

## Summary Report of the Equity Project for the Advisory Redistricting Commission

The Equity Ad Hoc Committee was formed by a group of the members of the Advisory Redistricting Commission (ARC) who advocated for the centering of equity as both an objective and approach to the work of the Commission. The ARC agreed to have a meeting dedicated to the topic of equity and tasked the Ad Hoc Committee with the responsibility of drafting equity principles to be used as a framework for the work of the Commission. A consultant was selected to facilitate the work of this Committee. One of the important responsibilities of the consultant was to help organize and prepare a diverse panel of county residents to present oral histories to the ARC at its meeting dedicated to the discussion of equity. The purpose of the panel was to raise the collective consciousness of the ARC membership about the harmful effects of historic inequities and systemic racism, highlighting the damage done to the quality of life in neighborhoods populated by people of color. The panel was to also address the impacts of actions such as redlining, intentional exclusion and/or segregation as well the consequent impact on community engagement and confidence in the electoral system that redistricting is attempting to impact in a positive way.

Sonoma County's leadership is committed to identifying and addressing the damage done by the historic practices of exclusion and the abuse of power over communities of color and other groups that have been disrespected and harmed. The Office of Equity was created by the Board of Supervisors with one of its responsibilities being to create a plan to address racial inequities and identify strategies for social justice. The Equity Ad Hoc Committee recommends that the equity principles adopted by the County Advisory Redistricting Commission be provided to the Board of Supervisors and its Office of Equity as a set of guiding principles that should be used in practice in all major policy and decision-making discussions moving forward in the County. It is also recommended that whenever significant discussions are launched that require community engagement through commissions or similar bodies, three protocols be established as a practice in support of equity:

1. The distribution and discussion of the equity principles of the County at the first meeting
2. A meeting dedicated to the topic of equity where an equity-based panel is brought on to provide oral histories to give context as to the need to focus on equity and social justice in the product of the topic assigned to the Commission/advisory group
3. Consultants selected to support the work of any Commission be done with the input and concurrence of the Director of the Office of Equity

The following is a summary of the comments made by the panelists that spoke at the Advisory Redistricting Commission's meeting on equity on September 13, 2021.

These panelists did not know each other and had not met as a group. Even so, there were themes that ran throughout the presentations. All panelists described changes in community boundaries, intentional or not, that had painful consequences of loss....the disinvestment in Roseland when Latino families moved in, school boundary changes that had negative consequences on the education, safety and treatment of children and families, redlining,

mental health issues, racism as a public health issue, the historic lack of consultation regarding boundaries and services, transportation, the environment, the persistence of microaggressions in schools, the need to empower youth and teach residents about the importance of policy. The panelists also spoke in favor of the draft equity principles and were heartened by the proposed inclusion of such a document as a framework for the work of this Commission.

The panelists spent time and gave their energy and hearts to preparing the comments they presented. So as not to lose the key points they presented, below is a summary of the comments each panelist contributed:

Sylvia Lemus:

- Her family migrated from Mexico to Roseland and worked in the vineyards. At that time White families owned the homes and businesses were thriving along Sebastopol Rd. There were three large markets and several other specialty stores.
- Schools were more diverse and she recalls the importance of having a Latino principal that served as a role model for the children
- In the 80s there was a big influx of Latino families and that drove a disinvestment of businesses in Roseland. Many moved to the Coddington area and it changed the self-containment and access to goods and services in the community
- School boundaries were changed with no explanation and ripped apart the social structures and supports among the Latino youth. Kids lost leadership opportunities and began to experience more over racist institutional hurts.
- The sharp contrasts in the standards of living in the county became more obvious. Roseland had the standards of Mississippi while Bennett Valley had the standards of Connecticut. New boundaries created the contrasts in available resources.
- Redistricting can create more cohesive community action groups to fight for safety, lights, better sidewalks. We need an investment in youth empowerment and in the environment in low-income communities

Segretta Woodard:

