown people are committing a disproportionate amount of crime, which is then reflected in the arrest statistics.

  - ○ There are some community members who agree with the sentiment that Black and Brown people are responsible for the bulk of crime committed in the City.

  - ○ Other community members indicated that this is more reflective of the fact that Black and Brown people are more likely to have the police called on them and/or be stopped due to racial profiling.

- ● Some community members shared experiences in which they believe they experienced racial profiling and/or racism in the City of Walnut Creek; some of whom are long term residents, including children having racial slurs directed towards them in school and Black residents experiencing high rates of traffic stops. Others cited experiences in which they felt they were given "a pass" (e.g.; possessing marijuana as a youth and released) because they are white.

- Some high school aged youth expressed significant concern around the racial bias they believe is present on school campuses in the City of Walnut Creek and expressed the ways in which this has a direct impact on the mental health and well-being of those from marginalized racial groups, in particular.
- There is a general concern among some community members that there is a focus on surface level incidents and symptoms vs. systemic issues and root problems when it comes to racial equity and justice.

Public Safety & Policing

- Some members of the Walnut Creek Police Department (WCPD) expressed concern regarding the ways in which the national narrative about law enforcement and policing is impacting the way they are viewed in general; some officers feel that police officers are generalized in a way that is insulting, disheartening, and not reflective of their intentions.
  - Some officers also feel as though the recent protests have increased antagonism towards law enforcement.
  - Some community members who responded to the questionnaire shared concerns about the impact of protests on police.
- Some officers expressed that they do not believe systemic racism exists in general and/or within policing; others expressed that they do believe that systemic racism exists and indicated that they have personally witnessed and/or experienced systemic racism (e.g.; out of uniform, through the experience of friends/family members, through news reports, etc.).
- Many community members and some City Employees expressed concern and frustration with what they saw as a lack of transparency, accountability, and compassion in response to the shooting of Miles Hall. Some saw the response from the Police Department and City leadership as a defensive means of evading any form of accountability and a missed opportunity to demonstrate compassion.
- Many community members are concerned by the increased use of force and what they perceive to be military grade equipment (e.g.; an armored vehicle described by some community members as a tank) leveraged by law enforcement during recent protests, also citing the use of tear gas and rubber bullets on what they perceived to be peaceful protesters. Some expressed that this level of force feels particularly inappropriate/excessive in a City such as Walnut Creek with relatively low rates of violent crime.
  - Some community members also believe that the procurement of such equipment has inflated the WCPD's budget unnecessarily; While Walnut Creek does not own this equipment (it is owned by the Central County SWAT team), there is a perception that the City itself has been purchasing and deploying this equipment.
- Some community members and employees expressed concern regarding what they see as a lack of sufficient support for law enforcement, including adequate training and treatment for trauma/chronic stress experienced on the job.
- Some community members who responded to the survey shared concern that ongoing protests may escalate to riots, looting, and/or violence following the events that occurred in Walnut Creek on May

31, 2020, which included in a woman being shot and vandalism resulting in $4M in damage to Broadway Plaza businesses.

City Leadership

- Many members of the community felt as though City Council did not seem very empathetic or receptive to the Hall's family or FOSATH members who spoke during the City Council meetings; this has eroded trust and further marginalized certain segments of the community in their opinion.

- Some community members feel that it is a significant barrier that systematically marginalized people within Walnut Creek are not represented among elected leadership, creating blind spots within leadership and resulting in further marginalization.

- There is a sense that Walnut Creek sometimes functions as "an island" and that there is not as much alignment between the City and the County as there could be; this is seen as a significant barrier given that most social and health services are delivered through the county.

- City employees are required to be nonpartisan; many issues that were once nonpartisan (e.g.; racism, public safety, etc.) are starting to be perceived as partisan, which some employees felt has made it difficult to have constructive dialogue around these topics internally or externally.

Strengths & Assets - Key Themes & Insights

Based on input from the community listening & dialogue session brainstorms and the anonymous questionnaire, we have identified several key themes and insights specific to **current strengths and assets** key stakeholders perceive, as outlined below.

It is important to note that given the volume of insights shared, and in the interest of ensuring anonymity, the themes outlined below represent recurring patterns vs. specific insights shared by each individual.

