

Public Testimony #1

Council Members and Mayor,

Juneteenth of Freedom Day marks the date in which the last enslaved Americans were freed by General Gordon Granger from traitors to the Union. Yet, we do not see this extremely important day marked on community calendars, we do not have fireworks, hold barbeques, or celebrate with friends. This year of course is different, but were previous years? From Veterans Day, to Memorial Day, to Dr. Martin Luther King Day, and Indigenous People's Day flags are placed all across Ashland, but on Juneteenth...nothing. Fireworks dot the sky on July 4th, there is a run through town and a parade through the streets. But on June 19th the sky is empty, there are no runs and no parades. I ask this Council why should Juneteenth be treated any differently? Is Juneteenth not just as important as July 4th? Should it not be honored in the same way? Should we not have fireworks, a run through town, a parade through the streets, a community-wide dinner, and a speaker who can better educate our community so we can continuously improve on issues of race, diversity, equity, and equality. We can no longer segregate our celebrations, therefore we must put Juneteenth on equal ground as July 4th so that like the Sun that shines on Ashland in the early hours we too can rise to a brighter future.

Thank you.

Luke Williams

Public Testimony #2

Our country was founded on personal freedom, and no official possesses authority to compel its citizenry to wear masks, and the United States Attorney General will investigate violations of civil rights.

Personal freedom negotiates with societal needs, mainly safety, so that a danger to society asks us to be careful, but no government can compel us to be careful.

Fear becomes an implement useful for unconstitutional governmental overreach, the greatest danger to personal freedom and the ideals of our country.

"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," said Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his inaugural address of March 4, 1933, and he was correct:

Media frighten us into donning masks, obscuring our faces from each other and robbing us of their expressions that stimulate ancient instincts of relationships with each other. Media warn us to stay six feet apart. Even office-holders in local and state governments urge these antisocial measures.

Locally city government removed the hoops of the backboards on the basketball court at Garfield Park evidently to discourage participation in recreational activities that would violate those antisocial measures by bringing us into close contact with each other as offense tries to score points and defense tries to prevent them from doing so.

We paid for those hoops with our utility fees and all the other taxes you extract from us.

I saw a father with his children on the court dribbling a basketball and going for layup and watched the ball sail through the air as we all imagined whether or not he had scored a goal. Would it have been a swish or perhaps the ball would have bounced off the hoop: We do not know, because the hoops are missing.

Your unilateral and undemocratic decision to remove the basketball hoops is robbing us of the joy of this sport in real life, and it is aggravating, and we demand the hoops be restored to their backboards immediately and an apology rendered to us moreover for clearly going too far in your arguably good intentions to keep us safe. You overreached in your government of us, and you must confine yourselves to merely supervising us instead of controlling us. The road to Hell is paved with good intentions, but your fear deranged you, and you went too far with removing the basketball hoops.

You also went too far in banning the playground at Garfield Park for months, which you sensibly rescinded, as if "COVID-19" is blanketing the entire globe, but the water park remains off, despite dangerously hot weather: This is how fear distorts decision-making processes: We could die from heat exhaustion with even the drinking fountains turned off.

It needs to end, and you need to recognize that this "pandemic" was overblown to induce fear and, just like the Marxist Black Lives Matter riots, was designed to overthrow our Republic and, as the founders of Black Lives Matter recently admitted, to remove the President.

It takes courage to entertain the possibility that a conspiracy exists among government officials, vaccine manufacturers, and the corporate media to deprive us of our personal freedom and violate our civil rights as delineated in the first ten Amendments to the Constitution of the United States of America.

Fear will keep you wearing masks and lead you down a road that ends in tyranny as safety becomes more important than freedom: Do not let this happen to you. Push back on the media hype, and do the courageous thing by turning the water back on--for drinking fountains at Garfield Park as well as for the Water Park--and put the hoops back on the backboards!

While I am at it, open the Emigrant Lake waterslides. Open Shakespeare. Stop making restaurant employees wear masks. Stop all the fear mongering. Life is dangerous, and the only guarantee is death, but if you are so afraid of dying that you stop living, you are already dead anyway.

Dare to live again and value personal freedom. We are adults and can keep ourselves safe without your compelling us to do so: That is not defensible, as the pandemic was a hoax and a power grab with a death rate despite inflationary tactics that is very low and dropping lower with testing.

