



TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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In cities across the country, mayors and other city leaders oversee many of the same processes over and over: planning, budgeting, hiring- to name a few. Many times, plans and visions sit on a shelf; yet in some places, leadership has sparked real change in city DNA. We'll hear examples of transformative leadership - ways that mayors, together with colleagues and communities, have instigated change through common processes. We'll examine tools they've used for change, talk about government culture, and examine what it means to build and leave a legacy.

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SPEAKERS

MAYOR LEIRION GAYLOR BAIRD, CITY OF LINCOLN, NE

Leirion Gaylor Baird was sworn in as the 52nd mayor of Lincoln, Nebraska in May 2019. Mayor Gaylor Baird believes that city government, at its best, helps people coexist and reach their full human potential. Her vision of leading Lincoln toward a more successful, secure, and shared future prioritizes public safety and maintaining the capital city’s low crime rate; enhancing traditional and tech infrastructure to support economic growth and community resilience; increasing access to high-quality, affordable housing; and building a vibrant quality of life for all Lincoln residents.

Mayor Gaylor Baird serves on the Advisory Board of the U.S. Conference of Mayors and as Chair of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Local Government Advisory Committee. She previously served on the Lincoln City Council and Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Commission. Her career includes experience as a management consultant, fiscal and policy analyst, and Boys and Girls Club Director.

The mayor earned her B.A. from Yale College and M.Sc. from the University of Oxford. She, her husband, Scott, and their three children enjoy playing *The New York Times* Spelling Bee game and wading deeply into the Marvel multi-universe.

MAYOR KHALID KAMAU, CITY OF SOUTH FULTON, GA

America's first #BlackLivesMatter organizer elected to public office, Mayor khalid (pronounced kuh-LEED) is leading a generation of young activists from protests to politics. This self-proclaimed Elected Activist has been featured by CBS, The Nation, Jacobin, Governing Magazine and other national media. With a population that is 92 percent African American, South Fulton, Georgia is now the blackest big city in America. khalid is a mission to make America's Blackest City Black. On Purpose — which means a city that is not just unapologetic about its demographics but moving on purpose to be a laboratory for economic, housing and restorative justice policies aimed at improving the lives of African Americans.

Before elected to City Council in 2017, khalid worked as a labor and community organizer. In his first term in office, Councilman khalid fought to increase funding for the city's Parks & Cultural Affairs Department, authored legislation to create a \$1 M Pedestrian Safety Fund to install speed bumps in working-class neighborhoods, a Blighted Property Fund to demolish blighted & abandoned properties left standing for decades by county government, and create a full, paid Election Day Holiday — making South Fulton the first city in the South, and one of the first in the nation to do so. He created an annual, companion event called the Electoral College to teach citizens how local & state government works and wrote resolutions, passed unanimously by Council, to declare racism a public health crisis and make Juneteenth a paid city holiday. He sponsored legislation to secure \$500,000 in Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) for affordable housing; co-sponsored and supported legislation to raise the city's minimum wage to \$15/hr., decriminalize marijuana for less than an ounce, "ban the box" asking applicants for city jobs about their previous criminal history and eliminate Columbus Day in favor of Indigenous People's Day. A college-educated, community activist and Southern, Black, Christian Socialist — Mayor khalid brings a unique blend of professionalism, passion, and authenticity to government.

CITY MANAGER ELIZABETH PAULI, CITY OF TACOMA, WA

Elizabeth Pauli is Tacoma's first female City Manager. As City Manager, Ms. Pauli is the Chief Executive Officer for the City of Tacoma government, overseeing a staff of more than 2,000 and a biennial General Government budget of over \$1.9 billion, which includes a General Fund budget of \$460 million. Prior to her appointment as City Manager, Ms. Pauli served as Interim City Manager. Prior to that, she served as the City Attorney for the City of Tacoma. She had joined the City of Tacoma in May 1998, as Chief Assistant City Attorney. She was appointed Acting City Attorney in 2004, and was named City Attorney in 2005. Prior to joining the City of Tacoma, she was a partner at McGavick Graves, a well-established law firm in Tacoma.

A graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School, Ms. Pauli also has Bachelor of Science degrees in education and social work from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Ms. Pauli is a member of the Washington State Bar Association and the Washington State Association of Municipal Attorneys.

A mother and grandmother who lives in Tacoma with her husband, Dave, Ms. Pauli enjoys tandem bicycling and running the trails near her mountain cabin. She is an active volunteer with her church and in many local community service activities.

MAYOR VICTORIA WOODARDS, CITY OF TACOMA, WA

Victoria Woodards has called the “City of Destiny” her home for nearly her entire life. She is a proud graduate of Tacoma’s Lincoln High School and served as a soldier in the United States Army. Before becoming Mayor in 2018, she served for seven years as an at-large member of the City Council. During that time, she launched the City’s Equity and Empowerment initiative which led to the establishment of its Office of Equity and Human Rights and appointed the first members to the Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs.

In Mayor Woodards’ first term, she continued to be a champion of these important issues while expanding her involvement in regional and national conversations on affordable housing, transportation, strengthening youth and families, public safety, growing local business, and the creation of family wage jobs. She has also worked to more fully engage the City’s youth in community decisions that impact them every day, by expanding Student Government Day and establishing the City’s first Youth Commission.

Some of her other leadership roles as Tacoma’s mayor include positions on the Puget Sound Regional Council Executive Board, Tacoma-Pierce County Economic Development Board, Pierce Transit Board, Foundation for Tacoma Students Board, and the Workforce Central Board. In partnership with County Executive Bruce Dammeier and County Council Member Connie Ladenburg, she also convened elected leaders from across Pierce County for Mayoral Roundtable to explore opportunities for regional collaboration on the issue of housing attainability in the region, an initiative that formally came to be known as the ‘South Sound Housing Affordability Partners.’ As a founding member of Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, Mayor Woodards partnered with United Way of Pierce County to launch ‘Growing Resilience in Tacoma’ or GRIT -- A local guaranteed income demonstration that will inform future State and Federal policy efforts to address poverty.

City Leader Guide on Organizational Culture Change

Creating Conditions for Innovation,
Collaboration, and High Performance
in City Hall

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This is the first version of this City Leader Guide. The authors welcome feedback and will continue to improve and update the guide as they work closely with city practitioners and monitor emerging “promising practices” in cities. Please send your comments to cityleadership@harvard.edu.

Executive Summary

This guide helps city leaders and their staff systematically evaluate and transform the organizational culture of city government so that it aligns with and best serves the vision and values of their administration.

It offers the following to support efforts to bring about culture change:

- 1 A definition of organizational culture;
- 2 A framework (i.e., “the Culture Cascade”) for implementing and assessing organizational culture change;
- 3 Real-world case examples from three cities (Kansas City, Missouri; Louisville, Kentucky; and Somerville, Massachusetts) that provide insights into what organizational transformation can look like, what works, and what does not; and
- 4 A self-assessment rubric that helps cities advance their culture change goals by identifying areas requiring the most urgent attention as well as appreciating areas where progress has been made.

Together, these four elements of the guide will support city leaders and their staff as they take on the difficult, but certainly not impossible, task of bringing about long-lasting organizational change at city hall.

What is Organizational Culture?

Although organizational culture is a commonly used phrase, its meaning can vary in both nuanced and significant ways, depending on the context in which it is used and who is using it. For the purposes of this guide, **organizational culture is the set of rules—formal or informal, written or not—that determine how work gets done.**¹

Indeed, culture pervades everything, from how people are hired and promoted to how meetings are run and decisions are made to how setbacks are processed and successes are celebrated. However, culture is often unwritten—and at times can be at odds with what is in the employee handbook. Perhaps no one ever articulated explicitly what the culture is, because everyone is so accustomed to “the way things are done here.” *Changing* the culture, however, starts with *naming* the culture. Until the unwritten rules, norms, and values are made explicit, it is hard to imagine what a different set of rules, norms, and values might look like and how the organization could adopt them.

Culture can change, but it may take years of consistent and coordinated effort across all levels of the organization, from the chief executive to frontline supervisors and their staffs. When culture does shift, it is palpable. Standard operating procedures change, the budget works differently, human resources (HR) approaches hiring, training, and promotions in new ways, and daily meetings are a fresh experience.

Culture cannot be changed by just announcing it. It is not a leadership decision that can simply be implemented. Organizational culture change is a multifaceted, multipronged process that needs to be carefully orchestrated and sustained in order to be transformative. This process involves explicitly stating the desired set of rules, norms, and values and investing in a widespread common understanding of how these rules, norms, and values guide how work gets done.

Organizational culture change is a multifaceted, multipronged process that needs to be carefully orchestrated and sustained in order to be transformative.

¹This definition is a variation of one commonly found in texts focused on organizational culture in the private sector, based on the authors' close reading of the literature. For an example of a similar effort to define the concept, see: Boris Groysberg, Jeremiah Lee, Jesse Price, and J. Yo-Jud Cheng, “The Leader's Guide to Corporate Culture: How to Manage the Eight Critical Elements of Organizational Life,” *Harvard Business Review* (January-February 2018).

A Framework for Change: The Culture Cascade

When considering whether this guide is for you, ask yourself these two questions:

- 1 In order to advance your top priorities, will the current way of working at city hall—"business as usual"—be sufficient to succeed?
- 2 In a typical interaction with city government, is a constituent usually satisfied or even delighted?

If you answered “no” to either question (as do many mayors and city managers!), there is a good chance the culture of your city government is not matched to your current needs and goals. **This guide offers you the tools you will need to create and sustain a culture that best matches and serves your vision and values.**

In particular, the guide features a framework that we have developed for these purposes: the Culture Cascade. This framework prompts you to consider and evaluate the prevailing culture at city hall; articulate your desired goals; and then shape, implement, and sustain your culture change agenda.