Mental Health Crisis Response

- As a relatively wealthy community, some community members believe that there should be adequate financial resources that can support needed change as it relates to mental health supports.

- Associations such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) were cited as assets that the City has been able to draw upon.

- Many community members see the Mental Health Evaluation Team (MHET) as an asset specific to mental health crisis response (though, as noted above, many believe the team is under-resourced).

- FOSATH's research, advocacy, and legislative proposals specific to mental health crisis supports were also cited as a strength.

Racial Climate

- Many community members see the growing awareness and concern regarding systemic racism as an asset, as awareness is the first step towards progress.

- Diversity and representation is increasing in certain pockets of Walnut Creek, which is regarded as a strength by some stakeholders.

- The Listening & Dialogue Sessions were identified as a productive space for community members and City employees to explore concerns and hope as it relates to the racial climate in Walnut Creek; many would like to see sessions such as these continue as an ongoing practice within the City.

- There are a number of professional associations that are increasingly focused on equity (e.g.; the League of California Cities, International City/County Management' Association, etc.); these associations provide helpful resources that some City Employees view as an asset that the City should tap into more.

Public Safety & Policing

- The Chief's Community Advisory Board has provided a useful sounding board to the Chief of Police and provided a channel for a cross-section of community members to weigh in on matters specific to policing; this is regarded as an asset to some members of each stakeholder group.

- Some members of the community cited the research and advocacy efforts of FOSATH as an asset to the City as they look to enhance public safety.

- The Walnut Creek Police Department has researched and is considering the implementation of the C.A.R.E. program (based on the national model) to assist officers in their ability to support individuals with autism, whereby parents can introduce officers to their children and file key information on the ways in which their children should be engaged should the police ever need to interact with them.
  - While this program is designed for individuals with autism, some members of law enforcement indicated that a similar program may help them to better support individuals personally impacted by chronic mental illness.

- Some community members also cited WCPD's recent Homeless Outreach Program, delivered in partnership with MHET, the Walnut Creek Homeless Task Force, the Trinity Center, other city and county agencies and departments, as a strength.
  - It appears as though this program has been temporarily paused due to COVID

City Leadership & Employees

- Many City employees cited that there is a strong foundation in place, as it relates to cross-departmental collaboration, that they believe can/should be enhanced further to better serve the community.

- Some City employees also cited the City's partnership with FOSATH as an asset, resulting in increased accountability and innovation including the launch of the Community Listening & Dialogue sessions, the development of the forthcoming Diversity & Inclusion Task Force, and the memorial park dedicated to Miles Hall and others who lost their lives due to mental health crisis.

- Some City employees also cited increased engagement from members of the community as an asset, particular as it relates to sharing insights with City Leadership.

Vision & Desired Solutions - Key Themes & Insights

Based on input from the community listening & dialogue session brainstorms and the anonymous questionnaire, we have identified several key themes and insights specific to **vision and desired solutions** key stakeholders shared, as outlined below.

It is important to note that given the volume of insights shared, and in the interest of ensuring anonymity, the themes outlined below represent recurring patterns vs. specific insights shared by each individual. These insights were also shared in the spirit of generative brainstorming vs. prescriptive recommendations.

Increased Awareness & Accessibility

- Many community members would like to see increased awareness regarding the true experience of those who experience mental health crises in order to humanize and destigmatize people who have these often misunderstood experiences.

- There is a desire across the board for more stable long term care options for those who are discharged after receiving intensive mental health treatment in order to ensure they are fully prepared to sustain their mental health with adequate support.

- To this end, many stakeholders also see the need to increase awareness of and accessibility to resources specific to mental health care. This includes enabling increased accessibility for community members who speak Spanish, Mandarin, and other non-English languages to include translating resources and ensuring the availability of multilingual translators when people call seeking mental health support.

- Some community members and employees believe that it is critical to increase awareness on issues specific to racial equity and justice, to include both historic and present-day issues.

- Some stakeholders would also like to see an adequate number of mental health experts who are able and willing to respond to mental crises without the presence of police to place more focus on mental health and enable police officers to focus more on enforcing the law.

    - Note: There are varying opinions as to the feasibility and safety implications of having a mental health crisis response team with no police presence. Some community members see it as a viable option and some community members see a MHET style response team (inclusive of a mental health clinician and a specially trained police officer) may be a more viable option.