Thank you,
Jerit Fourman

Public Testimony #3

Dear City Council Members,

I thought it would be appropriate to make this proposal to acknowledge and support racial justice and the Black Lives Matter movement in our community.

As I was taking an evening walk with my family keeping our social distancing, we walked through the underpass on the bike lane and as usual we discovered graffiti. However, this time it was expressions supporting the BLM movement asking people to remember the names of those who have suffered from racism and brutality (it now has been painted over by ODOT).

Since this area along the bike path always seems to be in need of attention, I thought it would be nice to have murals on the underpass and make that a more pleasant place to walk and bike through. I remembered that many cities including Ashland and Medford have let artists paint murals as a manner to enhance their community. <https://mailtribune.com/news/top-stories/undercover-art>.

Here are two additional articles regarding murals and their benefits.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/wendyaltschuler/2020/03/23/americas-mural-magic-how-street-art-can-transform-communities-and-help-businesses/#6e57c8841739>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/artists-graffiti-alley-mural-anti-racism-movement-1.5602082>

I was just informed that the Council will be discussing a proposed resolution declaring the City's commitment to social equity and racial justice at its next meeting on Tuesday, July 7 at 6 p.m. which will include a section on starting a mural project with the theme of social equity and racial justice. I am not sure if the location of this mural project is the underpass on the bike lane or not. If not I hope that it will be considered as well.

Thank you for considering a mural project based on racial justice for our community!

Sincerely,

Valerie Stein-Retiz Resident for 15 years
Employee of the Ashland Tennis & Fitness Club
Board Member of the Jackson County United Way

Public Testimony #4

Amongst many community and social justice groups, your so-called resolution is being discussed and named as a weak 'solution' at best and is unacceptable. This is such a transparent political ploy to placate the community and win votes for you. It won't work, thanks to social media and the many groups who are actively discussing this.

Stefani Seffinger pushed and pressed and was successful with all of you who were complicit in the criminalization of our homeless community and our community members struggling with mental illness, and targeting People of Color. emboldening APD to cite them for petty crimes.

How do we trust you guys to do anything otherwise? This is a main reason why the community is completely not trusting your 'resolution.'

Leslie Caplan
Professional Editor & Writing Coach
www.writeitstrong.com

To add to my previous letter: Your so called resolution blares of performative justice and a placating of the community for your own agenda. It's nothing more than what admins do when they create unions like: Black Student Unions, Asian Student Unions, Native Groups, Etc... in response to incidents of racism. You offer nothing but a form to file a complaint or send a report. It's weak, dismissive, unacceptable, blaring of political stunting and hundreds and hundreds of community members in a variety of groups are saying just that in response to your RES.

Leslie Caplan
Professional Editor & Writing Coach
www.writeitstrong.com

Public Testimony #5

“Ashland City Council: Resolution Declaring the City of Ashland’s Commitment to Social Equity and Racial Justice”

I would like to know what members of our BIPOC community were included in the crafting and writing of this resolution and how they feel it best serves our Ashland community.

Lisa Amador

Public Testimony #6

Regarding the "Social Equity and Racial Justice" resolution

This resolution is lacking. Lacking in self-awareness. Lacking in action. Lacking in reality. Lacking in representation. I hope my feedback can help you move in the right direction (e.g. away from directionless corporate-speak that evades responsibility).

Here are my suggestions:

This resolution should outline the difference between equality and equity, specifically how equity more commonly uses outcomes as a measurement. Equality, including quality of opportunity, may still allow for significant inequity.

This resolution should define intersectionality and how racism does not exist in a vacuum but rather interacts with all aspects of a person's existence and identity. This resolution should note the death rate of black trans women.

This resolution needs to acknowledge the specific reality and history of the city, including but certainly not limited to:

- an acknowledgment of the ancestral lands that the city encompasses
- the so-called "Rogue River Wars" that were Native American genocide
- the fact that Ashland was a sundown town
- Oregon's Black exclusion laws

This resolution should pause all hiring of city staff until or unless significant improvements are made to the hiring process. Section F Part 2 notes that the city is "adapting" its processes; however, more drastic action should be taken.

This resolution must acknowledge the dearth of Black and Indigenous people, and other people of color, in positions of power (both elected and staff positions) within the city. The resolution should note, at minimum, that all nine city elected officials are white. The resolution should call for more elected officials of color. The resolution should also acknowledge the lack of diversity in city staff in positions of power, and call for more staff members of color in positions of power.

