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Major Themes and Ideas/Concerns Brought Up:

1. **HOMELESSNESS** in light of the Covid-19 crisis was a topic right out of the box. Community concerns and particular aspects discussed:

- **Closing of public spaces** (e.g. library particularly) has left unhoused persons without access to toilets, drinking fountains, and bathing/handwashing facilities for sanitation purposes all while being told to WASH YOUR HANDS. Downtown CoMo does NOT have such facilities.
- In addition to sanitation needs, many people access the INTERNET at the public library.
- Homelessness was a **problem before the Covid-19 crisis, i.e.** during “normal times”. It has been exacerbated and these are among the most vulnerable persons in our community.
- **A year-round shelter** for unhoused persons in the community is needed, but has not been a priority for City Council. Some positive steps have occurred in CoMO (work thru Steve Hollis’ office track and enumerate our homeless persons) but long-term and short-term solutions are needed.

Suggested Specific Projects and Approaches

- Place MKT-quality public restroom facilities in downtown CoMo
- Look at other communities that have provided small trailers to house people
- PREVENTING Homelessness and citizens from becoming unhoused is the best strategy
- Adopt a problem analysis and “all solutions” approach; what to do 1st, then get the \$\$
- Hiring a Homelessness Coordinator to lead city goal to eliminate this problem – IMPACT
- Unused student housing was an idea that came in later after the session

2. **DISPARITY, i.e. the Disparate Impact** on black and brown people and/or people in the low-to-moderate income categories was discussed. These are folks who are typically disenfranchised and lack voice in the decisions of our community. Several aspects of this issue including WHO is affected:

- Like homelessness, Covid-19 has exacerbated and intensified this already existing problem
- This will “widen the gap (income/employment, racial, social, etc.); many people - even those working - are one paycheck away from being in financial trouble (low pay, no savings, etc.)
- Staying home and/or working from home is not an option for many (low-wage) households
- With school and daycares closed, there is unequal access to affordable childcare; care is sparse, expensive, and **scary**. One participant (both partners are essential workers) with access to childcare is thankful but questioned whether her family is lucky or unlucky.
- Persons with DISABILITIES also suffer disparity, more-so now with Covid-19.

3. **SMALL BUSINESS and ACCESS to ASSISTANCE FUNDS** came up. One participant, a business owner applied for PPP funds the 1st day they became available but funds had run out before his application was processed. Owners of very small Minority Businesses have experienced problems accessing assistance dollars due to their size, but also because of lack of information and no relationship with a banking institution.

- Big Business vs. Small Business in allocation of assistance funds (frustrating)
- Laid off employees from small businesses must compete with persons already seeking jobs
- What will happen when large employers (e.g. MU) begin laying off employees?!

Suggested Specific Projects and Approaches

- City, Chamber of Commerce, REDI Micro-lending Grant Program
- Darcie provided a link to City info on uses of previously awarded CDBG funds
- The group requested that information be shared on which business/organizations received Covid-19 assistance funds from the various sources and for what purposes.

4. **IMPACTS TO CHILDREN** and the need for CHILDCARE were discussed. The closing of schools and daycares is traumatic for kids. Parents and caregivers are being asked questions from 4 year-olds that we would have not have anticipated having to answer. For those who depend on school being in session and having access to childcare, the current situation is difficult.

(see #2 disparity, bullet point #4)

- Safe, reliable, and affordable Childcare was a problem before Covid-19; more-so now

Suggested Specific Projects and Approaches

- Make sure mental health (trauma) resources are available for kids and families
- Greater appreciation for our teachers is due!
- Increased pay for daycare providers while still having affordable, quality daycares
- Don't forget about ongoing need for **substance misuse disorder treatment**

5. **NEED for DISSEMINATION of INFORMATION on RESOURCES** – There is a lot of misinformation and lack of information about available resources. People don't realize that the 1-3 months of mortgage or rent payments are only deferred but still owed. There is no strategy for "catch-up" or plan for what next. Concern was expressed that we may be dealing with this problem for some time OR a resurgence of the crisis.

Suggested Specific Projects and Approaches

- Can some funds be diverted for OUTREACH? (VU has created/provided a great resource)
- Pay attention to FOOD BANKS and providing for nutritional needs of our community

6. **OTHER THOUGHTS/IDEAS EXPRESSED by PARTICIPANTS:**

- **INCARCERATED Persons** are a vulnerable population and there are not enough efforts being taken to protect them; resistance to releasing non-violent offenders while addressing uptick in domestic violence.
- It looks like the money received along with anticipated funds is a lot of money, but we need to realize that it really ISN'T.
- Voice was given to a concern that this crisis will last longer than we think and/or that there will be a resurgence of the crisis. Behaviors such as "hoarding" reflect the worst in us.
- A sentiment was expressed that much of CoMo underestimates or has little understanding of the problems faced by some groups and persons in our community.
- Columbia is a resource-rich community. Participants talked about a vision for CoMo as a "**Community of Sacrifice**", dedicated to helping others, where we don't let people suffer.
- The hope is that Columbia will be a GOOD place to live (for all) in "normal times" as well as during times of crisis. That means addressing long-standing problems.

Thanks to all for your active participation.

Submitted by Steve Calloway