Based on our review of the academic literature and our research on city government across the United States (in particular, our case analysis of culture change in Kansas City, MO; Louisville, KY; and Somerville, MA) we have identified nine essential steps that if followed will lead to lasting culture change. Together, these nine steps, listed below and depicted in Figure ES-1, constitute the Culture Cascade Framework:

Leadership Alignment: Setting the Stage

-  | 1. Vision and values defined
-  | 2. Senior staff reflect vision and values
-  | 3. Ecosystem engineer assigned

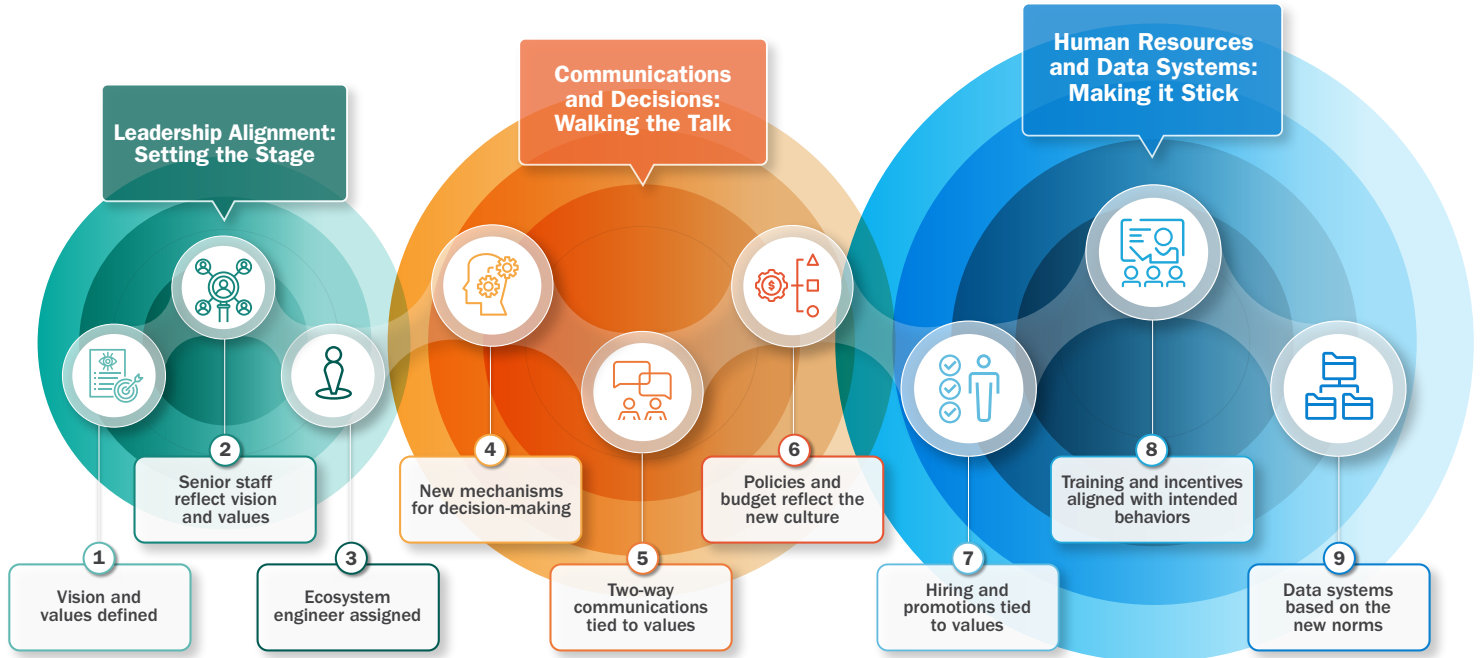
Communications and Decisions: Walking the Talk

-  | 4. New mechanisms for decision-making
-  | 5. Two-way communications tied to values
-  | 6. Policies and budget reflect the new culture

Human Resources and Data Systems: Making it Stick

-  | 7. Hiring and promotions tied to values
-  | 8. Training and incentives aligned with intended behaviors
-  | 9. Data systems based on the new norms

Figure ES-1
The Culture Cascade Framework



Creating and Embedding Change: A Diagnostic Tool

The steps of the Culture Cascade Framework are meant to be implemented in order, beginning with leadership alignment and continuing to communications and then systems. But because some jurisdictions may have already completed some of these steps (whether systematically or not), the guide also features a diagnostic tool that provides a rubric for self-evaluation and goal setting.

We encourage city leaders to engage their teams from across the organization, as well as other stakeholders in the city, when using this assessment tool. Completing the assessment together creates an opportunity for shared learning and collective strategizing around the city's future culture. Differing opinions about your city's current readiness level are bound to arise; and inviting perspectives beyond the internal team can enhance the quality of your diagnostic, communicate a shared vision, and secure support.

Implementing and sustaining organizational culture change is admittedly a challenging endeavor. It is not a quick process, easily fixed by one innovation or the words or actions of just one leader. Instead, it requires time, effort, and commitment across the whole of the organization. This may sound difficult, even overwhelming. But by understanding and embracing all elements of the Culture Cascade Framework, you can achieve the changes you want to make, transforming city hall's culture in a meaningful and lasting way.

Introduction: Organizational Culture—The Big Picture

At a 2019 Bloomberg Philanthropies CityLab gathering focused on new practices in municipal governance we interviewed a dozen mayors and senior aides about their experiences with advancing new programs in city hall. Some had success for sure, but many felt blocked or unfulfilled in terms of what they had hoped to accomplish. The challenge often came back to culture: “My senior aides get it, but frontline staff won’t budge.” “There is progress, but really most are waiting me out.” “I’ve had real success with one innovative program but getting the whole organization to shift to that mindset is an uphill battle.” And the most oft used line was a popular quote widely attributed to management guru Peter Drucker: “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.”

While mayors and city hall staff often bemoan that culture devours the best laid plans, they do not always have a clear understanding of what culture is, how it can be diagnosed, and how it can be improved. It is possibly the greatest factor for success for any organization, yet it remains an elusive concept. City leaders notice when the culture is not conducive to innovation, collaboration, and high performance, but they can’t always find the levers that enable change.

In the private sector, culture change is a much more prominent tool in the arsenal of change leaders. Ask any business executive the make-or-break characteristic of long-term success and one of the most common answers is culture: the values and norms driving the enterprise and animating workers and customers alike. Business executives can turn to scores of outlets and resources. There are countless magazines that discuss culture: *Money*, *FastCompany*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *Bloomberg Businessweek*. And, there are famous best sellers: *Who Moved My Cheese?*, *Dare to Lead*, *Good to Great*, each one about organizational culture and how to improve it.

Hardly any resources of this type exist for the public sector, however. This guide offers to fill that gap. It provides a framework for thinking about organizational culture that is rooted in the academic literature and a diagnostic tool to help local leaders examine their current situation, articulate desired goals, and shape a culture change agenda. It places particular emphasis on what mayors and senior staff can do to initiate, support, and sustain organizational change. After all, whether the goal is to improve resident satisfaction with government services like building permits or ensuring that a police department fully embraces racial justice reforms, culture change starts at the top.

Whether the goal is to improve resident satisfaction with government services like building permits or ensuring that a police department fully embraces racial justice reforms, culture change starts at the top.

Today, there is more urgency to create innovative, collaborative, and high performing (as well as truly inclusive) city halls than ever before. Over the past several years, cities have had to navigate a pandemic, a serious economic downturn, stark social and racial inequalities, and civic unrest, while continuing to perform the basic duties of municipal government. Successfully addressing these challenges requires enormous efforts from across the entire organization, as well as an ability and willingness to rethink current practices and work together to find better ways of operating. An organizational culture that is oriented towards innovation, collaboration, performance, and inclusion is a major enabling condition to do that work.

In fact, there is perhaps no greater argument for embracing such a culture than its potential for helping to address inequities and racial biases in local government, given the extent to which people of color and other historically marginalized groups continue to experience discrimination across the country, including as a result of unfair or inequitable municipal policies, programs, and practices. By providing a framework for transforming city hall’s culture in an enduring and comprehensive manner, this guide supports city leaders’ efforts to address these and other similarly challenging issues confronting their organizations and communities—while at the same time capturing and perpetuating their greatest successes and best practices.

Unique Challenges for Local Government

The public sector in general, and city halls in particular, have their own characteristics, however. Do the lessons from and for business leaders apply to city leaders? Political scientists have for a long time been skeptical about the ability of mayors and local leaders to affect the broader systems of government. Historically, many scholars have viewed city leaders as vessels pushed around by interest groups, business leaders, and state officials. Canonical texts such as Paul Peterson's *City Limits* (1981) and Barbara Ferman's *Governing the Ungovernable City* (1985) stress that municipal executives face many governing barriers and often lack agency.^v

More recent texts still tend to focus on factors outside the institution, including the role of governing coalitions, demographics, economics, and specific domains such as crime, transportation, and immigration (see Stone, 1989; Mollenkopf, 1992; Flanagan, 2004; and Trounstein, 2008, for examples of the more oft cited texts in the discipline).^{vi} These and other texts provide valuable insights into the mayoral environment, but do not substantively advance an understanding of how organizational culture helps or hinders operational performance or how leadership can change culture.

Several texts specifically describe mayoral leadership traits and approaches (Yates, 1977; Holli, 1999),^{vii} but this literature is quite thin, especially in comparison to the many texts and studies of presidential leadership. Moreover, it tends to focus on the individual, not the institution.

Some of the best-known works about government from the past century are written by authors who assess the so-called “administrative” or “bureaucratic” state. Among others, sociologist Max Weber (1922, 1978) and economist Anthony Downs (1967) have chronicled the rise of modern bureaucracy as a response to political corruption and the rapid societal changes in the 19th and 20th century.^{viii} These authors detail the common attributes of precision, functional specialization, hierarchical organization, and the emphasis on technical superiority that were critically important for tackling challenges such as establishing new transportation routes and laying sewer lines.

Contemporary scholars of public administration have continued this tradition of detailing and analyzing characteristics and work processes of modern-day bureaucracies. Notably, the New Public Management school of thought emphasizes private sector approaches to address public sector challenges. Authors such as David Osborne, Donald Kettl, and John Dilulio argue that it is the “systems” as much as the “people” that preclude government progress.^{ix} As with the previously discussed literatures, however, they provide little analysis of organizational culture. They instead focus on specific interventions such as competition, performance management, and customer service; the suggestion being that if you adopt managerial techniques borrowed from the private sector you can create a culture similar to that of high performing businesses.

More recently, scholars of public sector innovation have moved beyond efficiency to address the organizational transformation needed to take on significant societal challenges (Bason, 2010; Borins, 2006; Mulgan, 2009; de Jong in Cels et al, 2012; Goldsmith and Kleiman, 2017).^x Innovation scholars often focus on new innovative practices (data and technology, new delivery concepts, use of behavioral insights) or on innovation strategies (how to navigate the challenges of implementing new practices). They acknowledge organizational culture can be either a barrier or an enabler but rarely operationalize the concept or offer reform paths forward.