Policing is inadequately addressed in this resolution. This resolution must acknowledge that police training has no proven efficacy. This resolution should note that APD specifically wrongfully arrested a black man in 2018 because he was black. This resolution should commit to a decrease in police funding to pre-increase levels and eliminate the officer positions associated with that increase. This resolution commit to an organizational overhaul that potentially includes the administrator of the police department being of a non-police background and adds additional oversight. This resolution should acknowledge that police culture can include a lack of reporting of misconduct. Use of force policies should also be strengthened. Also, it should be noted that unhoused people are over-policed in the city. It should be further noted that unhoused people are disproportionately people of color and black.

Section 2 Part G must be changed to call for a non-police emergency response option that will be established within a certain amount of time and should note the need of full 911 availability (as in you can call and specify what you need).

It must be noted that the resolution has been written by white people and may not (almost certainly does not) accurately reflect the needs of BIPOC people in the community. And I am white, so I do not help with that. But I will recommend the following: hire a BIPOC community member to consult on this policy. And hire a consultant who will tell you the things you may not want to hear.

I recommend striking the following passages:

Strike the final sentence of Recital A in favor of a statement reflecting that addressing racial injustice should be a top priority of the City Council.

Strike the first part of Recital C, "The Ashland City Council recognizes that, in spite of the values of equality held by the majority of City of Ashland residents." This is a modifier that takes away from the meaning of the second part of the section.

Strike Recital E in favor of a statement that plainly acknowledges that the City has not taken adequate action to address racial injustice, and notes that changes should be made immediately, not "over time" as presently written.

Strike Recital G.

Strike Section 2 Part H regarding a mural. Art is great and can be very powerful, but the fact that this is a stated priority speaks volumes.

Strike Section 2 Part J in favor of a hiring freeze.

This resolution, as written, does just about nothing (the only immediate action within the city that I can identify is putting up Black Lives Matter signs). City governments, including ours, have a remarkable amount of actions that can be taken to work toward racial justice. USE IT!! There's no need to call for research or review of the issues like Capitol Hill Republicans are at the moment. Just go ahead and take some common-sense steps.

Moreover, I hope you will find ways to engage with the people this resolution is supposed to support.

Cole Daneman

Public Testimony #7

Use of Force Policy and Equity/Racial Justice Resolution

Mayor and Council,

The inappropriate utilization of police to address social issues is glaring in Ashland. Ashland's municipal code reads like a Jim Crow era document with a laundry list of ordinances designed to target the poor.

The effort that the city has offered to address the current political climate falls short and ultimately become a tool of subterfuge to avoid discussion of other authentic issues in relation to policing and equity in Ashland.

I strongly support the council's effort to address race issues and use of force , however, without a transparent discussion of the intersectional issue of poverty and homelessness it is entirely disingenuous. The glaring issue in Ashland involves lack of authentic investment in homeless services while maintaining an overt policy of targeting the homeless with petty citations to trigger exclusion.

The resolution, although it mentions equity in its title, appears to go out of its way to avoid discussions of homelessness. Other than a minor reference to mental health and addiction, which is only a tangential element of homelessness, there is no mention of any attempt to change Ashland's bigoted policies toward the poor.

I believe that an authentic response would begin with dismantling the "Exclusion Zone". The existence of this law ultimately serves as a mandate to the police to act as tool to remove the poor. Citizens are targeted for violations that might not even rise to the level of a misdemeanor to trigger exclusion. This unconstitutional law violates our poorest citizens' basic right to free movement, equal protection under the law, and threatens them with double jeopardy. This Jim Crow law needs to be repealed!

Respectfully,
Eric Navickas

Public Testimony #8

Mayor and Councilors,

I applaud the City Council for considering Resolution 2020-15.

If it is constitute a meaningful response to a local and national uprising, I suggest strengthening it through the following changes. This is not word crafting.

Section 1. C: I suggest that you add training in Title II of ADA (protecting people with disabilities from discrimination by local government services, programs and activities).

(<https://www.ada.gov/criminaljustice/index.htm>)

Section 2.: A. and E. focus on SOU and I strongly encourage you to add language expanding that to working with primary and secondary educational facilities in Ashland. Unfortunately, our youth experience discrimination; they have insight into how we can protect them and address the causes through education.

