



# Memorandum

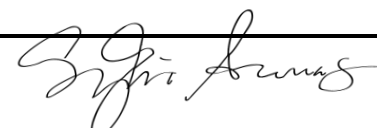
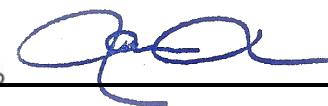


**TO:** CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Councilmember Sylvia Arenas  
Councilmember Sergio Jimenez  
Councilmember Raul Peralez  
Councilmember Magdalena Carrasco  
Councilmember Maya Esparza

**SUBJECT:** SEE BELOW

**DATE:** November 5, 2021

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Approved  Date  11/5/2021  

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**SUBJECT: DEFINITION OF RACIAL EQUITY**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Recommend Council discuss a more complete definition for Racial Equity (as defined by GARE), seek input from community stakeholders, and return to Council with a recommendation for Council adoption:

**WHAT IS RACIAL EQUITY?**

Racial equity is realized when race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved.

Racial equity means we eliminate racial disproportionalities so that race can no longer be used to predict success, and we increase the success of all communities. We set goals and measures to track our progress, with the recognition that strategies must be targeted to close the gaps. Systems and structures that are failing communities of color are actually failing all of us, economically and psychologically. Advancing racial equity is to our collective benefit.

[\(https://www.racialequityalliance.org/faq/racial-equity-strategy/\)](https://www.racialequityalliance.org/faq/racial-equity-strategy/)

2. Direct Staff to include in their next report to NSE initial plans for a comprehensive Citywide Equity Framework to be spearheaded by our Office of Racial Equity, and coordinated through the City Manager’s Office with all City departments.

- a. This Framework should provide a path to achieving the goals and strategies adopted by Council in our adoption of the Equity Pledge in June 2020 that will enable us to make measurable, substantive, and transformative change in our communities of highest need through providing baseline service outcomes in delivery of city services. This should include benchmarks to measure tangible results in our communities.
- b. This Framework should be informed by best practices including those within the GARE framework, as well as other frameworks and strategic plans such as the King County Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan.

## **BACKGROUND**

On April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the signatories of this memo brought forward a memo to our Rules and Open Government Committee proposing the creation of an Equity Fund and stressing the urgent need to address systemic inequity in our communities through our budget process, as well as within our organization and city processes.<sup>1</sup> This proposal marked the beginning of an extremely important –and at times challenging– conversation on Equity, both within our City government and with our community.

This conversation has included the historical causes and past decisions that account for the racial and socioeconomic divides that we see in our city today. We have again and again highlighted the hardships and challenges faced by so many of our underserved communities. And we have discussed the groundwork for the necessary next steps to meaningfully address these issues as an organization.

Importantly, these conversations and efforts led directly to the creation of the Office of Racial Equity. This Office represents an opportunity for us to elevate this from a conversation to tangible results in the way we operate, deliver services, and allocate resources as a City. Most critically, it presents us with an opportunity to deliver these results –in the form of baseline service outcomes– to our communities that need them the most.

This past year and a half, our entire nation has begun grappling with our legacy of systemic and institutional racism and discrimination. As we grapple with these issues, we here in San José must remember that we are no exception to this legacy. Decades of the discriminatory practice of redlining, which dominated 20<sup>th</sup> Century development in cities including San José and continued into the 1970s. This systemic discrimination forced residents of color into less desirable neighborhoods that were then ignored and denied sorely needed services and access to capital.

### **History**

This institutional discrimination was not only part of the economic and social fabric of our city, it was integrated into the political process as well. Between 1916 and 1978, under the City’s system of at-large representation, the vast majority of mayors and councilmembers came from the affluent, largely white neighborhoods in the western parts of the city. In fact, between 1953

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sanjose.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=7164335&GUID=BDB2D079-A5FC-4E15-ADFA-1A4B28BDF528>

and 1978, San José had only two minority councilmembers. Until 1973, this system was also compounded by off-cycle elections that discouraged voter turnout and adversely impacted communities of color.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, for much of our history, our communities of color faced the systemic and purposeful exclusion from the economic and political capital that would allow for these communities to thrive and fully participate in our civic process and prosper in Silicon Valley's economy. This legacy has shaped our City today, and is directly responsible for the significant disparities that we see now.

## **COVID-19**

These inequities have become all the more visible and dire as we continue to face the dual public health and economic crises caused by COVID-19. Our low-income communities of color here in San José continue to contract and die of COVID-19 at the highest rates in the County. Tens of thousands of families in Santa Clara County face potential eviction in the coming months due to lost income from this crisis, and these families are overwhelmingly families of color.

As so many of our families struggle to stay afloat, we need to focus our work on delivering tangible results to our communities. We cannot merely rearrange the deck chairs on the Titanic, or allow Equity to become a buzzword or a box to check. Our communities need transformative change, and we can aspire for nothing less. Our Office of Racial Equity must be empowered to lead this effort, but we understand that this change cannot occur without involvement and commitment from every department at every level.

## **Pivotal Moment**

We appreciate the initial “sprint” Equity review conducted by the City Manager’s Office as part of the Fiscal Year 2020-21 budget process, as well as the inclusion of the Budgeting for Equity worksheet incorporated as part of this year’s budget process, particularly given the extraordinary operational challenges that City staff has faced given the multiple crises we have had. And we agree with the Administration’s long-term vision to “operate an organization that embeds the spirit of realizing racial Equity in the City of San José into everyday work, with Equity considerations being part of organizational decision-making (budget, internal policies, and practices, etc.) and external decision-making (community engagement, programs, policy making, etc.).”<sup>3</sup>

**We also believe in the fierce urgency of now, and we know that so many of our communities and residents are suffering every day.** As the continued effects of the public health and economic crises impact our poorest communities, they continue to face issues of gang violence, of shootings, of other crime and blight. So many of our communities are on the brink of catastrophe—this is not an exaggeration, this is simply reality for many parts of our City. Equity means focusing our efforts and resources on these communities where the need is greatest, particularly in difficult economic times. It is imperative that these communities receive more assistance, not less, to deal with these challenges.

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<sup>2</sup> Christensen, Terry, and Hogen-Esch, Tom. *Local Politics: A Practical Guide to Governing at the Grassroots*. M.E. Sharpe, 2006, pg. 215

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showdocument?id=58618>

## **Baseline Service Level Outcomes**

We believe that the core of our delivery framework for city services should focus on Equity in baseline service level outcomes. We need to ensure that our neighborhoods are receiving not merely equal—but equitable—levels of basic city services, whether hauling junk, dealing with graffiti and blight, or addressing potholes and streetlight outages. Achieving this requires us to focus on result-oriented metrics, such as response times for these services throughout the City. Only through this focus on concrete results can we achieve truly equitable levels of services in our communities that need them the most.

We understand that there is still much more work to do to normalize the concept of Equity both within our organization and within our community. However, as we continue this work, we must simultaneously operationalize and organize our framework and strategic plan to set up ourselves—and our communities—for success.

*The signers of this memorandum have not had, and will not have, any private conversation with any other member of the City council, or that member's staff, concerning any action discussed in the memorandum, and that each signer's staff members have not had, and have been instructed not to have, any such conversation with any other member of the City Council or that member's staff.*