

Public Comment

Board Meeting – March 16, 2021

Increasing Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Village of Lansing

In 2017, an off-duty police officer assaulted 14-year-old Jordan Brunson. Consequently, in July 2018, the Lansing Community Coalition (LCC) and NAACP-CFSSB entered a Department of Justice MOU five-year agreement with the Lansing Police Department (LPD) and the Village of Lansing. The primary goal of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was to increase racial and ethnic diversity in the LPD to reflect the increasing diversity of the Lansing population, which has shifted significantly between 2010 and 2020.

The black population increased by 35.9%, and the Latinx by 13.8%, whereas the white population dropped by 29.3 percent. About 4,300 whites left Lansing in the past few years. The racial and ethnic makeup of the community is made up of the following:

- White 37%
- Black 43%
- Latinx 17%
- Others (Asian, multiracial, and Native American) 3%

However, the leadership in Lansing has witnessed no significant shift despite a dramatic change in its population over the years. After the MOU creation and signing, there have been many missed opportunities to establish a police department that reflects Lansing's ethnic and racial diversity. About 80 percent of active LPD full-time officers are white.

This is because of factors such as systemic racism, which has persisted because the Village leadership has missed opportunities to advance the goals of the MOU and has ignored suggestions offered on December 3, 2020, meant to help the Village achieve the goals of the MOU and get rid of systemic racism.

This administration deliberately overlooked six African-American and Hispanic police candidates without offering them employment, against the goals of the MOU. The administration also changed the hiring procedures for police officers and failed to timely notify the Lansing Community Coalition (LCC) when announcing employment opportunities for police officers, as agreed in the MOU. During the LPD's recent recruitment of officers, there were no hires, even when 40 percent of LPD police test-takers were African Americans and Latinx in the most recent class of officers.

With the significant shift in population, there should also be a shift in leadership. Unfortunately, there has been no remarkable change in Lansing leadership to reflect the ethnic makeup. For instance, 24 white candidates have run for elected official positions since 2010, and 14 were elected, whereas one candidate of color (Not Black or Hispanic) was elected from the seven candidates of color that have run for an elected official position.

Between 2017 and 2020, whites have been appointed to all Village boards, whereas African Americans were only appointed to the Human Relations Commission (HRC). Lansing records obtained through the Freedom of Information Act show that whites have been retained and reappointed 95 percent of the time to boards. The major recipients of the bulk of contracts since 2017 were white businesses, and whites have been hired 3 to 1 over African Americans with higher-paying jobs. The mayor also missed the

opportunity two times to appoint an African American, which has been the largest population for several years, to a vacant trustee seat during her administration. This led to no African-American representation.

These trends are worrisome, and there is need for change. Get blacks/Latinx on the ballot. Understand that leadership that fails to reflect the people is not regarded as democracy. This is the right time for a change in Lansing affairs to reflect new population changes and end systemic racism. The LCC has offered several recommendations to improve racial and ethnic diversity in hiring for the LPD, and here are some:

- The Lansing Police Department should commit to improving recruitment efforts to attract black and Latinx applicants. Through the MOU, the LCC will serve as a partner to assist in recruitment efforts.
- The oral interview process gives room for bias, and it must be reformed. The oral examination, conducted by an all-white Fire and Police Commissioner Board, includes subjective criteria. The process must be revised to include the following:
 - Diversifying the oral interview examiners to include black and Latinx examiners
 - Requiring implicit bias training for all those involved in administering the oral examination
 - Developing more objectively measurable criteria
- LPD and the Village must commit to better data collection and recordkeeping to help measure progress toward improving diversity in the LPD. Improved methods should include the following:
 - Collection of race and ethnicity information for all applicants and test-takers
 - Documentation and record retention to show when a candidate declines an offer and any other instance in which a candidate on the list is disqualified or voluntarily withdraws
 - Retaining LPD testing and hiring records indefinitely, including collecting and recording of race and ethnicity data to allow tracking progress on diversity efforts.
 - Offer employment to the six minorities eligible police candidates that were overlooked.

When the Village signed the MOU, we thought this reflected a commitment from the Village to work towards racial equity. But the Village's actions have not shown any such commitment. The Village should honestly dialogue with stakeholders including NAACP, CCL and LCC, so we all can be at the table, and not part of the menu. Over the years, it appears that more residents have moved out of the Village during this administration than any other administration, and this includes all racial groups.

Fortunately, in four years, enhanced opportunities for all residents might reverse the exodus in Lansing and offer equity as intended by law for everyone. Fortunately, the income of many new homeowners in Lansing exceeds many of those moving out. This is remarkable because thriving nearby Homewood and South Holland witnessed similar events 20 years ago, and they have enjoyed significant transformation.

Submitted by,

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