Section 2. F: One portion of this proposes helping “residents and business owners...” “...address the root causes of inequality and racial injustice.” I am unclear why “business owners” is mentioned separately in this phrase. F – 1 reads “The Ashland Police Department (APD) is committed to engaging all members of the community in an equitable, professional, and compassionate manner. “ If Councilors are serious about “addressing root causes” and equitably “engaging all members,” then uncomfortable realities must be acknowledged. The past 15 years’ of heavy-handed policies and enforcement against people who are unhoused in Ashland (BIPOC and white) is a local reflection of the historic, national use of United States law enforcement to protect elite capital interests. For too long, Ashland’s Chamber of Commerce has held inordinate influence over Ashland law enforcement (and other) priorities. If you are serious about this Resolution, the City and Council cannot achieve it through “business as usual” methods. One step in this direction is to not elevate business as a uniquely separate stakeholder and simply remove “business owners” from that section.

As written, the goal or activities targeted in Section 2 - F are unclear to a lay reader, i.e.

“community acknowledgement programs.” I encourage authors to rewrite this in a way that clarifies what it is intended to achieve. Clearly written goals are more likely accomplished.

I recommend that you include the development of a monitoring plan that is created by multi-stakeholders to measure the success of initiatives created as a result of this Resolution. It serves the purpose of measuring meaningful metrics and communicating shared value and commitment.

Respectfully submitted.

Cate Hartzell

Public Testimony #9

Some of you might be aware that local BIPOC and allies have started the Truth and Conciliation Commission to address and take action and hold entities like yourselves accountable to the community. Tonya, you were part of the first meeting and never returned. It is now known that Tonya, instead of joining a BIPOC action committee, you attempt to start your own, which right off the bat, is suspicious and creates an utter lack of trust in you. And we will all remember this.

This whole 'resolution' as you so call it should be written and consulted with and by BIPOC. And yours should be PUT ON HOLD. A bunch of white people who are mostly (except Julie) serving your own agenda, have no right, no community trust and no mind to be doing this without BIPOC and at least one member minimum of our houseless community. The larger community does not trust that you will take any public comments seriously or even read them. You are all so eager to react and come out looking like you are doing something, that you have skilled vital steps along the way.

And we ALL know this.

Your rush on this speaks volumes. The fact that you gave us 24 hours during a holiday weekend speaks volumes. And all of you pushing this through are utterly transparent and are complicit. We are no fools. You are placating and pushing an agenda that clearly, vividly suits yourselves.

During this local, nationally, global uprising, you are making a big mistake and all us registered voters now discussing this on trending community posts with thousands of locals, will remember this always and especially this coming November.

Leslie Caplan
20 year resident
Well-known Business owner
Registered Voter

Public Testimony #10

I appreciate the sentiment of this resolution but it is not enough. We want less funding for the police and more funding for social services to solve the root causes of crime and poverty. This resolution is performative and doesn't propose enough real change. We must acknowledge the role of policing in this problem.

Public Testimony #11

Mayor and Council,

Regarding your study session today on police reform in Ashland, I am writing to encourage you to terminate the “Exclusion Zone” (AMC 10.120.010-040. <https://ashland.municipal.codes/AMC/10.120>). It disproportionately targets specific folks and restricts some of their basic rights in a way that is not humane, and possibly not constitutional.

I also think that we're long past due to redirect whatever part of the police budget it will take in order to generously fund the success of a CAHOOTS style community outreach team. I think we should plan it in initial connection with police dispatch and concurrently plan to educate the town in using it in a way that means it will soon be an independent entity with a budget independent of the police budget.

It's a no-brainer, and the sooner Ashland does it the better. It would be embarrassing to wait for other national municipalities to take the lead in doing so. Eugene is right next door and there are professionals in Ashland and Medford with direct experience of CAHOOTS who will attest to its efficacy and humaneness.

I also want explicit community control of the City budget to become our way forward, and ask that the Council look at ways to facilitate this.

How can the Council ensure that budget reports become transparent instruments that work hard to make it easier for the community at large to decide how we want the City budget to be spent?

Lastly, before the Council goes further with any proclamations about Ashland antiracism initiatives, I am asking that you come to a full stop and consult with local BIPOC leaders and the BIPOC community at large about what they decide regarding what best suits them.

I also ask that you not formalize any antiracism initiative without tying it to binding economic and budgetary commitments that will have strongly positive economic impacts on local BIPOC, as well as commitments that will positively address Covid19's disproportionately negative impacts on BIPOC.