Becoming an Antiracist City: Tacoma's Data-Driven Transformation

By [Margot Bordne](#) and [Clinton Johnson](#)



The Tacoma Equity Index provides the data and details the city needs to assess and address inequalities.

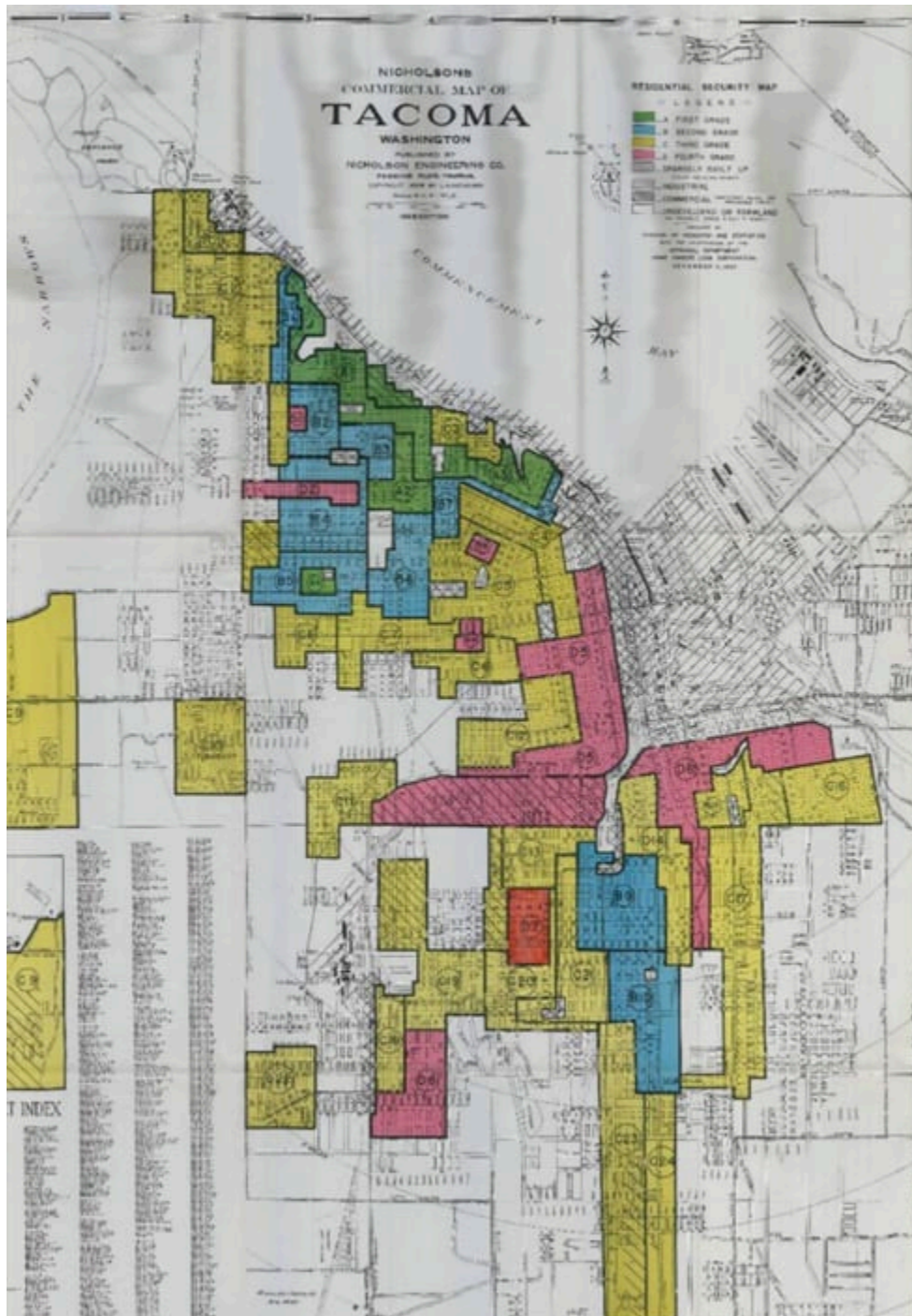
Key Takeaways

- City planners in Tacoma conducted spatial analysis to see the impacts of past discriminatory practices that can still be seen on a map.
- Public works managers could see how reprioritizing project sequences could significantly impact residents' quality of life.
- GIS was used to aggregate the data to create the Equity Index, and anyone can use GIS to add the equity layer and perform their own analysis.

○

Tacoma mayor Victoria Woodards wants to make her city antiracist, a goal that's now reflected in the [Heal the Heart of Tacoma campaign](#). Many cities in the US face ongoing impacts of systemic racism, but not enough have examined the underlying issues. Tacoma's program is moving forward with precision. The city first quantified the barriers people face and then mapped communities where disinvestment has led to lower quality of life.

The [Tacoma Equity Index](#) measures entrenched economic problems, housing needs, and social justice issues. The tool examines five categories of inequity that include livability, education, environmental health, economic opportunity, and accessibility. These topics were analyzed with geographic information system (GIS) technology to show patterns and represent inequities on a map.



Tacoma is one of many cities in the US that still suffers from the 1930s policy of redlining, which assigned high loan risk to communities of color. This practice prevented two-thirds of Tacoma's residents from buying or building a home.

There are 29 key indicators within five determinant categories of livability, education, environmental health, economy, and accessibility. Indicators include such things as crime, home value, affordable housing, school quality, amount of green space, and access to recreation and transit.

The map and its underlying data give the city council guidance to see and repair the harm done by systemic racism.

When the city started to replace streetlights, for example, the equity index guided the public works department to see how specific neighborhoods that have lagged in repairs are experiencing more crime.

"They only have the budget to complete a certain number of streetlights every year," Warren said. "By combining the equity index with data they already collect, they've reprioritized their list of work to consider past inequities as a factor of new investment. They're targeting the areas of the city that have historically been disinvested in, where crashes or crime might be impacted by a lack of streetlights."



Now, for all projects that go to council, equity analysis is required to show who is impacted and how equity is considered in implementation. The equity index gives us a story to tell why we've changed how we're doing things."

- Strategic Initiative Coordinator at the City of Tacoma,
Bucoda Warren

Committed to Getting the Numbers Right

The group behind the equity index first focused on getting the facts right about the role of historical policies in shaping the city's equity landscape. The foundational architect was then-senior policy analyst Alison Beason who sparked senior GIS analyst Adriana Abramovich's passion for data-driven analysis of inequalities.

"We are a team, and each member has a different area of expertise," Abramovich said. For instance, the 2020 equity index team had input from strategic manager Jacques Colon, strategic initiative coordinator Bucoda Warren, and IT GIS supervisor Christina Chelf. The new iteration of

the 2022 equity index includes a core group that works in consultation with city departments and partner agencies.

While contemplating what Abramovich wanted to do for the next 25 years of her life—having had some success as an architect—she got a job at the [Center for Urban Studies](#) at University at Buffalo (UB). She worked under the direction of [Henry Louis Taylor Jr.](#), a scholar who focuses on a historical and contemporary analysis of distressed urban neighborhoods, and on race and inequity in American cities.

In Buffalo, Abramovich rekindled her passion for urban planning, she said, “fell in love with GIS.” After achieving a certification in GIS and then a master’s in urban design and planning from the University of Washington in Seattle, Abramovich knew her purpose was to use GIS to establish guidelines for the future growth of communities under the big umbrella of comprehensive planning. She worked for the City of Renton, Washington, supporting planners before joining the IT-GIS team in Tacoma, one of the most racially diverse cities in Washington State. Nearly 40 percent of people living in Tacoma are Latino, African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Native American, or multiracial.



When Beason began asking about demographics in Tacoma and inequalities, it was Abramovich who helped the city discover the power of spatial analysis. Then Beason worked with the [Kirwan Institute](#), which has a reputation for its equity index approach, to compile the 2018 equity index determinant categories, indicators, and data model.

Abramovich recently reflected on how her privileged upbringing in South America immediately made her starkly aware of what other families lacked. Yet it is not a guilty conscience that drives her.



I'm Jewish, so I set out to follow the concept of tikkun olam, which means 'repair the world,' and I'm going to examine equity to improve people's quality of life.

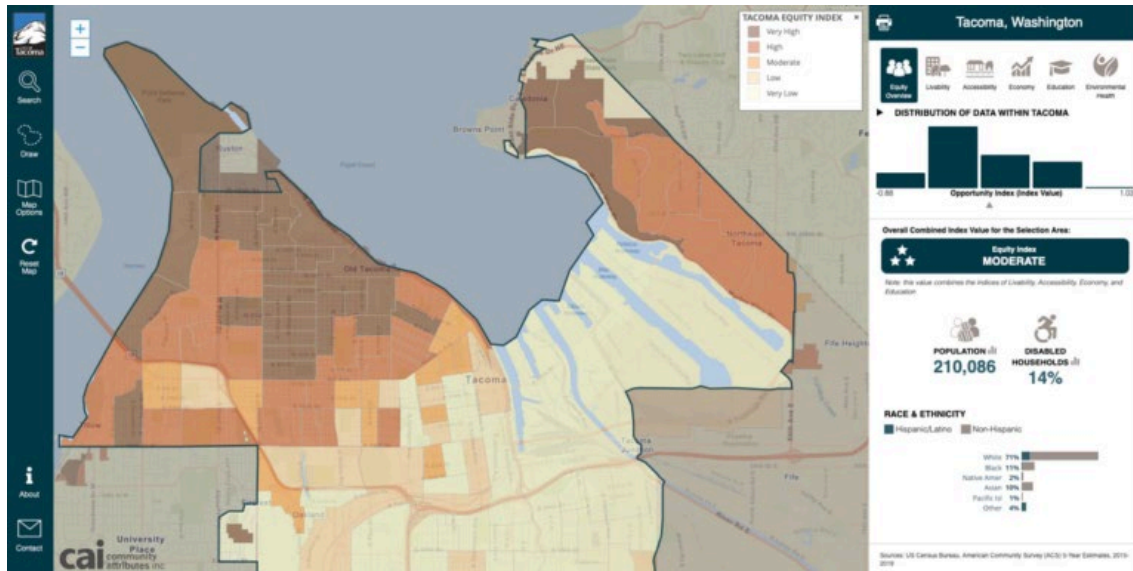
- Senior GIS analyst, City of Tacoma, Adriana Abramovich

Applying Equity to a Housing Crisis

From 2010 to 2019, the region around Tacoma has added three new residents for every housing unit. With the growing demand, rents have gone up, which has the largest impact on lower-income and historically marginalized communities.