Cultural Humility, Equity, & Racial Justice

- Some community members would like City Leadership to demonstrate an increased willingness to address the needs of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other people of color's needs. Ideally, they hope to see City Council come to honor these communities in such a way that they no longer feel the need to hold Community Listening & Dialogue Lessons such as these.

- Some community members also want there to be a more explicit recognition of systemic issues that lead to racial bias and a lack of real racial equity/justice.

- Some community members would also like to see more visual representations of diversity, equity, and inclusion such as murals, green ribbons (in honor of mental health awareness), pride flags, etc.

- Some community members would like to see more representation of marginalized groups elected to leadership positions and other key decision-making roles within the city including Black and Brown candidates and those with mental illness in key leadership/decision making roles

Policing & Public Safety

- Some community members indicated that they ideally envision law enforcement and City Leadership truly acting as their neighbor and demonstrating through action that they are a part of the community, while recognizing their role in the power structure.

- Among community members, there are a range of views on the ideal role of policing:

  - Some community members believe the focus should be on developing a "community policing" approach and providing law enforcement with training in de-escalation, anti-racism, and mental health crisis response.

  - Some community members believe that the City should decrease the budget allocated towards policing and increase spending in other areas of public safety such as healthcare, housing, food security, and education.

  - Some community members believe that police should ideally be replaced with an alternative approach to securing the community given what they see as the increased militarization of the police.

- Some community members wish to see a much more expansive approach to public safety that focuses more on providing supports demonstrated to decrease crime such as ensuring access to adequate food, housing, and medical treatment (to include drug abuse treatment), and cultivating an environment that allows all people to truly feel safe.

- Some members of law enforcement indicated that they would like to have more opportunities to engage in facilitated conversations with members of the community to generate more shared understanding.

- Some people across all stakeholder groups indicated that they would like to see more accountability:

  - Some community members want to see more accountability from City Leadership and WCPD as it relates to what they perceive to be harm, mistakes, and/or room for improvement; Some suggested that a formal community oversight committee should be established to ensure increased accountability.

  - Some members of WCPD want to see more accountability from community members as it relates to upholding the law; Some suggested that increased awareness regarding laws and regulations can help increase accountability.

Analysis & Recommendations

The analysis and recommendations outlined below are informed by the inputs gathered by each stakeholder group outlined above, in addition to leading practice and research across the fields of mental health, public safety, policing, and racial equity/justice.

It is our strong recommendation that this report be regarded as generative rather than prescriptive; in order for transformation to be sustained, it is critical that key stakeholders play a role in co-creating and implementing the change during each phase. As such, it is our recommendation that the City Council engage key stakeholders (such as the incoming Diversity & Inclusion Task Force, the Chief Community Advisory Board, FOSATH, members of WCPD, etc.) in ongoing discussions and working sessions in order to move from aspiration to action.

Mental Health Crisis Supports & De-stigmatization

There is a general perception among community members that there is a lack of sufficient/accessible mental health resources within the City of Walnut Creek. While many residents have health insurance, not all do and the range of mental health services covered through insurance varies significantly. Most health services open to everyone regardless of insurance coverage are offered through the County and/or community-based organizations. In our analysis, there seems to be a general lack of awareness of these resources or, in some instances, the belief that County-level resources are geared more towards underserved communities within the County.

Stigma associated with mental illness also discourages some community members from accessing these resources, in fear that they will be "othered". While there are mental health advocates who seek to educate and eliminate stigma, there is a need for broader discussions around mental health crises to destigmatize mental illness. There are also some manifestations of stigma that are specific to certain racial/ethnic/cultural groups, which require the integration of culturally resonant mental health care approaches.

As some mental health experts who participated in the community listening sessions asserted, systemic racism and bias are also present within healthcare and social service systems. For mental health crisis interventions to be effective for all community members, systemic racism must be addressed in these institutions, as well.

We recommend that the City take the following actions to enhance mental health crisis supports:

- Partner with the County to sponsor a campaign designed to destigmatize mental health crises and increase awareness of services available through the County and community-based organizations within the county.
    - A "low hanging fruit" here is to add a landing page dedicated to mental health on the City of Walnut Creek's website.