Lastly, any local antiracism initiative should address defunding the Ashland police budget and redirecting it in ways that will work to improve the health, safety and economic and general wellbeing of BIPOC Ashlanders, and all of these commitments should be co-created with and fully vetted by BIPOC Ashlanders - both BIPOC leaders and BIPOC Ashlanders in general, including BIPOC families, BIPOC SOU students, BIPOC Ashland High School students, and school age BIPOC community members.

Sincerely,
Liza Maltsberger
Ashland

Public Testimony #12

Hello Tonya and Council

I am an Ashland resident and work at the Ashland Public Library. As a member of the library I work with a diverse cross section of the public, including those disproportionately affected by policing, insufficient services, and racism.

I appreciate the statement that is before the council as a starting point, however I have concerns that it needs to outline more steps for the city to take going forward. Current events have changed the tone for the appropriate and necessary action for cities to take around the future of their police departments, social services, anti racist work, and justice for historical and current wrongs.

1. Beyond recommending further bias training for city government, such trainings and additional training on specifically unpacking and unlearning white supremacy should be mandatory for city government and employees.
2. Beyond merely supporting the APD in having more opportunities to explain their policies at SOU and to local communities, there needs to be time and budget allocated to review those policies, take community input on how APD needs to change, and a commitment from the council in this statement to future work on this matter. The community understands how APD works, because the community experiences those policies and practices every day. Explaining isn't enough, the council should include in this statement a commitment to assessing with community how APD needs to change.
3. Section 2 item G is an excellent start and should absolutely be embraced. In addition, professionals in trauma, mental health, and social workers with resources for survivors should be part of responses to domestic disputes. Social workers and mental health professionals should also be the first responders to situations in the houseless community.
4. Events around the country are setting the tone and cities around the country are looking at, and in some cases moving forward with, reallocating portions of police budget to expand the services and provide more resources for the more appropriate responders discussed above. I understand that timeliness is important in passing this resolution, and to that end there should be an item in it for future discussion of reallocating police budget to create the infrastructure and pay the appropriate service providers above who can offer the kind of necessary responses above, as well as increase funding for crisis support, in and outpatient mental health, addiction services, shelter, and accessible housing.
5. Finally, Black leaders have been reminding southern Oregon that the Rogue Valley, and Ashland in particular, have their own history of racism, segregation, and KKK and other organized racist activity. This should be acknowledged, and a commitment made for the Council to invite Black leaders to future discussion of necessary steps to acknowledge and address the ongoing disparities and suffering that come from that history and steps to move forward and find meaningful justice.

Thank you,
Holly Mills

Public Testimony #13

The City of Ashland prides itself on being a diverse, inclusive, community-oriented town, but the city's current resolution and response to the current crisis are far from that. The City needs more concrete action that will enact real change for the town for the better, rather than the performative route its currently taking. Police Department across the country have been complicit in the disenfranchisement of people of color and the brutal systemic racism that follows from the industrial prison complex, Ashland Police department is no different. The City Council must listen to the demands of the people when we call for public safety to be reinvented. Defund Ashland Police department and reinvest those funds to solve the root cause of crime and poverty. This Council's history of leaving the city's most vulnerable helpless in their time of need has to end. The City has the resources to help solve these problems, but the city would rather choose to bulk up the police force for the cities business interests.

Sincerely,

Devin Squires

Public Testimony #14

To whom it may concern,

I have read over this resolution kindly sent to me due to my voiced concerns about policing in Ashland. The resolution is filled with good intentions and hopeful bridges to something looking like equity, but I would like more concrete plans regarding funding and refocusing.

If Ashland is too small to have another number and separate social service department to respond to emergency calls, then I think the Ashland police need an even more substantial reform. I would like to see at least two fully trained emergency social workers employed by the Ashland police receiving the same pay and benefits as any armed officer would. Along with all officers receiving de escalation training, these social workers will have even more extensive training in identifying mental health issues and a knowledge of local resources. These workers should not be armed. In situations where it is unclear what kind of help is needed, both an officer and a social worker should arrive at the scene and the trained social worker should be the first one to gauge the situation and decide if the armed cop is necessary.

Data from this trial can determine how often a cop with a gun is actually required, and my hope is that over the years to come more and more armed police can be replaced or promoted to unarmed social workers.

I think this clear and decisive relocation of funds and thought processes is what Ashland needs for the future in addition to everything proposed in resolution 2020-15.

~Sarah McKenney
Ashland resident