

August 10, 2020
Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Moonwater (00:00:05):

Thank you for joining us for the second forum in a series of Listening Sessions focused on race and justice in Whatcom County. My name is Moonwater and I serve as the executive director of the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center. We are an independent, nonprofit organization, and my role here is as an impartial moderator for tonight's meeting. This is a public meeting sponsored by the City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, Lummi Nation and Western Washington University. Representatives of those entities, along with the city and county council members, are here with us and participating as listeners tonight. Shortly, many of the people you see now will shift into the attendee listening role to make space for community members to speak and be seen tonight. This Zoom meeting is being recorded and is also being live streamed on YouTube and BTV Channel 10. We encourage you to use those channels for listening and to log on to Zoom if you'd like to speak tonight.

Moonwater (00:01:03):

Technical support is being provided by the City of Bellingham, and I will be working with them to support as smooth of an experience tonight as possible for everyone. I thank you greatly in advance for your grace and patience with any technical glitches if they arise, as they probably will. We do have an ASL translator present for the duration of the meeting, and we hope to have Spanish and Punjabi interpreters standing by if needed, as well. If you are just joining us and would like to speak tonight, you can sign up by visiting www.cob.org/listeningseries.

Moonwater (00:01:44):

Just as we began the first session, I'd like to offer you all the opportunity to reflect on the important truth that here in Whatcom County, we are occupying the ancestral homelands of the Coast Salish peoples who have lived in the Salish sea basin throughout the San Juan islands and the North Cascades watershed from time immemorial. I want to express the deepest respect and gratitude for our indigenous neighbors, the Lummi Nation and Nooksack tribe for their enduring care and protection of this land. I offer this acknowledgement as a means to honor their relationship with the land we all share and a call to the community at large towards further recognition, reflection, learning, and action. Thank you.

Moonwater (00:02:28):

Thank you to our city and county council members and local leaders for being here to listen tonight. I'll now ask you to kindly turn off your videos and we will move you to the attendee status. We have made a few changes to the meeting structure tonight to create more ease and access for everyone. For the remainder of the meeting, we are intentionally minimizing the number of people on the screen to make the ASL interpreting more accessible. We now have the opportunity to hear briefly from Mayor Fleetwood.

Mayor Seth Fleetwood (00:03:04):

Thank you. Thank you so much, Moonwater. Thank you to the many people that have participated, not just in the technical aspect of this, but also in the work of identifying what kind of changes we thought might be helpful. A number of individuals and representatives of various groups have been helpful in sharing their observations and I think over time, we'll continue to just make this effort better. We heard from a lot of voices expressing the view that as an initial step in this work, that we should all be listening and so this listening series was a well-intended effort to try and be responsive to those requests. As we go forward. One of the things that we've heard from people is that this sort of thing it doesn't have to be

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four and done. We could continue to have a listening series and we could do a number of creative things to make them better.

Mayor Seth Fleetwood (00:04:15):

We're committed to that. So the purpose of this series, at least as originally expressed, and again, it's iterative, there's always opportunity to expand purpose, et cetera, but the object was to provide the public with opportunities to share their experiences, to form commitments to effective change, to create a public record of people's ideas and experiences and thoughts, and to just generally elevate the importance of these issues and ultimately ensure accountability for addressing them in our community. We've heard a range of perspectives in our first meeting that were helpful to hear. I've summarized some of the themes from that first meeting. I think it's fair to say that, and this is not an exhaustive list by any means, but in our first session, people who chose to speak described the ways that inequality and racist and discriminatory systems, policies, and practices affect their daily lives.

Mayor Seth Fleetwood (00:05:20):

A number of speakers encouraged us to defund the police and provide more financial support for social services and recast the role of law enforcement in our community. We heard that victims of crime don't always feel supported when they come forward, when cases are being investigated and when they navigate through the court system. We heard concerns about housing and homelessness and the ways that government can help support people's housing and other financial needs. We heard this is especially vital during this pandemic when rental assistance, continuing moratoriums on evictions and other support to people is essential, and especially so for people of color and other marginalized people who are disproportionately affected by the COVID crisis. We heard people voice concerns about how we care for marginalized members of our community and the need for opportunities for all ages to connect with and build trust and respect for each other.

Mayor Seth Fleetwood (00:06:28):

We hear from you a great sense of urgency in this work and that our community needs to address and commit to actions and begin taking those actions quickly. They're just a few of the many themes that emerged from our first session. I hope that tonight builds on these themes. I hope that people feel safe and free to express themselves however they choose. Again, we're here to listen. We're committed as a community to doing this important work and translating protest into action and meaningful change. Our intention is to take the information that we've learned and form taskforce work, sooner rather than later. I know Executive Sidhu and I have talked about this and we look forward to forming that and beginning this complex, challenging work of dismantling structural racism in our community and as we know, this is an effort we hope is going to continue to take place nationwide. So thanks for being here. We look forward to listening and I'll leave it at that for now.

Moonwater (00:07:49):

Thank you, Mayor Fleetwood. In the spirit of a shared understanding for tonight, I'd like to review a few agreements as we move forward. Our Spanish and Punjabi interpreters will review the agreements after me. Whether you are on the Zoom call or listening in another way, I invite you now to listen deeply, to bring humility, to reflect thoughtfully, to expect non-closure tonight. Conversations and changes will be ongoing. To share the space. We're asking people to limit their comments this evening to 10 minutes, and for those of you that have signed up to speak, I invite you to share the space with your fellow

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community members and as I mentioned, to please limit your comments to under 10 minutes in order to allow numerous voices to be heard tonight before the close of the meeting at 8:00 PM.

Moonwater (00:08:45):

I also invite you to help center voices of people of color, and to please allow black, indigenous, people of color to speak first this evening. So given tonight's intent and the limited time we have, the hope of this session is to hear first and foremost from people of color. So if you have signed up to speak and you identify as white or otherwise privileged, I respectfully invite you to consider yielding your time tonight to make space for your fellow community members to be heard. In terms of our process this evening, if you do identify as a person of color and would like to speak this evening, please use the raise hand function in the Zoom meeting at the bottom of your screen and our technology team will prioritize the order of speakers accordingly. Time permitting, we will invite additional speakers. I thank everyone for your cooperation.

