EQUITY IN SUSTAINABILITY

A collaborative initiative by the City of Providence and frontline, communities of color of Providence to bring a racial equity lens to the City’s sustainability agenda.
This document captures the process and results of the first year of Providence’s Equity in Sustainability initiative. The goal of the work is to develop a process for co-creating an equitable sustainability agenda that can serve as a model for prioritizing equity at all levels of local government. Within the first year, the effort sought to create a framework to begin to address and remedy deep-rooted environmental inequities along racial lines in the city of Providence.

The initiative is the result of a partnership between the Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island, Groundwork Rhode Island, and the City of Providence’s Office of Sustainability. This project team established the Racial and Environmental Justice Committee (REJC), made up of people of color representing frontline communities in the City. The work began with anti-racism trainings, which presented a racial equity analysis for City and community members. The REJC then assessed the needs and priorities of community members and researched best practices for equitable sustainable community development. The result was the creation of Recommendations for a Just and Racially Equitable Providence, which was adopted by the Office of Sustainability in September 2017 and is now known as the “Just Providence Framework.”

The process of creating this Framework was designed to shift decision-making power over environmental justice and sustainability issues to Providence’s frontline communities of color. It rejected the typical “input” model of community engagement and created space for frontline communities to be the decision-makers. This approach acknowledges that the experts of racial equity in Providence are those who have been most affected by it--communities of color. There was also significant attention given to removing barriers to participation and an explicit focus on trust-building between these community members and the City. Going forward, the REJC will be identifying and implementing a process for the operationalization of this Framework within the Office of Sustainability.

Overview

June 2016
City, EJ League & Groundwork RI awarded 100K grant

Sep 2016
Kickoff

Set Project Charter & Roles

Providence Office of Sustainability receive 100K from the Rhode Island Foundation and Partners for Places

Equity in Sustainability - Providence Year 1 Timeline
The REJC was established to co-create a process that directly integrates voices and concerns of people of color into a city sustainability and resiliency planning process, with the long-term goal of institutionalizing this model into city-wide planning and decision-making processes. The group was tasked with the following:

1. Build bases within their communities to support the work and raise awareness of environmental justice issues.
2. Identify key concerns, issues and needs for communities of color related to environmental sustainability in Providence.
3. Recommend a long-term process and structure for collaboration between communities of color and the Office of Sustainability.

The group included ten community members representing various “seats” within the community, as well as five City representatives. Critical elements that led to the success of the group included:

- Spaces were POC-centered and led
- Undoing Racism Trainings provided a common analysis and language
- REJC members conducted base building throughout the process to build support for the work and to ensure that it remained rooted in the community
- The City participated, but primarily in a listening role, and conducted its own base-building within City Hall to help other government official engage in racial equity work

### Committee Structure and Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Members</th>
<th>City Members</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Chief Sequan Pijaki “AKA George Spring Buffalo”</strong> Indigenous Seat</td>
<td><strong>Lily Gutterman</strong> Mayor’s Policy Office</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stephanie Moniz</strong> Low-Income Seat</td>
<td><strong>Leah Bamberger</strong> Director of Sustainability</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Monica Huertas</strong> Southside Seat</td>
<td><strong>Brian Hull</strong> Director of Economic Opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Candelaria Danicher/Lucy Rios</strong> Southside Seat</td>
<td><strong>Lizze Araujo</strong> Deputy Director of Arts, Culture, &amp; Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mike Araujo</strong> West End Seat</td>
<td><strong>Christina Hom</strong> Office of Healthy Communities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jesus Holguin</strong> North End Seat</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vatic Kumba</strong> Racial Justice Seat</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Seena Chhan</strong> Environmental Justice Seat</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Abraham Henderson/Paul Tavarez</strong> Education/Youth Seat</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sila Nhongvongsouthy</strong> Refugee/ Immigrant Seat</td>
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### About the Racial and Environmental Justice Committee

- **Sep 2016**
  - Community Wide Call for Applicants to REJ Committee

- **Nov 2016**
  - Presentation to Community Members About the REJ Committee & Process
Racial equity trainings were essential to building a standard definition of racism and systems of oppression between City and community members. 100 Providence City staff and community members, including Mayor Jorge Elorza, participated in two-day Undoing Racism® trainings hosted by The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond. Two trainings were hosted in December 2016 and January 2017. This educational component was a critical step towards collaboration and helped establish shared goals and a common understanding.

Based on this success, the City is continuing to commit resources to hosting additional trainings. The City is funding two more trainings in 2018 via the Department of Arts, Culture, and Tourism and the Mayor’s Office. The REJC also funded a third training in December 2017 with its year two grant funds.

Definition of racism from the Undoing Racism® training, provided by The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond.
Community Concerns

Through meetings with the REJC, base meetings and a survey, the REJC identified 12 priorities and concerns for communities of color related to the health of their communities:

**Topic 1: Clean Streets**
Cleaning up trash on the streets and in public spaces, better trash collection and recycling programs, street sweeping, making better use of vacant lots and foreclosed houses, addressing graffiti and potholes.

