

Notes from CRC Public Feedback Session on Oak Park's Diversity Statement – 5/15/19

These notes are grouped by themes. The bullet points under the themes are direct quotes or paraphrased excerpts from public comments. Roughly 30 people were in attendance to make public comments and all participated through our process to elicit feedback (a “power dotting” exercise to identify areas of support and areas that needed further attention, 2 minutes of public comment time per attendee, deep discussion of the language of the statement by paragraph, and additional time for public comment at the end.)

Themes:

Deep support for moving forward with updates to the Diversity statement, and more generally with taking action towards governing for racial equity. There is wide support for the CRC's work and recommendations, and there is urgency to move forward.

- The statement does not go far enough.
- We are behind. We are resting on our fair housing laurels from the past. Support for naming fair housing in the statement as an honor of the past.
- We have diversity; we don't have equity.
- There is an urgency to address this now. There must be a sense of urgency for white people in this community.
- I appreciate the work of the commission and support it.
- There is not enough action in the village.
- OP is known for diversity; this is built on something beautiful but needs modernizing.

Lead with Equity

- Move the paragraph about equity to the top to center the goal of equity.
- Equity should be centered. Equity is about outcomes (not just opportunity) and diversity and inclusion are tools to help achieve equity.
- Support for the statement “inequity is a source of division.”
- Different people have different needs. Get them what they need.

Further Strengthen the Statement

- Racial equity needs to be explicitly named.
- Include the sentiment that “this work is hard, but necessary, to create change. We need to address the challenges and not be willing to let the discomfort hinder progress.”
- Is “appreciate” a strong enough word? Maybe respect?
- The statement should provide motivation to propel the community forward.
- The list of identities in the diversity section is strong. Could add others.

Notes on Additional Concepts in the Statement

- Systems of oppression work against our friends and neighbors.
- The use of the word “operational” is super important
- “Does this statement tell residents who they should have to interact with? Is this an attempt to control people's behaviors?” CRC response: As this is a statement of values (not an ordinance,) it has no legal weight and no ability or intention to control community members' behavior.

Definitions of words/language in the Statement

- Define Resident: CRC declines to include this feedback. One attendee was very concerned with the definition of “resident” in the statement. Upon discussion of this feedback, the CRC recommends adapting the language in the statement to say “people” rather than “resident” so that it is inclusive of people who work in our Village, shop at our businesses, visit Oak Park, or temporarily reside in the Village. The CRC believes the original drafters of the Statement would have intended it to be MORE inclusive, rather than explicitly exclude people from it.
- Define Intersectional
- Define Equity

Comments about future work

- The audience in the room was largely white people. The Village and Board need to do more to engage a broader range of people in future work (canvassing, offering babysitters, etc.)
- This language should be reviewed every few years. It was appropriate for a review to occur this year.
- When we ask brown people what they want and don’t use their feedback, it is dismissive.
- There is an obvious disconnect between the community of color and the people in power that goes beyond offering childcare. It seems that communities of color don’t have trust or faith in the systems to actually change, which is why they aren’t showing up.

Wordsmithing notes/specific notes on order and language

- Too wordy – tighten it up.
- Provide some definitions (see specifics above.)
- Some language is too formal.
- Not too wordy – we shouldn’t leave anything out. The CRC heard more comments about tightening the language, so our 2nd draft has attempted to incorporate the desire to make it more concise while keeping it meaningful and robust.
- Last paragraph: too self-congratulatory; too contrived. Eliminate all but last sentence.
- Move equity to the top
- “Fair” can sometimes be understood as equal. Need to be clear that equity is different – it is more about liberation.
- End first sentence of equity paragraph after word, “sufficient.”

Notes from Douglas, who was involved in the original 1973 statement. We include his individual comments as a way to honor the origins of the statement and highlight his perspective on the need for the document to evolve over time as our community’s understanding of issues related to diversity evolves.

- Hand the statement out to people who are interested in moving to Oak Park. If they don’t agree, they should not come.
- The first version was not inclusive. Did not include LGBT people; later added.
- The third version was too wordy. This needs to be simple.
- Agrees with the content.