Moonwater (00:09:43):

I also ask for grace and patience this evening, with me as the moderator, with one another and with technology. We may experience glitches, silence, or other moments of discomfort as we navigate trying to hold this important space in this awkward and challenging way. Lastly, I'd like to acknowledge in advance the significant energy it takes to show up and speak, especially to share tonight messages, beliefs, and experiences that may have been shared for years and not heard or acted upon in a way that was needed. So thank you in advance to everyone who is willing and able to contribute their voice to tonight's meeting. Could our Spanish interpreter please review these agreements?

Martha Sabalsa (00:10:32):

Can you please put the first light on? Okay. [Spanish language 00:10: 44].

Moonwater (00:12:28):

Thank you. Could our Punjabi interpreter please review the agreements as well?

Picu (00:13:29):

[Punjabi language 00:12: 47].

Moonwater (00:13:36):

Thank you. I'll take a moment now to explain the process for this evening. If you would like to speak tonight, please use the raise hand function that is available now in the Zoom meeting. City staff will be assisting behind the scenes to coordinate the order of speakers. As of now, you all are meeting attendees. In groups of three, you will hear your name be called and you will then be invited to become a panelist. Once you are a panelist, I will cue you when it is your turn to speak. I will ask you to unmute yourself, and if you feel comfortable or able, to start your video. As I shared before, please limit your comments to under 10 minutes, and thank you in advance for your help with time management.

Moonwater (00:14:20):

Once you were done speaking, I ask that you mute yourself and turn off your video. Once each member of the group of three has spoken, they will return to attendee status and the next group of three will be cued into the speaking line. We will continue this process until about 7:40, at which point we'll identify

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our last speaker to begin to close tonight's session. So thank you for your patience, and I believe our Spanish interpreter is going to briefly review this process?

Martha Sabalsa (00:14:52):

Yes. [Spanish language 00:14:54].

Moonwater (00:16:25):

Thank you, Martha.

Martha Sabalsa (00:16:25):

Mm-hmm.

Moonwater (00:16:26):

Picu, could you please translate into Punjabi?

Picu (00:16:27):

[Punjabi language 00:16:41].

Moonwater (00:17:46):

Thank you so much. I believe we're ready for our first speakers. Janice, do you have their names for me?

Janice (00:17:55):

I do. We have Michael, then Carly, then Maya.

Moonwater (00:18:03):

Thank you. Michael, if you could unmute yourself and if you're willing or able to share your video.

Michael (00:18:09):

Thank you.

Moonwater (00:18:11):

You have the opportunity to speak. Welcome.

Michael (00:18:14):

Thank you so much. Thank you, Moonwater, and thank you to everyone for this opportunity to talk. I'm a South African, so I'm a recent resident in Whatcom County only having been here for a couple of months now. I wanted to share a little bit about my experiences of growing up in South Africa, particularly what I witnessed in terms of the whole cultural and race revolution that actually happened in South Africa and the lessons that I learned from that in terms of providing a context for some of this conversation. I think that's the thing that I really want to talk about is we really need to shift this conversation.

Michael (00:18:48):

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When I looked at the lessons or the listening to the last conversation we had, I saw that there was quite a lot of mistrust between the government officials and the people who were speaking and various things, and there wasn't really this focus on the possibilities of what we can create rather than just a focus on the problems and we give our problems away. So I think this conversation really needs to shift and I'd like to give you some ideas of what we could look at. Talk about some of the lessons that I learned from South Africa.

Michael (00:19:20):

I think we had a commission that was set up in South Africa called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Now the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up in order to allow people to come together and to find two things. One was forgiveness and one was actual justice. So it was this body that was set up in order to do that and people who were perpetrators, either from the ANC, which was the non-government organizations and the government, could actually come up and they could have these conversations and apply for amnesty. If you had created a crime, a politically motivated crime, you could apply for amnesty and then be granted amnesty and you could take that forward from there. Now, during these conversations, there was one conversation which was absolutely incredible. And this was between a man by the name of Nivote.

Michael (00:20:08):

Now Nivote was the main perpetrator, the main enforcer of the apartheid government and he would go in and he would literally interrogate and torture these people in this house, this building that was called Sanlam House. And so Nivote, he took a 22 year old activist and he took him off the street and he went and interrogated him, and he took him to an offsite location and he interrogated this poor boy, this poor young man, activist for about 18 hours. After he found that he could get nothing from this man, [Sompewa 00:20:41], he took him outside and he shot him in the back of the head and he literally took his body and he put his body onto, what would you call it? A barbecue, I guess, in American terms, so to destroy the evidence. Now these public hearings, amnesty, you would only be granted amnesty if you were a political motive for your killing.

Michael (00:21:03):

And so during the amnesty negotiations or amnesty discussions, you had this panel where you had the whites. You had Nivote up on there. Because it was a public hearing, the public could actually sit in the front row and listen, and so the family of the boy named Sompewa was actually in the very front row and they listened to the whole story as Nivote was cross-examined. It was incredible to witness. But what really happened is that because it was a politically motivated crime, Nivote was granted amnesty. So you actually left and he never got punished for that or there was no punishment that was meted out after that. And so Nivote wanted to find some sort of reconciliation, I guess, and so he contacted the mother of Sompewa." Her name was Joyce. He contacted Joyce and said, I would like to come and meet you."

Michael (00:21:54):

And so a meeting was duly set up with a family on the one hand of this boy who had been brutally murdered and interrogated, and this white policemen were taken in. And so this white policeman, he literally went and he sat down in the exact house where he had abducted this boy from, and this conversation happened. And because it was quite a public conversation, that was also actually recorded and you can see it on YouTube if you are interested. I put myself in Joyce, the mother of Sompewa's

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shoes, and I just looked and I said, "How would I feel if it was my son who was actually being brutally murdered and I came face to face with the perpetrator of this incredible racial crime? How would I feel? What would come up for me? Would it be revenge? Would I want to just literally get up and just take out all my pain on this man?"