**Topic 2: Industrial Hazards**
Addressing industrial health hazards and toxic sites particularly around Port of Providence, addressing air and water pollution, greater accountability and transparency around pollution issues, lead safety.

**Topic 3: Youth Programs**
Lack of after school programs for youth, lack of family-friendly community spaces, lack of free public events.

**Topic 4: Diverse, Local Jobs**
Lack of jobs, particularly jobs that are local, in diverse sectors, and jobs for youth and elders; lack of career options for youth.

Base members learn about and commit to the process for the year. Learn about the needs of historically marginalized community members. Learn about their vision for the future.
Percent change in number of white people over five year period (between 2006-2010 and 2011-2015). (Data from American Community Survey [ACS] databases.) Portions of southwest Providence (such as in the West End, Olneyville, and South Elmwood neighborhoods in particular) have seen an increase in the number of white people by over 40%.

Topic 5: Affordable Housing & Gentrification
Ensuring access to fair, affordable housing, preventing gentrification and displacement.

Topic 6: Race & Representation
Expanding representation of people of color in government, in decision-making positions, and in the education system.

Topic 7: Government Accountability & Service
Addressing the experience that government representatives do not understand, listen, or care about issues affecting communities of color; developing ways for government to better address community needs; changing the systems that create a sense of fear, disrespect, and discrimination felt by communities of color when working with government processes.

Topic 8: Policing Practices
Addressing police discrimination, racial profiling, and lack of police accountability; addressing fear of the police and the feeling that the police is not a community resource; shifting away from “supervision and surveillance” towards protection.

Community members receive information from REJC process on community priorities and needs. They further prioritize, add and clarify, and begin to work on solutions.
**Topic 9: Community Safety**  
Creating greater safety on buses and streets, better lighting, more safe places to play; addressing youth violence, gang and gun prevalence.

**Topic 10: Expanded Public Transit**  
Expanding public transit routes, greater accessibility, adjusting the system to better meet community needs.

**Topic 11: Mental Health Resources**  
Expanding access to better affordable mental health resources; encouraging mental health care that addresses from a holistic, spiritual, and emotional standpoint; ensuring access to providers that are LGBTQ friendly, deferent to cultural differences, and practice cultural humility.

**Topic 12: Education**  
Adopting curricula that better incorporates ethnic studies and histories of people of color; culturally appropriate teaching styles; use of other languages and better access to ESOL; changing curricula to better prepare students for post-secondary education; incorporating lessons that better relate to the real world including civic engagement, financial literacy, etc.
For Providence this means the City:

2) A racially equitable and just Providence supports safe spaces for frontline communities of color* have a fundamental human right to clean, healthy and adequate air, water, land, food, education, transportation, safety, and housing. We must have just relationships with Frontline communities of color* have the resilience and expertise to be our own leaders. It is only in the dignity of our self-determination* that we can thrive as a community. A racially equitable and just Providence values education for our children and youth. Education is a fundamental right for our children and youth. The City of Providence should Support education that embraces diverse teaching and learning methods and roots us in our communities’ culture and traditions. • Provide accessible and equitable academic resources and pathways that take our children and youth where they desire to go in their career and life; • Implement restorative justice practices in our school systems and end criminalization of our children and youth of color; • Ensure educators and administration reflect the ethnic and racial makeup of the student body; and • End the school to prison pipeline.

7) A racially equitable & Just Providence practices local, regional, national and international solidarity*. This means the City of Providence should • Work across cities, states and countries to support racial equity* and justice; and • Fight for the rights of frontline community members as they are their own.

8) A racially equitable and just Providence must create meaningful work. Meaningful work entails full employment for all frontline communities of color* in Providence. For the City of Providence this means: • Openly encouraging the formation of worker’s democratic structures; • Supporting collective bargaining for retaining working communities and building a life of dignity and inclusion; • Ending the exploitation of black and brown bodies, in prison, and in providing work for little or no pay; • Supporting work that lifts up and centers the beauty and intellectual brilliance of our communities; • Ending employment discrimination and nepotism in municipal employment; and • Creating work that does not harm our people or the earth.

9) A racially equitable & Just Providence requires building a sustainable local economy now, one in which we produce and consume to live well without living better at the expense of others. For Providence this means we move towards: • Zero Waste • Clean and Efficient Public Transportation • Supporting land ownership by people of color; and • Supporting education for people of color about their rights to land, water and food.

10) A Racially Equitable & Just Providence Respects Community rights to Land, Water, and Food Sovereignty. For Providence this means: • Support land ownership by people of color; and • Supporting education for people of color about their rights to land, water and food.

11) A Racially Equitable and Just Providence works to end the extractive economy. For Providence this means: • Eliminate fossil fuel dependence and wasteful use of scarce metals and minerals; • Eliminate production of plastics, toxic chemicals, synthetic substances and our dependency on them; • Reduce waste and eliminate wasteful practices that hurt our environment and ecosystems; and • Eliminate destruction of nature and invasion of natural spaces (e.g., land, water, wildlife, forests, soil, and ecosystems).