The [Home in Tacoma project](#) used the equity index to show how historic housing policies disproportionately impacted people of color. The data led Tacoma to prioritize creating housing in higher-opportunity areas and avoid gentrifying racially diverse areas of the city.

Phase one of the Home in Tacoma project adopted [low-scale and mid-scale residential land uses](#) that allow a range of multiunit clustered housing options, also known as “missing middle” housing. Phase two is getting started, and it includes community outreach, new policies through zoning, affordability, antidisplacement steps, and actions to support housing growth. Abramovich will be working with planners on the zoning changes.



Tacoma collaborated with the Kirwan Institute on community indicators of well-being shown to influence the ability to succeed in life. GIS was used to collect and aggregate this data and to roll up the overall Equity Index into a single measure that can be compared across the city and monitored to mark progress. (Examine the interactive Tacoma Equity Index tool by clicking on this screenshot.)

Another tool to increase the construction of affordable units is the [Multifamily Property Tax Exemption Program](#), which encourages the development of affordable units with tax incentives. For example, suppose a builder pledges to make 20 percent of the units affordable at 70 percent of Pierce County's average median income. In that case, the qualifying project with a minimum of four new units would be exempt from property taxes for 12 years.

With guidance from the Home in Tacoma policies and the equity index, Tacoma is planning for 60,000 new housing units by 2040. That growth is intended to be in the downtown area, and mixed-use centers, as well as along corridors in the city where growth has accelerated the most and where there are conveniences such as walkability and access to wholesome food and parks.

These decisions and policy changes will impact people's lives. "Increasing affordable housing choices in high-opportunity areas strengthens success in life through a better education, access to health care, and other services; likewise, directing capital investment into low-opportunity areas aims to increase opportunities," Abramovich said.

Engaging and Persuading Peers and Residents

Since 2018, the equity index team has steadily refined the tool's accuracy. In addition, city staff members have been explaining and promoting the index's power to other departments inside the city government as well as agencies and nonprofit organizations outside city hall.

Other projects and initiatives that have been guided by the index include COVID-19 relief funds; transit routes; and the extension of tree canopy to all neighborhoods to address extreme summer heat.

In addition to undertaking an education effort about the equity index within the city government, Abramovich and others have encouraged businesses, nonprofits, and residents to use the interactive tool to better understand the city's issues and how they might influence business and personal decisions.

In 2021, a local [television station](#) even promoted an information and training session offered by the city to teach residents how to use the equity index. In addition, the city lists a variety of topics that the equity index may clarify for members of the public, including how the city schedules repairs, conducts maintenance, and distributes grants and loans to applicants.

The Tacoma Equity Index has a growing reputation for reliability of data and the power to show the distribution of disparity through maps. Race Forward's Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), a network of more than 400 governments, came together with Esri to create a [Social Equity Analysis solution](#) modeled in part on Tacoma's Equity Index work. The equity index work has been presented at regional and national conferences, shared with regional agencies, and drawn the interest of the New England Statistical Society and the Biden administration.

"To know that the White House staff saw our presentation, and receiving questions from them about the tool was an amazing experience," Abramovich said. "The origins of the urban crisis are tied to race, class, and gender. And now we have a tool to assess where help is needed and improve people's quality of life. I'm repairing the world based on data, and that is a dream come true for me."

Read more about how [GIS is used to advance racial equity; social justice; and sustainable, inclusive development](#).



[Margot Bordne](#) is an account manager on Esri's Global Business Development team. Margot supports organizations across industries who leverage GIS to improve their operations and decision making capabilities, with a focus on the use of GIS for advancing equity and social justice. Margot also founded and leads Esri's Women's Enablement & Career Advancement Network (WeCan) and is currently working toward a Master's Degree in Diversity & Inclusion Leadership at Tufts University.



[Clinton Johnson](#) helps organizations create geospatial strategies for equitable outcomes. He takes an empathic approach to technology that begins with understanding real-world challenges faced by diverse communities and finding creative ways to implement practical solutions. Clinton leads Esri's Racial Equity team. He also founded and leads NorthStar, an employee community focused on increasing representation, inclusion and belonging for people of African descent in GIS. He is also an advocate for belonging and equity for people from underrepresented groups in GIS and STEM more broadly.



RESOLUTION NO. 40622

1 BY REQUEST OF MAYOR WOODARDS

2 A RESOLUTION affirming the City Council's dedication and commitment to
3 comprehensive and sustained transformation of all of the institutions,
4 systems, policies, practices, and contracts impacted by systemic racism,
with initial priority being given to policing in the City of Tacoma.

5 WHEREAS our nation was founded on systems of racism and slave labor,
6 beginning in 1619 when the first slaves are known to have been brought to the
7 British colony of Jamestown, Virginia, and

8 WHEREAS the abolishment of slavery did not end racism nor the
9 dehumanization and disparate treatment of Black Americans, and instead, new
10 systems of control and oppression were put in place, institutionalizing racism in
11 both the nation's systems and our cultural norms, and

12 WHEREAS the United States has engaged in more than 150 years of work
13 to reform societal structures and restore civil rights and social justice, yet full equity
14 has not been achieved, and

15 WHEREAS, over the course of modern history, high-profile cases across
16 the nation and in Tacoma have repeatedly raised questions regarding the impacts
17 of implicit bias and systemic racism in institutions across all sectors, including
18 policing, and have led to calls for increased transparency and communications
19 from police agencies and the government bodies that oversee them and other
20 public services, and

21 WHEREAS, on February 20, 2007, at the recommendation of the City's
22 Human Rights Commission and pursuant to Ordinance No. 27589, the City
23
24
25
26



Council adopted TMC 1.06.075.B.1, creating and clarifying the role of a Citizen
1 Review Panel, which is currently known as the Citizen Police Advisory
2 Committee ("CPAC"), and
3

4 WHEREAS CPAC is a policy-focused board whose role is to ensure
5 transparency and accountability in the way that the City of Tacoma Police
6 Department ("TPD") operates, and
7

8 WHEREAS CPAC's duties and responsibilities include reviewing police
9 policy at the request of the City Council or City Manager, and providing community
10 outreach and education through public hearings and committee efforts, and
11

12 WHEREAS the Equity and Empowerment framework, adopted by the City
13 Council in 2014, makes equity a consistent guiding principle across the City of
14 Tacoma and calls out specific goals to guide the City's operational and policy
15 decisions, including a commitment to equity in policy making, and
16

17 WHEREAS, in January 2015, the City established an Office of Equity and
18 Human Rights, with a mission to achieve equity in City service delivery, decision-
19 making and community engagement by identifying and eliminating the underlying
20 drivers within our community that perpetuate racial inequity and provide
21 opportunity and advancement for all, and
22

23 WHEREAS, in 2015, Project PEACE was generated in response to
24 community concerns about nationwide police-related conflicts to build trust,
25 relationships, and understanding between community members and law
26 enforcement officers in the Tacoma area, and



WHEREAS, through the work of Project PEACE, more than 800 community members, police officers and City staff took part in six community-wide conversations, resulting in a 2016 report which identified recommendations under 11 categories, and is work which continues today, and

WHEREAS, on March 4, 2020, Mayor Woodards launched the Compassionate Tacoma initiative, which calls on all leaders, businesses, and residents to commit to making Tacoma a more welcoming, connected, resilient, and vibrant community by listening and serving others with love, and

WHEREAS City Council Members have publicly expressed their support of this initiative, and its core values provide a foundation for how the City can engage in the work of ensuring equity and justice, and

WHEREAS, through past engagements such as the work done by Project PEACE and grassroots violence prevention efforts, community members have demonstrated their desire and ability to engage with compassion in difficult conversations in order to gain understanding and effect lasting change that increases equitable outcomes, and

WHEREAS, on March 13, 2020, the City Manager and the Mayor of Tacoma, pursuant to Chapter 1.10 of the Tacoma Municipal Code and Chapter 38.52 of the Revised Code of Washington, proclaimed that an emergency exists caused by COVID-19 ("Proclamation") in the City of Tacoma, and confirmed by the City Council on March 17, 2020, and

WHEREAS COVID-19 has shined a light on the deep need for more equitable systems, as "Long-standing systemic health and social inequities have



put some members of racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of getting COVID-19 or experiencing severe illness, regardless of age;"¹ and

WHEREAS worldwide demonstrations on systemic racism and brutality in policing renewed after the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed Black man living in Glynn County, Georgia, on February 23, 2020; of Breonna Taylor, an unarmed Black woman living in Louisville, Kentucky on March 13, 2020; and of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man in living in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25, 2020, and

WHEREAS Manuel Ellis, a 33-year old Black father, brother and son, died in Tacoma Police custody on March 3, 2020, and the Tacoma News Tribune published on June 3rd that the Pierce County medical examiner's report concluded that Mr. Ellis's death was by homicide and that the cause was from a lack of oxygen due to physical restraint, and

WHEREAS increasing community demands for reforms have been seen at an unprecedented scale, with daily, peaceful demonstrations across the City of up to 10,000 people calling for equitable justice and other reforms that would ensure that residents of every race and in every geographic area of the City may have equal access to those conditions which create a sense of safety, and

WHEREAS, these losses of life, as well as the countless others lost to the impacts of systemic racism on public health and safety, are evidence of the limited impacts made by reform efforts, not only in Tacoma, but across the nation, and

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>



WHEREAS disparities by race continue to be seen across the nation and in Tacoma in almost every measure of human health and wellbeing, including perceptions of safety, incarceration and arrest rates, risk of death from homicide, annual income, net worth, access to education, and key indicators of public health, such as maternal and infant mortality, heart disease, and diabetes, and

WHEREAS we, as a City, mourn every loss of life, and

WHEREAS the institutions and systems formed to protect human life, health, and wellbeing have failed to do so equitably, despite more than 150 years of work to reform societal structures and restore civil rights and social justice, and

WHEREAS the Tacoma Mayor and City Council acknowledged the failure of reform efforts to result in equitable outcomes at the June 23, 2020, Committee of the Whole meeting, described the inequitable current state as unacceptable, and thereby called for a need to transform all of the institutions, systems, policies, and practices impacted by systemic racism, with initial priority placed on policing in the City of Tacoma, and