- ○ It is also critical that this campaign be designed to intentionally reach community members from various racial, ethnic, and cultural groups (including community members who are not fluent English).
  - ○ This awareness campaign should also encourage residents with private insurance to confirm what mental health services are offered through their providers that they may be unaware of.
- The City should consider increasing the number of clinicians and trained officers assigned to support the Mental Health Evaluation Team (MHET) within the City of Walnut Creek.
- As it appears that County's Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) is an underutilized resource within the City of Walnut Creek, the City should investigate this further to determine whether it is a matter that can be resolved through awareness building or if there is a need to develop a similar alternative dedicated to the City of Walnut Creek, as has been proposed by FOSATH.
  - ○ Given that the MRCT does not provide 24/7 crisis response services, it is especially critical to look into the potential expansion of this service and/or supplementation during off hours.
- The City may also consider partnering with an agency to introduce the [Clubhouse International](#) model to Walnut Creek.
  - ○ Clubhouse International offers people living with mental illness opportunities for friendship, employment, housing, education and access to medical and psychiatric services in a single caring and safe environment through an evidenced based approach.
  - ○ There is currently a Clubhouse in Concord (the Putnam Clubhouse), which is open to other Contra Costa residents
- As the City forms the Diversity & Inclusion Task Force, a seat should be reserved for a community member living with mental illness.

Rebuilding Trust & Community

Following recent events including the shooting of Miles Hall, recent protests, and the respective responses from law enforcement and City leadership, there is a growing distrust between some community members, City leadership, and law enforcement. While some may view these community members as a "vocal minority", discounting the voice of the minority perpetuates the marginalization of these community members and also neglects the impact this distrust has had on the collective tone of Walnut Creek.

In order to rebuild trust, transparency, ownership, and community building are key. As such, we recommend that the City:

- Host ongoing community listening and healing sessions to continue the process of healing and trust-building, facilitated by experts in restorative justice and radical healing.
- Host community-wide learning sessions focused on increasing understanding and commitment to anti-racism, cultural humility, mental health and wellness, and other matters specific to social equity led by experts in these respective areas.

- ○ Task Force members and the broader community should have the opportunity to provide ongoing input on topics to be prioritized in these learning sessions.
- Provide multimedia learning content that can be leveraged on demand by community members and City employees (e.g.; videos, reading materials, etc.).
- Co-sponsor a series of annual culturally-centered events led by members of various cultural/ethnic groups (e.g.; festivals, block parties, etc.).
- Acknowledging past harms is key to building trust. To this end, we recommend that the City of Walnut Creek issue a formal apology for legalized discrimination codified in the City's laws (e.g.; redlining) through the mid-20th century and the ways in which these laws have created conditions that persist today. This is a leading practice that many institutions and governments are engaging in as a first step towards collective healing.
  - ○ A leading edge practice that some communities are engaging in includes instituting [housing reparation programs](#) for communities previously discriminated against via discriminatory housing laws in the form of programs that support homeownership, mortgage assistance and home improvement funds.
- Consider implementing a "Volunteer Time Off" policy, whereby members of law enforcement receive 40 hours of volunteer time off (VTO) per year to focus on community engagement in the form of relationship building, community service, and other supportive efforts. This is a practice in some private sector organizations that may translate well to public service. It is critical that these officers participate in the recommended training outlined below prior to engaging in this community work.

Increased Collaboration & Partnerships

Increased intentional collaboration between the City and County agencies, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, schools, and other agencies are key to ensuring alignment and maximizing resources.

- The City should deepen coordination and collaboration with County agencies and initiatives to increase awareness of County services available to Walnut Creek residents and to exchange best practices.
  - ○ The newly developing Diversity & Inclusion Task Force should be aligned with the work being done by the newly formed Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice at the County level.
- The City should also explore opportunities to increase collaboration between the City of Walnut Creek and the school districts within Walnut Creek to align on efforts specific to providing students and families with mental health resources.

Training for Law Enforcement, City Leadership, and City Employees

Training is one of many critical elements key to creating more equity within the City of Walnut Creek. All City employees, elected officials, and members of law enforcement should participate in the trainings

recommended below in order to facilitate a shared, foundational understanding, internal alignment, and collective commitment.