Michael (00:22:44):

And then I put myself in the shoes of Nivote, and I said, "Well, Nivote, he's obviously has some agenda here, but is he trying to find some reconciliation or compassion or forgiveness for himself perhaps?" This was incredible to witness this conversation. But what I really got from this conversation was, I stood back and I said, "We are South Africa. How are we going to change? How are we going to create a new society with this victim and perpetrator sitting in the same room and they cannot see each other? Where are we going to take this forward? What is the way forward? How are we going to rebuild our society through this?" And so that was an incredible lesson for me. For one, the pain. Both of these parties were trapped. Just like the police are trapped in a certain way, or the government officials are trapped in a certain way because they, perhaps, if you're the perpetrator of any type of racial policy, you sit with incredible guilt and it's very difficult for you to find your heart and to try and move forward.

Michael (00:23:42):

And if you have received some type of inequality in your own life, it's very difficult for you to actually to find compassion and be able to find your heart and to get together on a table and to rebuild society. So that was the first thing that I realized, was that the process required tremendous amounts of healing and healing had to happen between all the parties were given the opportunity to speak, not just the people who were actually the victims, but also the people who were the perpetrators, who had enforced those policies. They also needed the ability to release their guilt, otherwise they would stay in that and there would be no chance of reconciliation or to move forward. So what I learned was united we stand, divided we fall. There's just two [inaudible 00:24:24] way about that. We have to unite together in this.

Michael (00:24:27):

We have to move past our own woundings and come clean, if we'd been the perpetrator or we've done those things in order to rebuild our trust. Therein lies the problems because in South Africa, for example, we have incredible constitution that was set up just after this to rebuild the country. The constitution was incredible, yet the constitution, no matter how structurally you put in place these incredible structures to rebuild the country, you could not take the country forward until the social fabric was reestablished. The social fabric was what I would term societal capital. It's the ability for us to meet together as good neighbors and be able to communicate, not from the space of victim of tyrant or persecutor, but to rebuild the social capital that people could get together. And that was a crucial element of this process. It was not just about unwinding practices or laws.

Michael (00:25:19):

Those things were incredible and needed to be done, but the social fabric was more important for long-lasting change. The second thing I realized was, in that process, was that enlightened leadership would not take us forward. It was not just about the government finding the solutions to the problems. And we had incredible... And I'll just show you this, this is a 50 Rand note. It's a currency from South Africa and that's Nelson Mandela. And so Nelson Mandela was an enlightened leader and his leadership stopped the civil war in South Africa. But today the racial inequality and the economic injustice is incredibly high

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and the police brutality is incredibly high and so we still have the problems from the past, because we have no social fabric that's been rebuilt. And if you look at the incredible leaders of America, and this is George Washington on a \$1 note or Abraham Lincoln, these incredible... The legacy that they brought us, the abolition of slavery and the establishment in the Revolutionary War and the four freedoms and the Bill of Rights are absolutely incredible, but we need to build a social fabric along with that.

Michael (00:26:19):

We cannot expect the governmental leaders that they have the solutions for that. All the solutions that we require are together. We can't just expect us to give our problems to them. In that way, we abdicate our power and we give our power away to the politicians and then say, "Okay, you've got to run this now. And you've got four years in office and you need to find a solution." That doesn't work. We all need to show our own leadership, and that leadership is all of us to come together. It takes courage, especially if you've been a victim. I can imagine how much courage that takes to be able to face your perpetrators and find some sort of reconciliation, the ability to work together. And also the courage if you have perpetrated to come forward, either from the police perspective or the sheriff or whatever it is. I don't understand where it comes from, but the perpetrators of these also need to come forward and ought to be given the chance to share their guilt and their own hearts in order to rebuild the society.

Michael (00:27:16):

When I look at America, America to me is in the fourth quarter of a Superbowl game. This is the fourth quarter. We are in the middle of a social change and revolution now, and where we take this is depending on where we go all together in terms of our collective participations. And so if I look at the nature of history, if you're a student of history and you look at something like the French Revolution, what happened in the French Revolution afterwards was complete chaos. The breakdown of society. They were guillotining everyone. There was suspicion, almost like McCarthyism, I guess, in the sixties in America. Incredible suspicion was created. Or if you look at what came out of the Revolutionary War in America, which was this incredible 13 colonies put together and the land of the free. Right now, we're in this fourth quarter of a game and we have to look...

Michael (00:28:03):

Now we're in this fourth culture of a game and we have to look very openly and honestly at all of what we are trying to achieve and what is the intention of that, whether you are a Black Lives movement or you're in any of the types of movements or from the government perspective, all the role players, where are we going to take this game? Because we are responsible for, and we need to make sure that this now does not turn out to be a chaotic social revolution, but rather a step-by-step process toward change.

Moonwater (00:28:30):

Thank you.

Michael (00:28:30):

And so-

Moonwater (00:28:32):

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Thank you, Michael.

Michael (00:28:35):

Yeah. Just to finish up-

Moonwater (00:28:36):

Sure.

Michael (00:28:36):

... I think we just need to shift this conversation. And together, what is possible if we create this all together? So thank you so much for allowing me this time just to be able to share what's been in my heart. Many blessings to you all.

Moonwater (00:28:51):

Thank you so much, Michael. I appreciate your perspective.

Michael (00:28:54):

You're welcome.

Moonwater (00:28:56):

I believe we have Carly next. So, Michael, thank you, Carly, you can share your video if you'd like and your audio. Welcome.

Carly (00:29:06):

Thank you. I actually wanted to be mindful of time. You said in allowing other people, especially people of color to speak, so I prepared a statement. My name is Carly and I live in Bellingham. I have worked for a decade as a mental health crisis clinician in various communities around the country, and I now work as an educational interpreter at a high school. I would like to add my voice tonight in support of defunding the police and redirecting that money to community and social services. Removing money from the police budget allows these funds to be redistributed to services like mental health, homelessness outreach, and other groups, which they themselves have been defunded over several decades to the detriment of local citizens.