WHEREAS the City acknowledges that the challenges of dismantling more than 400 years of systemic racism to ensure measurable improvements in the equitable health and wellbeing of all members of the community is an adaptive leadership challenge that will require a radical reimagining of institutions and an innovative and collaborative response, and

WHEREAS, at the June 23, 2020, Committee of the Whole meeting, the Mayor and City Council discussion acknowledged a need for this transformation to begin with creating a shared community understanding of what it means to feel



safe, and acknowledged that the conditions that create a sense of safety may be
1 vastly different for various members of our community, and

2 WHEREAS institutions and systems of the United States, including local
3 governments, have been operating under the influence of racism for centuries, and
4 we, as the City of Tacoma, should not endeavor to transform our systems without
5 first listening to the voices of those which have been marginalized, silenced, or
6 ignored, nor without incorporating the advice of experts in the field of reform and
7

8 WHEREAS, at the June 23, 2020, Committee of the Whole meeting, the
9 Mayor and City Council highlighted a need for this work to be community-led,
10 driven by the best practices of reform as defined by national experts, informed by
11 the foundational work of CPAC and Project PEACE, and that it should engage
12 local leaders in this work, including members of the CPAC and Project PEACE
13 Executive Board, and
14

15 WHEREAS collective efforts are required for collective change, and to
16 effectively address the root causes of racial inequity named by the Mayor and City
17 Council members at the June 23, 2020, Committee of the Whole meeting,
18 including education, poverty, housing, mental health, economic opportunity and
19 more, a need was expressed to engage and collaborate with all organizations
20 across all sectors in the work of transformation, and
21
22

23 WHEREAS community members serving at all levels in business, faith
24 organizations, education, environment, public health, utilities, libraries, housing,
25 social services, government, police services, and more have acknowledged the
26



inequities perpetuated by racial injustice and expressed their commitment to
transformative change, and

WHEREAS leaders across many of these sectors have specifically
committed to reimagining community safety, looking at innovative ways that safety
could be enhanced, convening conversations on how each agency has a role and
can support behavioral health, establishing social service programs that are both
preventative and serve acute needs, and creating opportunities to rethink safety in
schools, libraries, parks, and other public spaces, and

WHEREAS to successfully change systems, we must engage with a deep
understanding of the needs they serve and their policies, practices, contracts, and
administration, and

WHEREAS the TPD performs many necessary public safety services within
our community that add to quality of life in Tacoma, and they have had an active
role in community conversations and work related to justice and reform, and

WHEREAS effectively transforming our systems of policing will require a
process that engages with personnel at every level of the TPD to assess our
current state, ensures that staffing models provide the ability for officers to both
protect and serve through authentic and community-oriented policing, and looks for
ways that we can innovate and assist police officers on the front line by identifying
alternate models for engaging with emergency calls for service related to societal
issues outside of police officers' core training, such as homelessness and mental
health crises, and



WHEREAS transformation cannot be done effectively through policy alone,
1 but also requires hiring, training, and accountability systems that align to ensure
2 just outcomes, and

3
4 WHEREAS an unprecedented act of transformation is an adaptive
5 leadership challenge, where learning is required in each stage of defining the
6 problem, seeking a solution, and working to implement the solutions generated,²
7 and

8
9 WHEREAS this will require all involved to learn, change, and grow
10 throughout the process, and potentially require those involved or impacted to,
11 "give up things they hold dear: daily habits, loyalties, ways of thinking,"³ and

12
13 WHEREAS creating and implementing in an innovative model of
14 collaboration and community engagement that is effective, authentic, and
15 transparent will require substantive resources and time, the scale of which are
16 currently undetermined, and

17
18 WHEREAS the City acknowledges that it is undertaking this historic work of
19 sustained and comprehensive transformation concurrently with the unprecedented
20 challenges of COVID-19 on public and economic health, and

21
22 WHEREAS, while acknowledging these challenges, at the June 23, 2020,
23 Committee of the Whole meeting, the Mayor and City Council expressed an
24 aspiration to create an effective model of transformation, tailored to the specific
25 needs of the Tacoma community, that could set a standard for the nation, and

26

² Heifetz, Ronald A. Leadership without Easy Answers, 1994, p. 76.

³ <https://hbr.org/2002/06/a-survival-guide-for-leaders>



WHEREAS state and federal government elected leaders and the agencies they oversee are responsible for enacting legislation, allocating funding, and establishing administrative procedures that can have either disparate or anti-racist impacts, and

WHEREAS Washington State and the United States government are currently taking action on funding, legislation, policies, and legislative procedures that address justice and accountability in policing, and these actions will certainly impact residents of the City of Tacoma, and

WHEREAS the Mayor and City Council hereby affirm their dedication and commit to comprehensive and sustained transformation of all of the institutions, systems, policies, practices, and contracts impacted by systemic racism, with initial priority being given to policing in the City of Tacoma, and

WHEREAS the Mayor and City Council commit to a comprehensive transformation process that will establish new practices based on community and expert opinion, as well as past reform efforts, centering the voices of those most impacted by systemic racism; Now, Therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TACOMA:

Section 1. That the City Manager is hereby directed to keep anti-racism as a top priority in the process of budget development and prioritize anti-racism in the planning of an economic recovery strategy following COVID-19.

Section 2. That the City Manager is hereby directed to prioritize anti-racism in the evaluation of new policies and programs, as well as the sustained and



comprehensive transformation of existing services, with initial priority being given to policing.

Section 3. That the City Manager is hereby directed to assess the current state of systems in place at the Tacoma Police Department in consultation with police reform experts, and give specific attention to how current policies and existing studies, agency composition, hiring, promotions, staffing levels, training, and accountability systems align to create just outcomes and use this assessment as a foundation for the work of comprehensive transformation.

Section 4. That the City Manager is hereby directed to actively seek and implement interim administrative changes and process improvements that can legally be taken immediately to improve transparency and accountability in policing.

Section 5. That the City Manager is hereby directed to work with the Mayor and City Council to build a legislative platform at the local, state, and



1 federal levels that works to transform institutions impacted by systemic racism
2 for the greater equity and wellbeing of all residents of Tacoma, Washington
3 State, and the United States.
4

5 Adopted _____
6

7 _____
8 Mayor

9 Attest:
10

11 _____
12 City Clerk

13 Approved as to form:
14

15 _____
16 City Attorney
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Tacoma mayor: 'We aren't the next big thing. We are the big thing.'

x



[Enlarge](#)

Victoria Woodards, mayor of the Gritty City, set out to serve and grew into Tacoma's top leadership position.

CITY OF TACOMA



By [Shawna De La Rosa](#) — Reporter, Puget Sound Business Journal
Sep 7, 2021

Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards never intended to run for a political office, much less become mayor of her hometown. She prefers to be the person “next to the person in power.”

But she believes life takes you where it wants you to go, and her path led her here.

Now, Woodards is overseeing the city of Tacoma during a period of rapid growth. Balancing the concerns of residents with those in the business community can be a

challenge, she said. Most city council meetings include at least one agenda item about a commercial real estate project or an economic development issue.

As the city transforms, it is experiencing the growing pains that happen when some want the city to change and others want it to remain the same. The Business Journal spoke to the mayor about these challenges, and what led her to where she is today.

Victoria Woodards

- **Age:** 56
 - **Education:** Attended Pierce College and City University
 - **Family:** By blood, my mother [Valerie Kaluna](#); by chance, the late [Harold Moss](#), who I consider my father; and by choice, my entire community
 - **Born:** Riverside, California
 - **Residence:** Tacoma
 - **Hobbies:** Hanging with my dog, Genesis; going to beaches and being on the water; jigsaw puzzles; and spending time with my family and friends
 - **Lessons learned:** If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.
-

Tacoma is changing and growing rapidly under your watch. What are your thoughts on the development that is taking place? Managing growth is a delicate balance. We are a city of a lot of single-family homes. We have to balance growth so that we don't lose our quality of life. We have to grow responsibly, and we have to increase density where density makes sense. Density is part of our growth strategy, and that is what tends to get people up in arms. We have to keep the character of our neighborhoods and increase density in areas where it makes sense. We also have to maintain affordability at a rate that everyone who works in the city can still (afford to) live here.

Developers from other cities and states say Tacoma is great to work with, and it's the next big thing. How do you feel about that reputation? We aren't the next big thing. We are the big thing. Tacoma is the best kept secret. For years, no one paid attention to Tacoma. I can tell you, without fail, that when I show someone around Tacoma who has never been here before they say, "Wow, I never knew." Everyone is so surprised when they come to Tacoma.

As far as being great to work with, we still have challenges. We continue to try and make it easier. It's not perfect, but nothing is. We have to continue to be innovative. The fact is, we have a willingness to make it work. We are scrappy and we can change and move and adapt. We are the Gritty City. I used to hate that term, but we have a fighting spirit. They always count us out, like we are the underdogs. But look at where we are now.

Being an elected official was never your goal. So how did you get here? I graduated from Lincoln High School in 1983. I wanted to see the world, so I joined the military. I ended up stationed at Fort Lewis (which is now called Joint Base Lewis-McChord). I guess I was meant to be here. I worked for Boise Cascade in downtown Seattle and was the president and CEO of the Tacoma Urban League. Then (former Tacoma mayor) [Harold Moss](#) asked me to be his policy assistant on the Pierce County Council. That was the beginning of my political career. After that people started asking me to run for office. My first elected position was parks commissioner.

What's the best part about being mayor of Tacoma? I really love service and I love bringing people together to work toward a common goal. Someone once told me that if you get five votes (in a council meeting) that is politics. If you get nine that's leadership. I prefer to not be the person in power though. I like to be the support person for the person in power.

I love bringing people together, but in a meaningful way. For example, I love doing Tacoma Ethnic Fest because it celebrates all the different cultures we have here.

If your career path hadn't gone the way it did, what would you be doing? I would be a flight attendant. I love service and I want to see the world. That profession has both. Flight attendants are servers, in the end. I am always happy when I am in the service of others. That's how I create my happiness and my energy, by serving people.

What culture do you aspire to create in your leadership position? One where people feel heard and appreciated. One that doesn't center around the leader, but the work and the people who do the work and the people we serve. It's also about solutions. I like a culture where we don't just identify problems, we identify solutions. I like fun cultures. You have to have fun and laugh. Laughter is important.

