

Address inequities

Address inequities (Care): As some groups prosper from growth and development and others fall behind, caring for one another and common goals have been compromised. Crime increases as some experience loss and despair. In order to strengthen our community, we need to acknowledge our interdependence, invest in each other, and make sure all members of our community have opportunities to move ahead.

There are efforts at many levels to address inequities. Social equity is at the heart of [the city’s 2016-2019 strategic plan](#). Voters have also shown a willingness to invest in other members of the community, [approving tax levies and bond issuances](#) for the public schools, [a county wide tax to improve services](#) — including those related to mental health — for our teens. Part of these funds are dedicated to a new [Family Access Center for Excellence](#), which will connect families in need to a range of social services and is being developed in partnership with the University of Missouri. Various nonprofits including the Food Bank and the Center for Urban Agriculture have tackled hunger, and both the city and others combine to run [Project Homeless Connect](#). The county’s alternative courts provide options and support for veterans and those struggling with alcohol and drug addictions. The Tribune publishes weekly a list of opportunities for members to become involved in these and other organizations, and also hosts the [annual “HERO awards”](#) to recognize the work of our community volunteers. The city also hosts a comprehensive [volunteer site](#).

Yet there is also a sense that more remains to be done. As one participant commented:



“There are many, very good initiatives taking place, but no-one has a holistic understanding of all of the efforts. To too many individuals it looks like nothing is happening and no-one cares.”

Although many forum and survey participants expressed a concern that historical and systemic inequities adversely affected many in our community, others emphasized personal responsibilities, questioned the underlying causes of inequities and expressed concerns about parental and family discipline and involvement.

This tension was captured in [an article written in the August 2015 issue of Inside Columbia magazine](#) by publisher Fred Parry explaining what he learned while serving on the committee that interviewed executive director candidates for the Heart of Missouri United Way:



“We like to focus our attention on the many quality-of-life amenities we publicly fund and our reputation as Missouri’s leading producer of Presidential Scholars. In truth, we’re still one of the state’s most racially segregated cities. We seem to be content in our ignorance about those living with mental illness, hunger and a variety of social ills we’d rather not discuss.”

— Fred Parry

These thoughts were subsequently endorsed in [an op-ed written by Gene Robertson](#), an MU professor emeritus,

local columnist, and member of the Minority Men's Network. This divide was also reflected in many comments we received:

“In Columbia some folks seem to be saying “If it’s not on my side of town, I don’t care.”

“I’m concerned for our future since our low-income kids have some of the worst rates of upward mobility in the state and even nation. If we see a divide now, imagine what it will look like in the future if we don’t address that.”

“too many people in the community who don’t get it.”

“Problems dark skin brings often not acknowledged in family or in community.”

“Even if focusing on child education, can’t succeed unless parents are helped too. It’s a circle.”

“How support families and children that deal with stress and trauma?”

Other participants specifically referred to a need for more [affordable housing](#), jobs that “give people a chance,” and public transportation that is matched to locations where people needed to travel for work.

So the question is, what more can we be doing as citizens, and as a community, to address inequities? The following table captures some ideas that were suggested during our forums along with some related concerns.

Use this space to gather your thoughts for dialogue, to make notes as others speak, or to reflect:

MY EXPERIENCE:

I CAN LIVE WITH:

WE SHOULD START WITH:

MY IDEAS:

I CAN’T ACCEPT:

WHAT I CAN DO NOW:

Suggestions

Concerns

My thoughts

Citizen groups, restaurants, and grocery stores could work together to reduce food waste and redirect food that would otherwise be wasted to people in need.

This could be unsafe and lead to food poisoning. It also reduces self-reliance and motivation to work. Would also be difficult to coordinate and supervise.

City could require all new developments to have a certain number of units that qualify as affordable housing, and ensure that all neighborhoods have a mix of housing.

This forces people to associate with others they may not want to and limits options that the current housing market shows people want.

Interested citizens and organizations could create funds within the Community Foundation that provide short term low interest loans to people in need, microcredit loans for small entrepreneurs from underrepresented populations, and low cost financial assistance for qualified candidates who otherwise might not afford college.

This is not necessarily a good way to distribute community resources. It could lead to defaults, discriminates against some people in need and undermines personal initiative.

The city could create a “ride share” bulletin board to connect those who need rides with others in their neighborhood who can give them.

This raises safety issues, could expose the city to potential liability and undermine the use of existing public transportation options we already are paying for.

Employers can provide or help working parents find affordable high quality care and adopt family friendly policies that help employees balance family and work demands.

This could be costly for business, which would be reflected in higher prices, and besides, it is not the job of the business, it's a family responsibility.

Using an inclusive process for goal-setting, the community could design, and city government and businesses could implement, an “affirmative-action” program to develop, identify and advance qualified workers from underrepresented populations.

This is costly, divisive, and takes opportunities away from those who have prepared themselves.