Carly (00:29:57):

If we build these services back up, we can help people in a more targeted and effective way. People with mental health emergencies can have the local crisis services respond. People with substance abuse issues can get connected to treatment instead of being criminalized, which is a model that has proved very successful in other countries. Additionally, these alternative services are far less likely to have deep-seated and systemic racism ingrained in their institutions, are far less militarized and are far less likely to end with violence or death. They are more accountable to the community. These systems treat social problems at the root, and are more effective long-term solutions to reducing crime in general. They empower citizens to heal their own community in pro-social ways. Redistributing funds and responsibilities also does leave the police more available to respond to issues for which they are more necessary, such as urgent responses or follow-up investigation to violent crime situations.

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Carly (00:31:06):

We are at a crossroads in this country and here in Bellingham, we can respond by choosing differently this time, especially during this pandemic when citizens are hurting even more than usual and funds are more limited than usual. The right thing to do is to cut the police budget by 50% and put those funds into housing, education and other social services that will more effectively improve our community. That's my statement.

Moonwater (00:31:39):

Thank you so much for joining us this evening, Carly.

Carly (00:31:42):

Thank you.

Moonwater (00:31:42):

We appreciate your time. I believe we have Maya next. Maya, if you can... There you are. Welcome.

Maya (00:31:52):

Thank you. So I will keep my story brief, but my name is Maya and I wanted to share an experience I had while I was a student in the public schools. I'm in my mid-twenties. I grew up here in Bellingham and I graduated from one of the local high schools. I was raised by white parents so it was a little too easy for me to forget that racial discrimination or systematic racism was something that could even affect me. I loved being involved in school and was an active member in a variety of extracurricular activities. There was this one activity I so badly wanted to be a part of ever since I was in middle school and in order to participate, you needed to try out. So I tried out all three years that I was eligible and was unsuccessful all three times. After my first two attempts, I went to the teacher and asked, "What could I improve on? How could I increase my chances of being able to be accepted into this group?"

Maya (00:32:45):

I was given a variety of feedback and I worked really hard during the school year and over the summer to improve upon the areas that I was suggested to, but it wasn't enough. So after I unsuccessfully auditioned and didn't get in for my senior year, I went back to this teacher and asked, "I did all the things that you shared and told me to improve on. What else could I have possibly done?" And she gave me a couple of empty responses and finally said that I didn't have the right look for the group. I left that office stunned and not really knowing what to think, and it was only after I spoke to another female of color who had also unsuccessfully auditioned and she shared that she had also received a similar response that I understood it wasn't maybe because of my ability, it was because of the color of my skin.

Maya (00:33:35):

The group has a very particular look. It has for several years, and that teacher still is teaching at the high school I attended. I just want to share that that's an experience that has happened. That still stings to this day. I just don't believe that it's right for an adult, let alone a teacher to be able to tell a high school student that they don't have the right look to participate in something and have that be a valid reason that they aren't able to do something in school. Thank you so much.

Moonwater (00:34:09):

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Maya, thank you so much for joining us tonight and sharing that experience with us. I appreciate your time.

Maya (00:34:15):

Thank you.

Moonwater (00:34:17):

Janice, do we have some additional speakers in the queue?

Janice (00:34:22):

Yes. We have Sage, Benjamin and Monica.

Moonwater (00:34:30):

Sage, if you can join us. Welcome. If you can unmute yourself. Thank you.

Sage (00:34:36):

Hi, my name is Sage Jones and I'm a member of the Whatcom Democratic Socialists of America. I'm a resident of Bellingham. Though I've only been politically active in Bellingham for four years and because of that, I don't have the best total view of community coalitions that have formed in this town, I just would like to say that I have personally never seen another issue unite local community groups like the opportunity to reallocate funds from the police department into social programs. So an example of this is our event. Stonewall was a riot march to defund the police, was cosponsored by 13 community organizations, and there are many other organizations and individuals that have been fighting for justice for a long time and are continuing their work in their own way in this current movement.

Sage (00:35:44):

I just want to thank those people that are not in the coalition that I'm personally involved in, but I share this because I believe that the campaign to prioritize spending our tax dollars on social programs rather than a punitive system of policing is a movement rather than a moment. So whether we succeed at cutting the police budget by 50% in this budget conversation, we're going to keep fighting for this. As many other organizations working on this campaign, Whatcom DSA has been organizing for affordable housing, childcare, workers rights, expansion of public services, and trying our best to stand in solidarity with other community organizations for several years. Yeah. We will continue this fight for as long as it takes. I'm incredibly proud of Seattle City Council's swift commitment to defunding their police department by 50% and funding the demands created by BIPOC organizers. If other cities can take swift action, inaction by Bellingham City Council is inexcusable.

Sage (00:37:10):

We will continue to do community outreach, mutual aid, to stand in solidarity with other community organizations, and to the best of our ability, to primary elected officials who do not support the people at Bellingham. If anyone watching this would like to be involved in the coalition that helped put on Stonewall was the riot March to defund the police, I recommend joining the mailing list at defundbpd.org, and I yield the rest of my time. Thank you.

Moonwater (00:37:48):

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Thank you, Sage. Appreciate you being here. I'd like to welcome Benjamin now. Benjamin, if you can share your video and audio. Let's see. Sage, if you can turn off your video and audio, hopefully Benjamin can join us now. Hi, Benjamin. Welcome.

Benjamin (00:38:18):

I would just like to yield my time to somebody else who would like to speak, or I guess since I'm already speaking, I would just plead for unity and stress the importance of everyone trying to see both sides and acting out of love, not fear. That's all. Thank you.

Moonwater (00:38:47):

Thank you so much, Benjamin. Monica, are you able to share your video and audio and join us? Welcome, Monica. Thank you for being here tonight.

