

Tuesday – 4.21.2020 – 7pm Engagement Session (Summary edited 4.22.2020 at 2:30pm)

**Steve Calloway – Facilitator**  
**Connie Carpenter**

**Pat Fowler**  
**Jessica Macy**

**Judith Mutamba**  
**Christine Doerr**

We had a very thoughtful and engaged group on our call.

Major Themes and Ideas/Concerns Brought Up:

1. **DISPARITY** in Columbia suffered by people of color, persons suffering homelessness, and persons with disabilities, tends to be hidden in good times. The Covid-19 crisis has exposed and exacerbated the disparity in Columbia, being described by someone in our group as “the deepest disparity”.
2. **UNHEALTHY** housing conditions (e.g. poor indoor air quality, gutters) in part due to poor landlord maintenance, code violations, etc. make people more vulnerable to health problems.
  - The City needs a robust housing inspection and enforcement program put in place
  - Knowledge and education needs to be provided to landlords and tenants (citizens) about the importance/value of indoor air quality
  - Continue to emphasize and work on **SAFE, HEALTHY, and AFFORDABLE** housing
  - Efforts must continue to be focused on health on top of Covid-19 guidance
3. **HOMELESSNESS** was a major concern expressed. Reflecting on Columbia’s recent actions regarding the homeless and the City’s RFP for services, participants expressed **extreme** disappointment **and even disgust** at the attitude and lack of action. “Staying Home” doesn’t work if you don’t have a home.
  - Access to **HEALTHCARE** is a major problem. How do persons suffering homelessness, who already have poor access to healthcare, gain access to Covid-19 testing and/or treatment?
  - How do persons suffering homelessness receive communication about national, state, or local health guidance about Covid-19? (written posts/posters was mentioned)
  - Can they even get the minimal personal protective equipment? (e.g. face masks)
  - **The City needs additional “rehousing” efforts that address the range of affected persons (e.g. single persons, couples without kids, and families).**
4. **UNEMPLOYMENT** is the beginning of the domino. Regarding **MORTGAGE/RENTAL** assistance, people are told to “talk to your lender or landlord; evictions have been put on hold”. BUT no one is making it clear that once the temporary hold has ended, banks and landlords will expect to be paid. Essential workers need to be paid more than \$10-15/hr (e.g. service attendant).
  - People need better/clear/honest info on what will happen when we come out of this
  - Businesses receiving PPP funds may have employees they must retain, but for whom there is not much for them to do. Since they’re being paid anyway, **business/non-profit community should create a LENDING “pool” to match workers to high-needs areas in the community.**
  - **Employment and mental health services for our youth was mentioned as a concern. It was suggested youth could be employed to help address housing problems (e.g. cleaning gutters).**
5. Support for **FOOD & NUTRITION Services** and information on available resources was discussed. People need to know where and how to get food (e.g. food pantries, food bank, SNAP, etc.). Attention needs to be paid to the fact that our supply chain has been disrupted.
  - A “One Door System” needs to be developed that provides a common/universal access into the social services and non-profit community assistance programs. Project Homelessness was mentioned as a template for such an effort.
  - We need to destigmatize poverty and need; stigma keeps people from asking for help
  - As part of the Covid-19 City updates/announcements, include resource information on where to get help besides just the “CoMoHelps” process

*Finally, it was mentioned that the City might consider a different approach for these funds. Numerous funding streams have been generated in connection with the Covid-19 crisis. The example given was to consider focusing dollars (e.g. \$500,000 on say homelessness) with the goal of having a real impact, rather than the usual allocation process that spreads money over a number of things but doesn’t really get much done. Just a thought...*