- In the late 50s her family moved from SF to Santa Rosa's Stoney Point area. Her first impression was that while they had geographically moved "north", it felt like they were moving into the American South because of the deep, pervasive racism they encountered. Over time she learned that many of the powerful White families (see mansion areas of Santa Rosa) were indeed from the South and had brought the values and traditions of dehumanization of Black people with them.
- Several African American families owned houses when they moved here but as the parents died off and homes turned over, the children moved away due to racism. It was not and it is not safe for African Americans to live in Sonoma County

- Redlining was a common practice that limited where Black people could live in Sonoma County. County records show that African Americans were expressly prohibited from purchasing homes in certain neighborhoods.
- Racism in schools throughout the county were very common and persist til today.
- Tokenism in employment is a practice that makes it necessary to fight for jobs and positions. This need to use fighting energy for a community is exhausting and harmful.

Dr. Daniel Malpica:

- The census is showing that Whites are aging in the county and are declining in numbers while Latinos are growing in population and are much younger.
- Over half of the elementary school population is Latino and the care for these kids matters. The high school dropout rate for Latino remains disturbingly high
- Investment and support of these youth must be viewed as support for the local economy of the future

Dr. Brenda Flyswithawks:

- She came to Sonoma County from Texas and was taught how to guard and protect herself when she got her. That is a necessary practice of a population of Native American people that are said to be important to the county yet remain underserved and excluded from consultation and care when making decisions
- She urged leaders in the county to establish formal relationships with local tribal leadership. Get to know and consult with the various chairpersons.
- Know and care about where our Indigenous neighbors live
- Water protection, land rights, homelessness, lack of adequate transportation...issues that county leadership must address are very high priority items for our Indigenous communities. The aftermath of the wildfires had very specific impacts on Native Americans. Access to food banks is very difficult for those in remote areas of the county...they can't get to the centers.
- Bus transportation to Indigenous communities needs to be improved.
- Mental health is at a crisis as suicide rates among both youth and elders increase
- Dr. Flyswithawks pleaded with county leaders to "know who we are" and attend and participate in the various Native American events held throughout the county. Learn about the local history of Indigenous groups...."know and acknowledge that you are on stolen land."

Magali Larque:

- Has lived in South Park ("Cowtown") all her life. Has been active alongside her mother who teaches History at SRJC and worked at the Santa Rosa Rape Center.
- Went to Doyle Park School that became the French Academy, to Slater and to Montgomery HS. Her education has provided her with the language to understand the

microaggressions she experienced in schools. She had teachers that would not learn to pronounce her name, there was no support for the issues and hurts that youth were experiencing in the community with murder, suicide, drugs....she was allowed to feel shame as she compared herself to others who came from Bennett Valley. These issues persist and the lack of support is hurting our youth.

- It was not until college that she was able to learn the words and theory that gave her an understanding of everything she had experienced as a woman of color in Sonoma County
- At Humboldt State she was able to find a mental health approach that taught the intersection between nature and mental health. We are missing offering that understanding to our youth. Not teaching them how to live differently, have voice and impact, feel cared for.
- She wants to use the platform of discussions like those related to redistricting to amplify the voices of our undocumented residents who are dismissed and not heard.
- Racism is a public health crisis in Sonoma County
- When we create cohesive communities, we can encourage community pride that produces residents that have voice and will ask for and get things like clean parks, lights, safety. When there is a loss of social cohesion, there is a loss of identity and therefore care in a community.
- Teaching leadership for youth matters....when you can teach something you really learn about it....have them teach others about policy and how change occurs in our communities

Herman J. Hernandez:

- Represents two communities: the Russian River and the Latino community.
- Came from San Francisco and became the first Latino business owner, realtor and Rotarian.
- The history of integration and emergence of Latino business has been one of challenges and overcoming barriers.
- The emergence of the power and investment of the Gay community in the River community opened doors for others as well.
- In forming Los Cien his goal has been to shape the future so that the next generation does not have to go through the same experiences as his.
- He commented on the development of the equity principles for ARC. Ten years ago, he would not have seen such a document for a public agency nor been able to speak positively about it without feel at risk.