Monica (00:39:13):

Hi. Good evening. My name is Monica Kohler and I'm coming today as a mother of two young boys and as a community building consultants and owner of Connecting Community. Moonwater, could I just ask a question please?

Moonwater (00:39:32):

Of course.

Monica (00:39:32):

I'm wondering how many folks are on this call today?

Moonwater (00:39:37):

So Monica, there's a couple of different ways that people are participating. There are 49 people in the Zoom meeting at this moment. Not all of them are queued up to speak. And we also have people watching on YouTube and BTV. This is being recorded so everything that you share tonight, along with everyone else's perspectives, will be able to be viewed again following tonight's meeting. Does that help?

Monica (00:40:02):

Thank you.

Moonwater (00:40:03):

Certainly.

Monica (00:40:05):

It's good to be in community with you all tonight. I just wanted to acknowledge and echo what I heard in the conversations that took place in our last meeting, that these conversations probably would not be taking place if it wasn't for the hard work of the Black Lives movement and the folks that are working really hard to bring racial justice issues to the forefront for many years. I'd also just, Moonwater, I just wanted to appreciate your land acknowledgement and that we are still currently standing on indigenous lands of the Coast Salish people, the Lummi and Nooksack tribes who have been here for thousands of

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years. That this is stolen, occupied land and that I still continue to wonder why there isn't more acknowledgement in the Bellingham community of the lives that were taken historically and the systemic oppression and the trauma that that has placed on the people who are still here very much.

Monica (00:41:16):

I'm thinking about the work that Shirley Williams has done around talking about truth and reconciliation and the long houses that were destroyed in this community and just really a lack of acknowledgement of the history that has taken place in this community. So just wanted to start, I think if we're going to engage in conversations about racial justice, that that's a really good place to start. So I moved here nine years ago from the Bay area, California, and I'm still really struggling to find myself in this community and feel a sense of belonging here. I've been engaging very actively in conversations about race and social justice over the past nine years in many different capacities. But I just really would like to talk about the urgent need that we have in the county to hold diversity, equity and belonging trainings and strategic planning and conversations, really, to talk about systems that continue to be in place and issues with bias and how that really is affecting and impacting our communities here for black, indigenous and people of color.

Monica (00:42:49):

So I've really had the honor of working with the Dispute Resolution Center as a reach co-facilitator that's respecting ethnic and cultural heritage. I really hope that you all look into some type of equity trainings that county-wide officials can engage in these courageous conversations. Because I've really found that people are so challenged with having these conversations. So really just want to stress the importance. There's so many wise, amazing people who are doing this work in the community around equity, and it's going to take reaching out and connecting and really building relationships with people who have been doing this work for years. I'd also like to suggest an equity office for the county so that there is accountability held for one another. We're all going to make mistakes. We're all going to make missteps in this process of talking about race, but it's really, I think, essential to collaborate and for there to be a central equity office where people can go and talk about their grievances, the microaggressions that take place within workplaces and communities.

Monica (00:44:15):

I'm talking about different groups of people coming together. Family champions, who are paid to come and collaborate and do this type of work. I know that the Dispute Resolution Center is offering a safe spaces type of program and I'm wondering how much more we can get connected in those conversations at schools. And of course grandmothers, because you want to know what's happening. What's going on in a community? Ask a grandma because they know what's up and grandma needs to be compensated, too. So just really hoping that we can come together to form an equity office for the county. I'm also here today as family champion for Generations Forward, which is a collaborative of families and nonprofits, schools, agencies who really are coming together under the Health Department and Opportunity Council.

Monica (00:45:18):

Over the past two years, I've connected with hundreds of families within the community, anyone from the Deming Library, who was a mother who shared her story about being fearful that her child was reaching for a toy in a bush and almost got pricked by a drug needle to, I went to the Sikh Temple in Ferndale and connected with a mother who was struggling with post-partum depression. So really there

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are so many stories that support how critical it is for us to reallocate funding at this time to serve families and children. I know Executive Sidhu, you were in our gathering with our Policy and Action Team for Generations Forward last month. I still remember that fabulous white hat that you wore, and I hope that you got the proposal that we have really worked hard on presenting to you as well as the videos. We had hosted an Unhappy Hour where people, community, families were invited in to talk about what they're really struggled and challenged with at this time of COVID.

Monica (00:46:38):

We sent that to you a few weeks ago, so we're really looking forward to hearing your feedback about that. In that proposal, we've really talked about reallocating funds to support mental health, preventative care. I know last week we had a gentleman talking about the importance of community centers. Yes, I come from San Leandro, California. We had a Boys and Girls Club where people could go and connect with one another. It's really critical to people's well-being and health. So more mental health funding. Housing. I heard people telling stories last week about homelessness, small, tiny homes. I don't know what the solution is, but we really need to start talking about housing. Childcare. We're in a childcare desert and now with COVID people are really being impacted. So these are all issues that we have sent your way and really hope that you're going to consider, again, reallocating funds to support families and children.

Monica (00:47:46):

Another thing I'd like to talk about is storytelling. For thousands of years, healing, learning and connection have come from people telling their stories and people listening. So I'm just really going to share my story that I am a mother, like I said, who is still challenged with feeling a sense of belonging in this community. There's a culture here, the culture of this is the city of subdued excitement that just has never resonated with me. I still struggle with it. I'm concerned that my children don't have community spaces or centers to connect with other people of color. So my children actually commute to the bilingual school in Mount Vernon, as a result of the stories that I've heard of the racism that exists here in this community.

Monica (00:48:54):

So I just wonder what stories exist in Whatcom County. I know that there's so much wisdom in this room with all the 40 something other folks that I can't see, but just I'm really interested in sharing stories and in having deeper conversations about the ethics and implications that come behind asking people to share their stories, which I think this is one of those spaces, right? I think it was Kristina Martins last week who brought up that we're coming and we're taking our time to share our hearts and be vulnerable. I think that there are ways that we can work together to make story sharing a more healing and fulfilling experience. So some thoughts I had about that are compensation. So I know that there's a lot of Black Live Matter supporting businesses who are supporting Black Lives Matter, and I'm wondering if they're willing to provide donations and contributions so the people who are coming and vulnerably sharing themselves in spaces like this do get compensated.