What have you found to be important leadership traits? Being open and honest and authentic with people, even if they don't agree with you. Be consistent. People will at least understand where you are coming from. At the end of the day, I have to be able to look myself in the mirror and like who I see. I have to be true to myself and make what I think is the right decision. Not everyone will agree with your decisions, and there will be lots of other opinions. But I have to make decisions based on what I believe is right.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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Mayor Khalid Kamau is embracing South Fulton's identity as the Blackest city in America

[Jasmine Robinson](#) | WABE

April 13th, 2022



South Fulton Mayor Khalid Kamau is embracing the city's status as the Blackest city in America through his "Black On Purpose" mission. (Jasmine Robinson/WABE)



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At the Southwest Arts Center on March 22, the City of South Fulton is having its monthly city council meeting. In the lobby, there's live music, an art gallery and maps of the city that indicate council districts and the changes in state House and Senate districts. It comes together to create an atmosphere that differs from your typical city council meeting.

The city's mayor, Khalid Kamau, likes to call this "edutainment." These things were orchestrated by him to make sure that citizens are educated while bringing some fun and excitement to city government.

But this lively mood isn't replicated inside the auditorium where the meeting takes place. There's an air of tension on the stage, where the all-Black cast of Kamau, the city council and city administrators are seated.

After discussion on whether or not to continue in-person council meetings, the council was hit with a barrage of criticism during the public comments. Some people accused the council of mismanaging money, a couple of people called the council corrupt and one person even referred to the council as the "gang of six."

Kamau, who's passionate about getting citizens engaged in local government, gave each comment his undivided attention.

"South Fulton could be a great city if you all could be great council people," one woman told them.

South Fulton is the newest city in Fulton County to take on cityhood since it was incorporated in 2017. It's also the Blackest city in the U.S. among cities with populations over 100,000 people, according to the 2020 Census. Nearly 92% of its residents are Black.

wants the city to push — ones that intentionally improve Black people's lives.

Being "Black On Purpose" is key in his vision for the city: a highly educated citizenry and the best place to do Black business. But, getting past the growing pains of being a new city — and the Blackest city — won't happen without having courageous conversations about identity, insecurity and purpose, he says.

"Understanding the psychological battles that people have within themselves when they are trying to chart a course that is different or unique, I think really informs sort of the patience that I have with our citizens," kamau says. "But also, my persistence and insistence that we have these difficult conversations because I know the richness and the wealth of pride and identity that lies on the other side of it."



Mayor Khalid Kamau speaks with people during his "Mayor Mondays" on March 28. It's an initiative he started to increase citizen engagement. (Jasmine Robinson/WABE)

In the 2000s, when cities such as Sandy Springs and Johns Creek were incorporating on the north side of Fulton, valuable commercial corridors in unincorporated Fulton

As the decade turned, kamau and other cityhood supporters felt that the south Fulton area was suffering from systemic disinvestment of money that was funneling to north Fulton.

South Fulton residents voted in favor of cityhood in 2016, but just barely had a majority.

Earlier that year, kamau helped found the Atlanta chapter of Black Lives Matter. By this point, he says the organization had a comprehensive platform that touched on housing, income inequality, restorative justice and more. At the time, members of the Movement for Black Lives were reluctant to get involved in electoral politics, but not kamau.

"...But this new city in the SWATS," he recalls. "I was like, 'This city is going to be super Black.' And if there were ever a place, if there were ever a laboratory to test out all of these policies, the City of South Fulton is that place."

He ran for council and was elected to represent District 6, making him the first Black Lives Matter organizer to be elected to public office in the U.S., according to kamau.

The City of South Fulton was officially incorporated on May 1, 2017. William "Bill" Edwards, formerly a Fulton County commissioner for 15 years, was elected mayor.

"Lots of people thought that a Black-run city would run itself into the ground, that we didn't have the money or the resources to really survive as a city or that Black leadership would just mismanage things or devolve ... and those fears, they rear their head all the time," kamau says.

A rude awakening

In a nearly all-Black city, kamau assumed that without any racial discrimination, his time in the city government would be dull with only minor disagreements. He was in for a rude awakening.

"I was surprised by how intense some of the battles for power were," kamau says. "And I was shocked that there were people that were battling for power that didn't really have a vision [and] they just wanted to be in charge. They didn't seem to have a clear political agenda."

He found some of the disagreements among city leaders to be necessary and normal in the early stages of forming a government. For example, arguments about power help choose the direction of democracy, he says, and to not have these fights is to stop the democratic process.

He compares the struggles of South Fulton to those that occurred in the play "Hamilton," which portrays the conflicts among America's early leaders during the American Revolution.

"When we became a city and we started fighting on the council, everybody worried about how it was going to look in the media, all these Black leaders fighting," he says. "And I would say, 'Have you seen 'Hamilton?' Like, people having gun duels in the streets about the direction a democracy should take. And that is normal and natural and necessary."

kamau has been passionate about political education ever since his time working with the Movement for Black Lives. In the organization, he was head of the political education committee. When South Fulton was first voted on and he ran for city council, he did what he could to educate citizens on why it became a city and what that means for everyone.

At the time, the city didn't have a website or a Facebook page. So he turned his own website into an informational website for the city, which includes an extensive history of the city. Now, he does political education through newsletters, his YouTube channel and any other way he can meet people where they are. That includes going to local bars on Tuesdays where patrons can talk to him about the city.

"All these things to just try and get more people engaged and know that these decisions are being made right down the street from your house," he says.



Mayor Khalid Kamau at the Southwest Arts Center on March 22. (Jasmine Robinson/WABE)

Kamau is a proud native of Southwest Atlanta. He's proud to have grown up in the same area as other famous entertainers like Kandi Burress and Ludacris. And he makes it known that when hip-hop artists refer to the SWATS or to Old National or Cascade in their songs, they're talking about South Fulton.

"I really think that a lot of what distinguishes us from Atlanta is that a lot of what you hear about Atlanta being this Black Mecca and this center of Black excellence, a lot of that is actually South Fulton," he says.

He was raised in a culture of service and civic awareness that undoubtedly impacted his life. After working for the Georgia House Democratic Caucus, he went on to lead the political education committee for the Movement for Black Lives. And, he became a Democratic Socialist and a member of the Working Families Party.

He credits those two organizations for being the mastermind behind many of the policies he's put forth in South Fulton. His work as an organizer also made him sensitive to income inequality and inequity in policymaking.

“I really think that a lot of what distinguishes us from Atlanta is that a lot of what you hear about Atlanta being this Black Mecca and this center of Black excellence, a lot of that is actually South Fulton.”

—khalid kamau

Although he’s the leader of the city, kamau is living in a community that is suffering from the same disenfranchisement that he’s trying to quell. He lives at the Camelot Condominiums, one of the most distressed complexes in the city. Underinvestment, infrastructure problems and crime have created harsh living conditions there.

He moved into the complex to fulfill a campaign promise made to Condia Perry, a longtime resident and member of the Camelot Concerned Residents Committee. (Also, renting a unit for about \$800 per month there is within his means. As mayor, he makes a salary of \$37,000.)

Initially, kamau told Perry he’d demolish Camelot. But that wasn’t the answer she was looking for, so she hounded him on the campaign trail advocating for improvements to Camelot.

Eventually, she brought him to visit Camelot and to talk to residents to get another perspective. He made the campaign promise that night to move in and do what he could to improve the conditions.

“And that next day after [he won], he called me and he said, ‘Okay, Miss Perry, I need someplace to stay,’” she says.

At first, she says some residents were on “pins and needles” when they learned the mayor was going to be their neighbor. But the day after he moved in, he was already acquainted with his new neighbors and made them feel comfortable.

“Then the scuttlebutt was, ‘I talked to the mayor. He cool as hell,’” Perry says.

"If we all just give him a chance and really see what he's doing and let him do what he needs to do, I think he's really going to take the City of South Fulton to a totally different level," she says. "I'm talking about from an economical standpoint, he's going to bring some really good changes to the city."

His time living at Camelot has given him a better understanding of what some of his constituents are going through.

"Those sorts of real stories, seeing children in Camelot, like walking in ditches without sidewalks to get to a MARTA bus or school bus, those are the things that remind me why I do this work and why I can't give it up," kamau says.

Bringing equity to South Fulton

kamau, a proud socialist, hopes he will leave a legacy of opening the minds of people to the ideas of socialism.

Some of the progressive legislation that's been passed in the city includes: increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, abolishing Columbus Day in favor of Indigenous People's Day, "banning the box" on job applications and making Election Day a city holiday.

"We are really showing that these sort of progressive policies — you don't have to be in like Seattle or San Francisco, some uber-wealthy place to make these policies work," he says. "[They] can work in working-class communities in the South."

But ensuring equity in the city hasn't been easy. It's especially difficult, he says, with a council that struggles to embrace progressivism that involves redistributing wealth and opportunity.

One of the reasons residents voted for cityhood is because residents felt like south Fulton County was suffering from systemic disinvestment of money that was being funneled to north Fulton.

policies and decision making.”

—khalid kamau

Now, kamau says South Fulton has become a microcosm of Fulton County because they’ve replicated that same north-south disinvestment.

For example, the city has made significant investments north of Roosevelt Highway, but there are no major buildings or investments below it.

South Fulton’s busiest business corridor, Old National Highway, is in the southern part of the city. It has the highest density of people, transit and businesses in South Fulton, but half of it doesn’t have sidewalks, he says.

“Not thinking comprehensively about how to make systemic improvements and ensure that we have equity in investments has been really detrimental to our city,” kamau says.

On his to-do list, kamau wants to overhaul the city’s zoning code, subdivision regulations and business permitting process to make sure that the benefits wealthier communities are enjoying get disseminated throughout the entire city. He also wants to create a Housing Authority to address housing inequity.

“It definitely [is] refreshing to hear someone who actually had an agenda that represents the poor and those who normally don’t have a voice in government and sincerely wanted to develop our neighborhoods, like the neighborhoods on the north side, like Johns Creek or Roswell, Alpharetta,” says Student Minister Stanley Muhammad, a friend and spiritual advisor to Kamau.

Muhammad says he is grateful for Kamau and his policies that uplift Black people economically in America, where Muhammad feels Black people have been deprived of economic opportunities.

He adds that self-hatred is a problem among Black people in the community, and kamau is working to turn that around.

"Brother khalid is giving us a fresh look at our Blackness," he says. "Making us see our blackness as a beautiful badge of honor. Then whatever he offers in his policies to our people to uplift them economically ... Now we believe that we're worthy."

