

Eric D. Batista  
Acting City Manager



Sept. 16, 2022

TO THE WORCESTER CITY COUNCIL

COUNCILORS:

I respectfully request the City Council's review and deliberation of the attached document, which includes the Racial Equity Audit Report for the departments of Human Resources and Health & Human Services. The comprehensive report, completed by Letterman White Consulting (LWC), includes racial equity data and analysis of both departments as well as the firm's recommendations for enacting meaningful and measurable change to these departments and the City workforce as a whole.

The Racial Equity Audit Report is the result of the February 2021 Executive Order to Assess and Address Institutional and Structural Racism. The Executive Order, which was inspired by a call for reform from the community following the murder of George Floyd, requested an audit to "review and assess institutional norms, systems, polices, and practices..." culminating in a "report with observations and recommendations as they pertain to institutional goals of racial equity."

To be clear: the report offers an impartial and unflinching assessment of the lived experiences of staff members of diverse backgrounds in two of the key departments in our City government. These employees paint a clear picture of what institutional racism, built over the course of our municipality's 300 year history, looks like today. These issues are not limited to the City of Worcester's workforce; however, it is our responsibility as leaders to meet the moment and take meaningful steps to improve our workplace culture to achieve our expectations of a thriving organization that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. We must take ownership and be transparent in order to break down the barriers to change.

Every department at all levels of government will be impacted, and the process is already underway to ensure that the administrative Cabinet understands expectations and receives the necessary training implementing an equity-first practice to all decision making processes. In addition, the Cabinet and I will work with LWC to update the Strategic Plan by developing a City of Worcester DEI mission, vision, goals, objectives, and metrics. This work will lay the foundation necessary for the next Chief Diversity Officer's appointment. I intend to commence the search for a new CDO in late fall 2022, and will do everything in my power to ensure they receive the institutional support they need to be successful.

At the ground level, it is imperative that we streamline the hiring process within the Human Resources Department, by standardizing and centralizing all HR functions with a focus on recruitment and retention. For the City to achieve its goal of having a workforce reflective of the community we serve, we need to ensure every department is following a hiring blueprint that is inclusive and equitable. Some of this work started this summer with the removal of drug testing and physicals for some City positions, and it will continue into the foreseeable future as we examine each procedural step to ensure it is necessary, inclusive, and standardized.

As we move forward, we will establish measures of success to determine if we are achieving the goals set forth in this report and of the forthcoming DEI mission, including establishing a platform for disaggregate data collection. Departments will continue to be held accountable to their Departmental Development Plans (DDP's), which will drive decisions around the annual budget. Further, we will take steps to reduce barriers and challenges in issuing City contracts for goods and services to ensure they are awarded impartially and that City investments are distributed equitably across commercial and residential neighborhoods. We will work to codify these transformative changes as part of our standard management ethos and business practices.

The Racial Equity Audits offer us a rare opportunity to acknowledge the lived experience of our employees and to respond by implementing systematic solutions. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve in this extraordinary moment, to be able to make progress on many longstanding structural issues, and to improve the quality of life of my current and future colleagues. Not many communities have taken the initiative to self-assess and to be transparent about the results. It's my hope that the work we do together can be an inspiration to other municipalities and other organizations to invest the time and capital into becoming the diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces that employees in all sectors deserve. As our workplace culture improves City government, I'm certain it will have an impact across industries and disciplines in Worcester. Our entire community benefits from our commitment to growth. I humbly ask for your support as we build a more equitable future together.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric D. Batista  
Acting City Manager