Monica (00:50:19):

I think about transparency in how, when people show up to conversations like this, historically there's been a distrust because information is gathered and then there's not transparency about how information is going to be used or how stories are going to have an impact. So I think that's really important to look at. I also think following up is important so that the people who have come and gather

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and are continuing to share their stories in such amazing ways in this community, that they know that their story matters and that we are seeing that there's action based on the conversations that have taken place.

Monica (00:51:07):

So I'd just really like to see everyone's stories honored in this community, and I think the more conversations that we have, the more healing is going to take place. It's just so important to understand multiple perspectives and I think that that's something that stories have had, generations and generations of an oral tradition of people sharing who they are and how they're showing up, and there's a lot of power in that. I'm hoping that the stories in this community continue. I just want to acknowledge all the participants who have come to speak your truth, and thank you all for your time. I am here and I would still love to connect and continue this work together. So thank you all and take good care.

Moonwater (00:52:04):

Thank you so much, Monica. I appreciate you being here tonight and joining us. I'd like to take this moment just to acknowledge that if additional people would like to speak and you've joined us through Zoom, please use the raise hand function to join the queue. If you've already spoken or you're just here to listen, please unclick the raise hand function. Use that to indicate that you'd like to speak. Thank you. Janice. Do you have additional folks lined up to speak this evening?

Janice (00:52:38):

Yes. We have Keith and Nicholas ready.

Moonwater (00:52:48):

Okay. So if other folks would like to join in the queue, please use the raise hand function to let our tech team know. So Keith, can you unmute yourself and start your video and you can join us now to speak? Welcome.

Keith (00:53:10):

Hello. How y'all doing?

Moonwater (00:53:11):

It's nice to see you.

Keith (00:53:14):

All right. So I'm going to start off. I got a couple of things. I'm just going to start off about my experience here real quick, just some that I've dealt with. So my name's Keith Raymond. I lived here in Whatcom County in Bellingham for about 11 years. I've done a lot of things with youth. I'm very big on youth and the youth in the community and how much we need them, so that's my focus and so I've always been focused on that. I coached around here for a while. I've coached at Sehome High School. I coached at the Boys and Girls Club. I've done both as a volunteer for free, and I've also been paid at Sehome.

Keith (00:54:09):

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I started my own youth organization, if many of you don't know. What's called Infamous Allstars. It's a sports organization that also entails academics because we are big on academics inside of my organization. This organization was created because I didn't think that there was a sufficient organization that had the right mindset for youth in the community. There was nothing holding kids accountable, kids running amuck, and so I started Infamous Allstars. Infamous Allstars was geared towards lower income families, which tends to be the minority, black, Hispanic families. I started Infamous Allstars in 2018. Our first year we had maybe 18 kids on our teams, okay?

Keith (00:55:22):

Mind you, I did a lot for my players and my parents, but we got about 18 kids on our team. There's another youth organization out here started, ran by a white man. They had about 150 to 180 kids in their organization. That was just the beginning of me seeing the racism that was, I guess we want to say dug in around here in Bellingham, Whatcom County, and so that was just a start. So as I move forward in this, and I continue to offer our academics afterschool programs for the kids, different things, coding, tech engineering...

Keith (00:56:03):

It's after school programs for the kids, different things, coding tech, tech engineering, and things like that. To continue to boast these kids and continue to teach these kids and continue to grow the knowledge we come around to 2019. And again, we get back into football season, gearing up, getting ready to go again. We're about making great human beings. If you go to our info page, you'll see that. That's what we're about. We're about creating great human beings. That's important for us. That's the most important part for us football is great. And I use football as an opportunity to get youth involved and be able to surround them with people that can encourage them and push them into a proper life and to doing the right things and to being a great human being all around.

Keith (00:56:51):

And so, again, as we get into 2019. I look at my numbers, I see everything. And we are in Bellingham, Washington. We're located Bellingham, Washington, which is an 80 to 85% predominantly white area. Okay. And my numbers in my organization is about 90% minority black, natives, Hispanics. We have about 10% white at my organization. And so for me, that says a lot about this town, about the people in this town. It's not just the politicians, it's the people. They want to say... I heard people talking about creating relationships, but it is ingrained in this town, the racism. And they don't speak on it. It's micro and macro. They don't speak on it, but they show it through not dealing with you, through not participating in things that you participating in. That's how they show you that they're racist. That's how this town shows you that they're racist.

Keith (00:57:51):

So that's just the start. That's just the beginning. We fought against parks and recreation with Mike Love on a consistent basis to try to get fields. He blackballed us with fields. We couldn't use Civic. We were paying about the same amount, everything. And so again, it is systemic and it's throughout Bellingham and throughout Whatcom County. And so those are just things that I've been through. And some of the things that I've felt and seen, and it's a consistent thing that happens here in Whatcom County. And so that's just a little bit of my story and the racism that I felt and I've seen. And so I want to go into just a couple things real quick. First, I want to say what actions have y'all taken, city council members, whoever else that got some authority, what action have y'all taken since last meeting?

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Keith (00:58:49):

Like what actions? You just have another meeting, right? That's pointless, right? What have you done physically? You know what I'm saying? What have you done? If your answer to me is nothing, then you ain't doing your job. So that's how I feel about that.

Keith (00:59:04):

Now we want to talk about policing and all these things, okay? I've talked to a couple of people and policing the community is a problem. The way we police is a problem, all right? I suggested that... And police are being called certain calls, then they don't need guns. But this comes when you know who you're policing, when you're in your community and you know Jake down the street and you know who Keith is and his family. You understand them because you know them, right?