As the city approaches its fifth anniversary on May 1, the self-determination that led voters to vote for cityhood still exists in the "Black On Purpose" mission. kamau looks back on how leaders of the past purposefully made Atlanta a place for Black people to prosper.

"There were dozens of people from Maynard Jackson to Joseph Lowery, James orange, John Lewis ... People planned and strategized and worked to make this a place where African Americans could prosper. And I think that's been lost," he says.

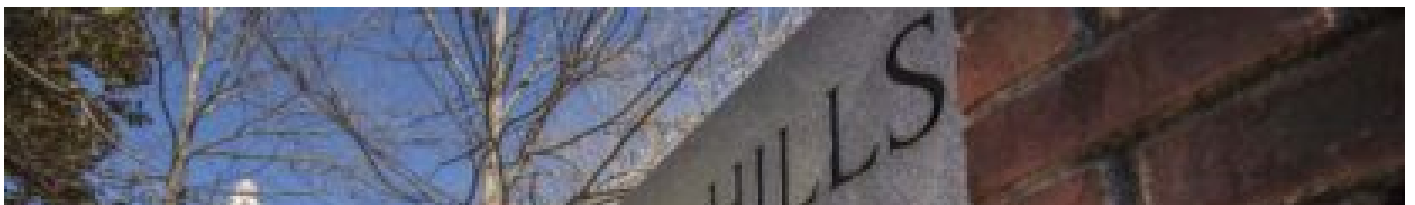
"It didn't happen without people pushing and finally taking over the political machine to create conditions that allow the level of prosperity that we see," he says.

kamau hopes that South Fulton can recapture that purpose.

"When you look at how Black people are faring in America, we are at the bottom of almost every socioeconomic indicator from housing to healthcare, from education to entrepreneurship and economic development," he says. "I really do believe that a rising tide lifts all boats and if you can raise the boats at the bottom, the smallest boats, then everyone is going to benefit from that."



Related



By acc April 20, 2022



Social media: [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#)

Party affiliation: [Working Families Party](#)

Salary: 37,000/year

Age: 45

Second job: This my only job.

What inspired you to run for Mayor?

The Mayor is the spokesperson for our City, and in our City, runs City Council Meetings. The Mayor sets the tone for what we talk about and how we talk about it. I ran for Mayor to lead our citizens through some courageous conversations about what kind of government we want to have and what kind of city we want to be. I believe as the America's Blackest Big City (South Fulton is 92 percent African American) we must be #BlackOnPurpose — which means ensuring our policies measurably improve the lives of Black people and dismantle the structural inequalities we face. Because African Americans are at or near the bottom of nearly every measurement of American success — from healthcare to housing, education to economic development —improving the lives of South Fulton's African Americans will not only improve life for 92 percent of our citizens; but by extension, all people.

What are the three most pressing issues you believe your city faces? How are you addressing them? What people or entities are you enlisting to get these things done?

1. **Culture Change/Civic Engagement:** The City of South Fulton was never designed to be a city, but a suburb of Atlanta. So in addition to lacking access to infrastructure like sidewalks, transit and commerce & entertainment outlets, we also suffer from lack of political infrastructure and shared identity. We are increasing citizen engagement with informative & interactive meetings and town halls, and a more fun social media.

2. **Economic Development:** We are building live/work/play communities that attract millennial entrepreneurs by building on what South Fulton is already known for — being an incubator minority enterprise and popular music, art & culture.

3. **Income Inequality:** A child born poor in metropolitan Atlanta — the cradle of the Civil Rights movement — is more likely to die poor here than anywhere else in America. I want South Fulton to be a model of the Beloved Community that Dr. King wrote about, where our Economic Development never loses sight of “the least of these.”

Describe your main goals for your first term in office.

- Increasing our city’s name ID, both nationally and amongst our own citizens.
- Increasing civic engagement and voter turnout.
- Becoming the economic capitol of the African diaspora in addition to already being its cultural capitol.

To what do you attribute your campaign’s success?

Being radically honest with citizens. Period.

How will you foster a strong relationship with your constituents and ensure you are addressing their needs?

As a Councilman I was known as being very accessible. As Mayor I am amplifying my accessibility with initiatives like [#MayorMondays](#), where every week anyone can walk into city hall meet and meet with the Mayor. In our City the Mayor’s Office is only allotted two staff people. I have made one of those positions the city’s first [Public Advocate](#) who serves as an ombudsman to help

shepherd citizens through the bureaucratic maze that can confront them when they come to their government for help.

You ran as a Democratic Socialist against Democrat candidate Bill Edwards, the first mayor of South Fulton, and won in the runoffs. How do your values as a Democratic Socialist inform how you govern?

Our society is sick because instead of loving people and using things, capitalism has taught us to love things and use people. Socialism sounds scary and exotic to some Americans but African and other indigenous cultures are inherently socialist. The first thing African slaves did upon winning their freedom was to start Free Colored Schools which educated both black and working poor, white children. The Black Panther began a free lunch program for children in the 1960s which has become the model for the USDA's breakfast & programs offered in all American public schools today. So when I talked about using tax dollars to fund Blighted Property Abatement program, speed bumps or free & reduced programming in our parks for our young people and Senior, South Fultonites immediately understood that kind of "sidewalk socialism" or "sewer socialism."

Why are you proud to call your city home?

South Fulton is my hometown. When folks talk about Atlanta being a Black Mecca, most of what they are talking about is South Fulton. From celebrities like Outkast, SNL's Keenan Thompson and Kandi of the Real Housewives (who are all my former classmates) to legendary Civil Rights leaders like the late Congressman John Lewis, South Fulton has been the center of Black Culture for decades.

We have urban areas, but also very bucolic, rural areas. We have a dozen farms & wineries.

[Click here for a map to learn more about South Fulton.](#) (Created by Maggie Lee)



Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird was elected the 52nd mayor of Lincoln, Nebraska in May 2019.

About

Mayor Gaylor Baird believes that city government, at its best, helps people coexist and reach their full human potential. The mayor's vision of leading Lincoln toward a more successful, secure, and shared future drives her administration's agenda. That agenda

prioritizes public health and safety and maintaining the capital city's low crime rate; enhancing traditional and tech infrastructure to support economic growth and community resilience; increasing access to high-quality, affordable housing; and building a vibrant quality of life for all Lincoln residents.

Vision Statement

Leading Lincoln toward a more successful, secure, and shared future.

Core Values

Lumos Maxima

Our work proudly stands in the sunshine of public observation and accountability.

Loving Kindness

We serve with compassion toward ourselves and others, recognizing that we are interconnected.

Triathlete of the Mind - Vision, Data Analysis, Viability

We pursue excellence, leading with vision and developing evidence-based strategies.

Start the Conversation

We proactively communicate with others, especially when it is hard. We value diverse perspectives and seek to be inclusive.

Free the Fun

We bring enthusiasm and optimism to our work every day. Our workplace and community should involve plenty of joyful delight.

What's Next?

We celebrate progress, with an eye on the next opportunity. We appreciate the value of emergence.

Lincoln's focus going forward will be recovery, equity and climate change, mayor says

LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR | Margaret Reist | Sep 28, 2021

Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird spelled out her administration's accomplishments and the work underway — environmental initiatives, diversifying the police and fire workforce, ramping up affordable housing and workforce development — during the annual state of the city address Tuesday.

“City government, when it's working like ours, frees people from worries about the basics of city living so they can instead focus on pursuing opportunities that improve their lives and their family's futures,” Gaylor Baird said during the annual address sponsored by Leadership Lincoln and broadcast online.

The mayor focused on her administration's accomplishments, which include navigating a pandemic and collaborating with county officials on how to distribute more than \$100 million in federal relief funds to help with the recovery.

She noted that the 73% of Lincoln residents 16 and older who have been vaccinated outpaces the rest of the state, and she highlighted the health department's efforts to reach out to Lincoln's minority communities.

Among the ways the city and county federal relief money will help, she said, is \$12 million going to help residents find high-wage jobs, \$23 million to boost tourism and \$21 million to help nonprofits that help people with basic needs.

Among her administration's accomplishments, she said, was Lincoln's quarter-cent sales tax for roads projects begun two years ago and on track to complete \$78 million in street repairs and improvements in six years. So far, 11 projects have been completed, eight more are under construction and three are about to begin, she said.

She also highlighted “Green Light Lincoln,” a program to improve traffic flow by better timing traffic lights, which she said leads to reduced fuel consumption.

While other parts of the country saw construction grind to a halt during the pandemic, Gaylor Baird said the city's building and safety department processed an average of \$90 million worth of projects every month this year and is on pace to exceed a record-breaking billion dollars in development in 2021.

She pointed to a reduction in crime in Lincoln, efforts to improve response to mental health calls and diversify the police force and fire department. The city budget added firefighters and \$11 million to fix up fire stations.

Three of the mayor's initiatives guide the administration, she said — efforts to create a “culture of equity inclusion and belonging,” helping Lincoln recover from the pandemic and making the city resilient through initiatives laid out in the city's Climate Action Plan.

The city budget includes \$710,000 more for the city's affordable housing fund, the tenant assistance program continues to offer free legal advice to people facing eviction and the city has distributed nearly \$13 million in rent and utilities assistance to more than 3,000 families, she said.

The city also created a new job to improve equity and inclusion in the city's workforce, a position that will focus on recruitment, retention and employee training.

Among the climate initiatives underway are a transition of the city's fleet to electric or alternative fuel vehicles, looking for a second water source, reinforcing the existing wellfield infrastructure and cleaning up brownfield sites to free up space for more housing and parks.

She said she's proud of Lincoln, and urged others who feel that way to do something for others — and she highlighted what she said was one of the best options.

“Spread the love with a kind gesture, big or small. Of course, right now the most impactful gesture that shows you care for others is to get vaccinated.”

2021 - 2027 Climate Action Plan



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Letter from Mayor Gaylor Baird



The coronavirus pandemic has shown all of us in Lincoln what it is like to face a global threat together. Times have been tough as we have encountered one unprecedented situation after another. Yet, amidst the disruption and uncertainty, we have found within us deep wells of resilience. We have designed solutions to new problems. We have developed new ways to help one another. We have discovered new ways to strengthen our community.