While some members of law enforcement recognize the existence of systemic racism in society, others expressed the belief that systemic racism does not exist. Lived experience and extensive research confirm that systemic racism exists in society. In order for any anti-racism or implicit bias training to be effective, the existence of systemic racism must first be acknowledged. As such, it is critical that City and WCPD leadership take a position that acknowledges the existence of these systemic issues in our society and how they show up in the form of implicit/explicit bias, the disproportionate treatment of Black and Brown people and other minoritized racial/ethnic groups, and the social inequities correlated with rates of crime, arrests, and imprisonment.

We recommend that City Leadership, Walnut Creek Law Enforcement, and other city employees participate in expert-led training covering the following subjects:

- **Systemic Racism** - to explore the nature of systemic racism, how it is internalized, and how it shows up in law enforcement and other institutions/systems.

- **Cultural Humility** - to provide a greater understanding of cultures that are different and to help individuals recognize and value unique cultural experiences.

- **Courageous Conversations** - to understand how to participate in dialogues that explore difficult subjects such as racism, stigmas associated with trauma and mental illness, etc.

- **Effective Engagement Strategies for Youth** - to understand the impact of brain development on youth and adults under the age of 25.

    - Note: On average, the executive function of the brain that controls impulse, decision making, and emotional regulation is not fully developed until the age of 25; this is a critical area of training given that techniques such as de-escalation must be differentiated for adolescents/young adults to be more effective, based on cognitive science.

- **Trauma-informed & Healing Centered Approaches** - to develop approaches designed to support individuals in addressing trauma and to support holistic restoration.

- **Restorative Justice** - an approach to justice that focuses on addressing the harm caused by crime while holding the offender responsible for their actions, by providing an opportunity for the parties directly affected by the crime–victims, offenders and communities–to identify and address their needs.

    - Note: In 2019, Contra Costa County became the fourth county in California to adopt a Restorative Justice diversion program for youth; there is an opportunity for Walnut Creek to partner with the County to identify training expertise/resources on this subject matter.

- **Mental Health Crisis Response** - to identify signs and symptoms of mental health crisis and how to utilize a range of stabilization and de-escalation techniques through a compassionate, healing-centered approach.

The incoming Diversity & Inclusion Task Force should have the opportunity to provide additional training suggestions.

Across the county, state, and country, there are a plethora of best practices as it relates to racial equity and justice that the City of Walnut Creek to explore, customize, and adopt. While many of the examples below have been implemented in cities with larger populations, Walnut Creek should seek ways to incorporate these best practices at an appropriate scale, which may require increased partnership with the County/neighboring cities.

- Studies suggest that ~30% of police officers experience clinically significant post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms or meet the full diagnostic criteria for PTSD. Stress reduction programs for officers are a leading practice that the City of Walnut Creek should consider implementing.
- An increasing number of cities are creating Police Oversight Commissions in order to increase trust and accountability between law enforcement and community members.
  - As stated by the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement, "Police oversight can benefit not only the individual complainant, but also the larger community, police and sheriff's departments, and even elected or appointed officials. The actual benefits that occur depend on how well the involved groups work together and the type of model implemented."
- In keeping with the extensive research and strategic planning that went into the implementation of the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) and the Director of Equity position at the County Level, we recommend that the City of Walnut Creek invest in an internal team dedicated to this effort to enable effectiveness, sustainability, and alignment.
  - For this team to be effective, it is critical that they be given adequate resources and decision-making power, and that they work in close partnership with the County.
- We recommend that the incoming Diversity & Inclusion Task Force leverage the Racial Equity-Centered Results Based Accountability™ approach.
  - "Results-Based Accountability™ (RBA) is an evidenced-based approach that starts with the desired results and works backwards towards the means, to ensure that the plan works toward community results with stakeholder-driven implementation.
  - This approach has been endorsed by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE).
- Additional examples of leading practices documented by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) include the following (see frameworks on pages 16-17 and Advancing Racial Equity and Transforming Government- A Resource Guide to Put Ideas into Action for additional details:

Capacity Building in Seattle
Race and Social Justice Initiative Organizational Chart
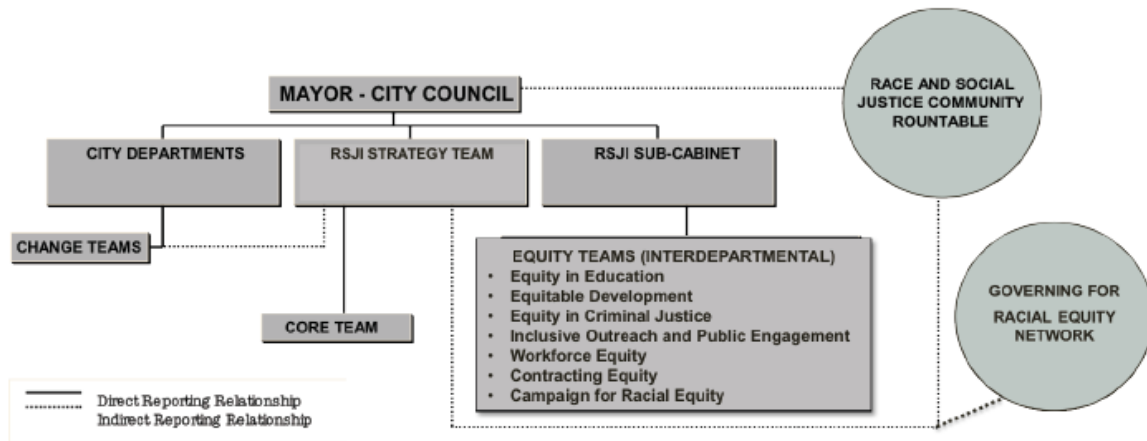
Citywide Racial Equity Goals & Strategies, City of Portland

CITYWIDE RACIAL EQUITY GOALS & STRATEGIES

OFFICE of EQUITY
and HUMAN RIGHTS
CITY OF PORTLAND

EQUITY GOAL #1	OVERALL STRATEGIES
We will end racial disparities within city government, so there is fairness in hiring and promotions, greater opportunities in contracting, and equitable services to all residents.	**1 Use a racial equity framework:** Use a racial equity framework that clearly articulates racial equity; implicit and explicit bias; and individual, institutional, and structural racism.
	2 Build organizational capacity: Commit to the breadth and depth of institutional transformation so that impacts are sustainable. While the leadership of electeds and officials is critical, changes take place on the ground, through building infrastructure that creates racial equity experts and teams throughout the city government.
EQUITY GOAL #2	**3 Implement a racial equity lens:** Racial inequities are not random; they have been created and sustained over time. Inequities will not disappear on their own. It is essential to use a racial equity lens when changing the policies, programs, and practices that perpetuate inequities, and when developing new policies and programs.
We will strengthen outreach, public engagement, and access to City services for communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities, and support or change existing services using racial equity best practices.	**4 Be data driven:** Measurement must take place at two levels—first, to measure the success of specific programmatic and policy changes; and second, to develop baselines, set goals, and measure progress. Using data in this manner is necessary for accountability.
EQUITY GOAL #3	**5 Partner with other institutions and communities:** Government work on racial equity is necessary, but insufficient. To achieve racial equity in the community, government needs to work in partnership with communities and institutions to achieve meaningful results.
We will collaborate with communities and institutions to eliminate racial inequity in all areas of government, including education, criminal justice, environmental justice, health, housing, transportation, and economic success.	**6 Operate with urgency and accountability:** When change is a priority, urgency is felt and change is embraced. Building in institutional accountability mechanisms using a clear plan of action will allow accountability. Collectively, we must create greater urgency and public commitment to achieve racial equity.

Resources & Reference Material

Articles

The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement, by Dr. Shawn Ginwright

Stanford Scholars Examine Racism, Social Change and How to Build a More Just Future, by Melissa De Wite

Advancing Racial Equity and Transforming Government- A Resource Guide to Put Ideas into Action, authored by Julie Nelson, Lauren Spokane, Lauren Ross, and Nag Deng; published by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity

Racial Equity: Getting to Results, authored by Erika Bernabei; published by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity

Training Experts

Flourish Agenda (Radical healing)

TraumaTransformed (Trauma informed approaches)

Melanie Tervalon Consulting (Cultural humility)

SEEDS (Mediation and community conflict resolution coaching/mentoring)

Dr. Joy DeGruy (Healing workshops and culture specific models of service delivery and practice)

Project Implicit (The science, impact, and mitigation of implicit bias)