Keith (00:59:36):

You spend time with them. And that's the problem I see. There is no community here. Okay. There are people with money, people without money, and there's no pockets here, but there is no real sense of community. And that's one of the hardest things when you raising kids around here, especially my little black girls. I have three girls and I'm raising little black girls around here, and it's hard to be in a place where there is no community that you don't feel that sense of love. And so I think when we talk about defunding the police, we need to talk about also how we are policing, right? How we're policing. I think it's ill informed of us to think that a policemen needs a gun to handle every situation. Not saying that guns are not needed situationally, but not for every situation. Right down my street and the police officer, he has a gun and he wanted just to talk to me.

Keith (01:00:42):

That's uncomfortable for me as a black man because of the things that I've been through with police. And so that's one of the things that we can reassess of how we place our communities. Where we police them with love, or do we police them with authority, right? Authoritative type of policing. And that's when you begin to get backlash. When somebody tells me to do something, I'm like, "Excuse me?" But if they ask me, if they come to me in a different light, they might get a different response from me. And so I think we really need to rethink on how we do things. Because you've done something for so long does not make it right. And that's a problem that we have in America as a society because we think that we done stuff for so long, we can't change, but we can.

Keith (01:01:21):

And we should because right is right and wrong is wrong. All right, now if we are going to talk about defunding these police man who is going to point where these funds go? Now we have more white people taking money, trying to put into black communities or minority communities. They don't know what they really need. So how does that help? Are we going to put committees in place with black people, with minority people in place with leading these committees to make sure that the funds in that community are going to places they need to go. You see what I'm saying? We got to make sure that we have solutions to these problems if we want to do something. We got to make sure we come up with a proper plan in place so that we can go ahead and hit the ground running.

Keith (01:01:58):

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You know what I mean? A lot of talk. I heard a lot of talk. The politicians are talking all over the world. We're about to have an election. They just talking. Everybody talking, talking about what they going to do, but ain't nobody doing nothing. Ain't nobody done nothing. You know what I mean? And so again, you been in your position for more than a year, you have ample time to make a change. What change have you made? And so again, if we going to defund the police, we need to make sure we have committees in place to make sure this money is going to the right places. And we don't need to have a bunch of white men telling people where this money should go. It needs to be very diverse. And it needs to be a majority of minorities deciding on where this money goes. Not a majority of white people deciding where this money goes in these minority communities. That's important.

Keith (01:02:40):

And we also need race relation committees inside of schools and the police, okay? The reason why there's so much racism in this town and of towns all across America is because what they teach, the history that they teach. I know my history. I've taken time to read and read and read. I haven't had the opportunity to go and travel because I can't afford that, to go to Africa, to go to Europe, to go to these places to learn the history that a lot of people that I've learned about. But there's history that we don't teach at our schools that need to be taught. We teach white supremacy history in our schools and that needs to change. And that will begin to undermining of white supremacy. That will begin to take down white supremacy because now we understand our history fully and completely, and not just the white history, not just talking about how the white people created this and the white people discovered this.

Keith (01:03:33):

And so I think that's one of the biggest problems inside of our society is what we teaching our kids. Again, when we start to understand how to become better, we need to do it and not just sit back on our hand and say, "Oh, I get it. Oh, I understand." But nothing changes. It's okay to have an understanding. It's not okay to have an understanding and not do nothing about it. All right. And so that's big. We'd have some type of race relations, a community of minorities to say... Or community of people to bring in to light the history and the facts that we're teaching our kids. And that's the way that we break down a built in racism that we have in this town. A lot of people in this town tell you they not racism, but they won't go and shop with a black person.

Keith (01:04:26):

They won't go and put their kids around black people or minority people. That's racist. And so that's kind of a stem. Those are the problems. There are solutions. I just think that there needs to be voices of different backgrounds in order to move things forward. And once we do that and create these committees and get things running and moving, then I think we can, as a city and as a town here in Bellingham, really make a great change because again it's 85% whiter.

Keith (01:04:59):

So it's a different stance in having been in somewhere like St. Louis, Missouri, where I'm from, where it's more black people. But those little things that you can do here to say that this is what we're trying to do to make a change against systemic racism because there might not be a lot of black people here, but the ones that are here, they feel it. They feel it and it's crazy because there's not a lot of us here. But I felt it. I talked to my friends, they feel it. And so it is here. And so we need to make sure that we're taking steps and not just listening to people, but taking action and moving forward on things that people are saying.

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Moonwater (01:05:37):

Thank you so much, Keith.

Keith (01:05:39):

Thank you much.

Moonwater (01:05:40):

Really appreciate your perspective and you bringing that forward tonight. Thank you for being here.

Keith (01:05:45):

You welcome. Thank you.

Moonwater (01:05:49):

I believe in this moment we have another speaker in the queue, Nicholas, and I'd also like to acknowledge that we have approximately 40 minutes left for our speakers. So Nicholas, are you able to join us and unmute yourself and your video?

Nicholas Filtz (01:06:07):

Hello. Nicolas Filtz. I'm a long time Bellingham resident. Thank you for hosting these forums. These are important subjects and a crucial community conversation. I want to talk about policing and I'll begin with a story. About three years ago, I was in the vicinity of an officer involved shooting. I was, Sunday afternoon, walking downtown, heading up Holly street. I heard yelling. And then about a minute later, sirens and gunshots. And that what had happened was this, there had been an argument in front of the Horseshoe. Someone was stabbed. The assailant ran off. A police officer caught up with him at the end of Railroad, the police officer shouted for him to drop the knife. He started moving towards the officer. The officer told him to stop. He continued to advance, and then the officer shot and killed him.

Nicholas Filtz (01:07:06):

This is within what is allowed by the law and Bellingham police guidelines. But I think that's part of what makes it an important story in that there are still other questions to ask. Watching video of the event, you can see that the officer fires within 10 seconds of having exited the vehicle. It seemed important to ask would there have been another approach or another way to handle the situation that could have avoided the shooting? In the moment the officer was reacting to a threat, but it's important to review it after the fact and see what could've been done differently. With that in mind, I want to call on you to suggest that we should establish a civilian police review board for the Bellingham police department. It's great in this moment there's community attention and energy to trying to make improvements. And a civilian oversight board would be a huge positive step.