While it has not arrived as a distinct event like the pandemic, our planet's accelerated rate of climate change also poses a global threat and one of the greatest challenges humanity has ever faced. We now know that flooding, drought, extreme heat, and public health problems are some of the most significant climate-related risks Lincoln faces in coming decades and that the potential local impacts of these risks will affect everyone. We also know that embedded in these risks lie opportunities—opportunities to innovate and create new jobs and technologies as we strengthen our infrastructure, reduce our carbon footprint, and protect our quality of life.

With this in mind, one of my top priorities after taking office was to develop a Climate Action Plan so that, here in Lincoln, we would be well-informed of the challenges we face and be prepared to mitigate them and adapt. In short, the goal is to increase our resilience to climate change.

This plan is a reflection of our Lincoln values: we are collaborative, kind, innovative, and forward-looking. This plan will come to life as it is embraced by our community with a shared purpose and a shared sense of caretaking for our future. The plan presents a myriad of opportunities to increase our resilience—and even thrive—in the face of great adversity. The time to seize these opportunities is now.

While reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change are critical, these goals do not stand alone. Our city is an interconnected system comprised of our health, economic, educational, transportation, philanthropic, and social systems, all of which will be impacted by the climate crisis. We recognize the interdependency of these systems and the fact that the negative impacts of the climate crisis have a greater effect on the members of our community who are most exposed. As we plan and pursue this important work, we must keep social and environmental justice at the forefront of our minds, ensuring that all who call Lincoln home have opportunities to succeed and reach their full human potential.

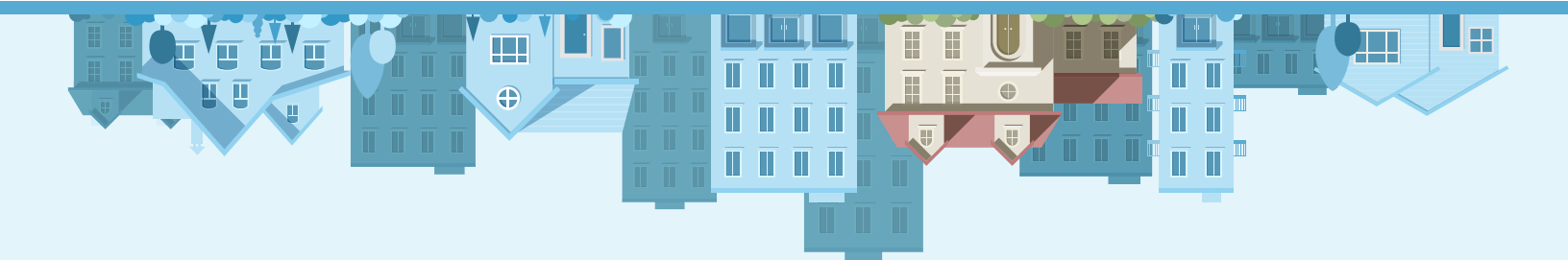
Now is the time for a bold and achievable vision that will chart the course for the coming years. This plan contains an ambitious goal: to reduce Lincoln's net greenhouse gas emissions 80% by the year 2050. This goal will be instrumental in aligning the direction of municipal government going forward, yet my hope is that it will provide a vision for all of Lincoln. This is a plan for the entire community. Our energy providers, business owners, universities, institutions, and residents all will have an important role to play in achieving the goals of this plan by 2050. By working together, we can harness our collective energy for innovation, for problem-solving, and for a more just community to ensure that Lincoln is thriving into 2050 and beyond.



Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird



CITY OF
LINCOLN
NEBRASKA
*AFFORDABLE HOUSING
COORDINATED ACTION PLAN*



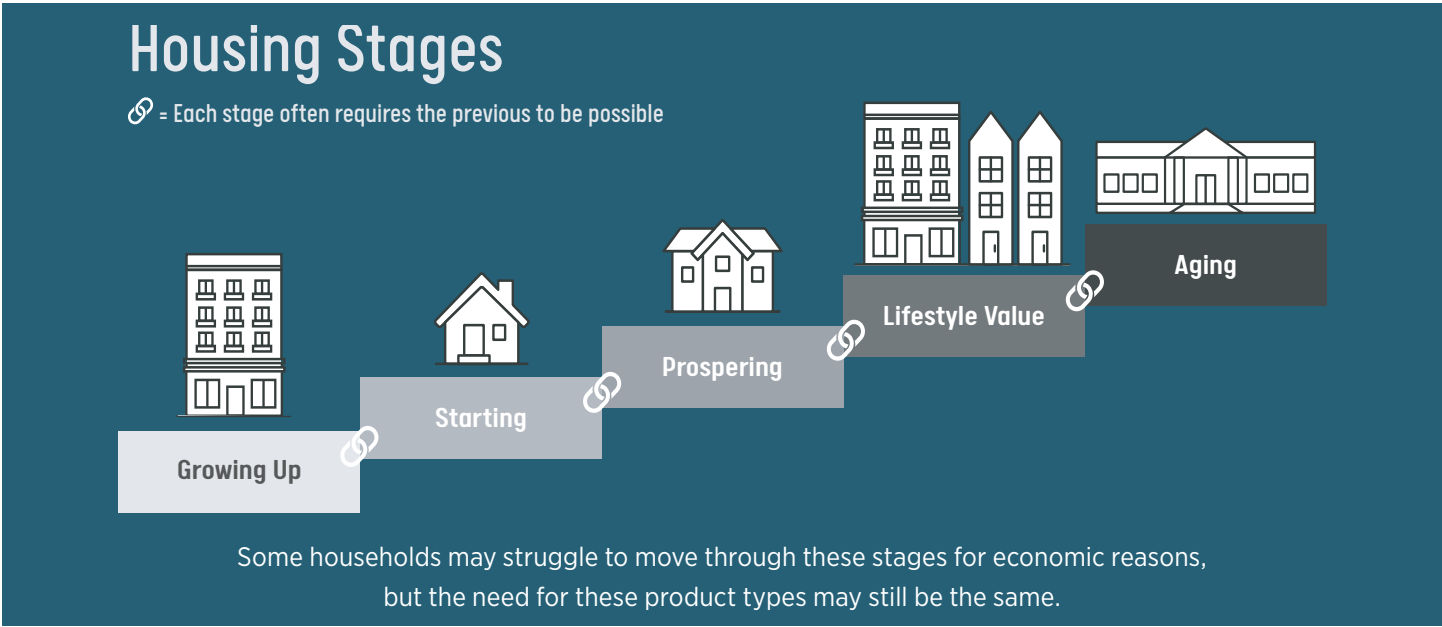
INTRODUCTION

It is only through study and introspection that a community can navigate a path forward to realize the best future for current and future generations. The Affordable Housing Coordinated Action Plan is built from a wealth of information which forms a picture of Lincoln's housing market today. The market analysis in the first chapter is built on a review of previous housing studies and reports including the South of Downtown Community Development Organization's (SDCDO) Affordable Housing Subcommittee Plan, an assortment of data, and by working closely with the public and a wide variety of stakeholder groups. In addition, concepts from the One Lincoln Initiative (see call out box on the following page) aided in identifying issues and opportunities and developing the path forward. This plan seeks to support the development of a housing market in Lincoln that is reflective of the diverse community of residents that makes up the city. In this way, the process included a variety of stakeholders representing a broad cross section of the housing providers and those looking for housing. Feedback was solicited throughout the development of the plan, beginning at the start with over 24 stakeholder group discussions and ending with a two and a half month open comment period at the end of the process which involved public meetings, presentations, and the opportunity to write in feedback on the draft document.

Knowing quality of life and access to daily needs varies depending on where you live in Lincoln, the action items identified in this document attempt to address these issues and improve the overall economic health in Lincoln and more importantly, protecting and advancing the health, safety, economic opportunity, and quality of life of every resident. This means creating housing options for all income levels and ages throughout the city.

While the main focus of this plan is on how to address housing needs for the city's residents earning less than 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI), no one market stands in isolation. Markets are interdependent on each other, whether that is different income levels or product types. Thus, many residents, through the public engagement process (see Chapter 2), noted the struggle to find "affordable housing," including those households making over 80% of AMI. A healthy housing market allows individuals to move through the market at different stages of life. When the market does not supply the product type a household needs, there can be a break in the system that can affect many different households.

This document also takes into consideration existing studies, such as the Lincoln Homeless Coalition Affordable Housing Task Force Essential Housing Report and the SDCDO Affordable Housing Subcommittee Plan. Information on housing for homeless or near homeless populations is included on page 34, but it is beyond the scope of this plan to do a deep dive into the topic. The initiatives identified in the Lincoln Homeless Coalition's report are important and should continue to move forward. It is also exciting to note that many of the initiatives identified in SDCDO's report are moving forward and many aspects of this plan support those efforts.



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Lincoln/Lancaster County Welcoming & Belonging Strategic Plan

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CITY OF
LINCOLN
NEBRASKA

LETTER FROM THE MAYOR



Dear Friends, Colleagues and Neighbors,

Lincoln is a strong and vibrant city. Part of what makes Lincoln a great community are the many immigrants and refugees from all over the world who have made their home here. These New Americans contribute to our thriving and diverse culture. A culture where we work collaboratively to make sure every resident feels a sense of belonging and has an opportunity to contribute. Our Gateways for Growth program is a partnership between the public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors. The purpose of this program is to include immigrant and refugee residents into our community. Through community conversations with stakeholders, they identified the following outcomes: Equitable Access; Community Connections



and Civic Engagement; Education and Economic Opportunities; Safe and Healthy Communities; and Affordable and Quality Housing.

To achieve these outcomes, we must continue to build trust across diverse groups, innovate new ways of solving problems, and bring more voices and perspectives to the table.

Another part of what makes Lincoln great is you. Thank you for welcoming our new residents and investing in their belonging and success in our community.

Leirion Gaylor Baird

LETTER FROM THE LANCASTER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



Dear Lancaster County residents,

Today, as in years past, new immigration to Nebraska is bringing exciting opportunities and new neighbors to Lancaster County. Creating a welcoming and inclusive community involves Nebraskans from all walks of life—business, education, community, faith, and immigrants themselves—who are proud of our welcoming community and who are working together to build Nebraska's future.

In the past five years our county grew by 6.5% while our immigrant and refugee population grew by 16.2%. Proactively planning gives us the durable power of a welcoming infrastructure as Lancaster County continues to grow.

Our community is stronger, more vibrant and prosperous when everyone feels they belong. When people feel they belong, they add to our cultural fabric, economic growth, global competitiveness and overall prosperity and vibrancy for current and future generations.

Deb Schorr