Nicholas Filtz (01:08:08):

It also serves a purpose for the police departments. I was recently watching one of the police perspectives videos on YouTube in which Lieutenant Don Almer was talking about the 8 Can't Wait set of proposals. Watching that, he consistently makes three points talking about use of force guidelines, which are one, that the Bellingham police department is committed to deescalation and trying to use only force that is necessary and appropriate, two, it's difficult to write policies which specify or exclude exact behavior because officers are often in fast moving or chaotic situations, but three, transparency's

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helpful. Lieutenant Almer said, and I quote, "We want our community and our citizens to know that we're doing the right thing for the right reason." And then, "We are part of this community. We want to show you what we do. I don't think any officer in this agency would be sad if the citizens got a truly in depth understanding of what our job entails."

Nicholas Filtz (01:09:16):

That's exactly why a civilian police oversight board would be good talking about body cameras. Lieutenant Almer offered this example, "I've had people come in and say, 'Hey, I want to make sure this was handled appropriately. Can I see the body camera?' Sure. Come on in, watch the video. Great. That's exactly what I needed done."

Nicholas Filtz (01:09:42):

It's good that he does that. I think we realize that many people wouldn't either think to go to the police or feel comfortable going to the police to ask, "can we review body camera footage of the encounter and talk about it?" But if there is a civilian oversight board and somebody says, "I had a bad experience with the police," then it offers the opportunity for exactly that interaction to take place because then somebody in a review capacity can say, "Hey, we want to make sure this was handled appropriately. Can we see the video? Can we review it?"

Nicholas Filtz (01:10:28):

For both the public and BPD, an independent civilian review board conducting an in depth review would be the best way to identify where BPD is doing the right thing for the right reasons and where there's room for improvement. Think about this forum and this conversation we're having right now and how much it would add to this conversation to have an independent citizen body that could contribute and say, "we've been involved in police oversight. We have seen and reviewed what the BPD does," and to bring that perspective. So I encourage you to create such a board. Thank you for this time. And thank you again for hosting this forum.

Moonwater (01:11:14):

Thank you so much, Nicholas. Janice, do we have additional speakers in the queue?

Janice (01:11:20):

Yes, we do. We have Rainbow, Jubal and Dena.

Jubal Jones (01:11:29):

Hello, everyone. I'm happy to be here today, and-

Janice (01:11:33):

[inaudible 00:01:11:33].

Jubal Jones (01:11:33):

I've been... Can you hear me?

Janice (01:11:36):

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Yes.

Jubal Jones (01:11:36):

Okay, great. Well, hello. My name is Jubal Jones and I am currently an engineering student at Western Washington University. And I'm here today to speak to my personal experiences in life, specifically, the things I've seen with respect to race and justice while in a leadership position, to describe an experience.

Jubal Jones (01:11:58):

In traveling to Beijing, China, for an English tutoring position. I experienced struggles and hardships on a daily basis to overcome these things. I had to be adaptable, open minded, and willing to learn and change myself to better fit my host family's expectations of me. After two weeks, my family told me that I needed to change or that I was finished and was going home. From this perspective, I was intimidated and nervous that I would be unable to become the tutor they desire.

Jubal Jones (01:12:33):

However, when faced with this decision to develop my character and get away from the person who I then thought I was, instead of being too proud to change myself to better serve them, I instead took this as an opportunity to learn and better understand the person I wanted to become. At first, of course, this was not easy, nor comfortable with who I was, however, in being adaptable and willing to make that sacrifice, I learned so much about myself and what I was capable of. In Chinese culture, from my point of view, and especially in my host family, a strong leader who is sociable, active, funny, ambitious, and confident is greatly valued and desired. And becoming this, I learned the benefits of enabling my peers as a strong self-sacrificing servant leader who will stop at nothing to see my peers supported, enabled, encouraged to the fullest of their ability.

Jubal Jones (01:13:35):

So moving forward in life, I use this mindset to foster friendship, understanding and support with those around me, to listen before speaking, to understand the needs of others and, if need be, to get them access to what they need. In the wake of COVID, many things have changed, and we as students must adapt, overcome and learn all the same just as if COVID was not here. However, due to a widespread necessity of needing electronics, such as webcams, computers, and numerous other devices and resources. We have seen shortages of these supplies. As such, I want to ensure that students from ethnic families from diverse backgrounds and of varying descents have full access to the technologies. They need to make the most of their education.

Jubal Jones (01:14:33):

I do not want this pandemic to further suppress people that have suffered due to inequality, the injustices, or from adversities to be further expressed. So to make an active initiative and to ensure these students have what they need. We need prompt, effective, and complete coverage to guarantee that students, especially those of color, have full access to opportunity and their education. This is a passionate subject for me and I have real emotions for this.

Jubal Jones (01:15:10):

Okay. So moreover, in consideration to education more generally, I believe we need to quickly come up with plans and initiatives to compensate for students who have children and for parents who must now

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accommodate their at home children, who previously made financial decisions based on the previous state of the world, we need to compensate for and consider the addictive potential of devices like phone games or for social media services where users can spend countless hours on devices if they're not being regulated.

Jubal Jones (01:15:49):

My experiences in laboring, another tangent in life, in laboring and fixing worn or broken components, I learned that to fix a problem, and we must try to understand the source of its dysfunction. And we must pull the system apart and look at the individual pieces. If you try to do it all at once, sometimes details are forgotten. Things are overlooked and other pieces are not even considered due to the hasty approach. Instead being patient, detail oriented, and trying to understand the source of the issue, then by considering each individual piece, we can begin to improve the system. We can pretend there is no issue, or if we try to cover it up, then we cannot properly diagnose the issue nor can we expect a fully operational system. Hiding from problems is not going to work. We need to get things out in the open and pretend like racism, sexism do not exist for people who are not actively oppressed is a convenient way of thinking, but is not a way of thinking that it's going to enable us as a people to our fullest potential.

Jubal Jones (01:17:11):

Excuse me.

Jubal Jones (01:17:15):

In breaking things down, this approach is the same process we take in engineering. We have a problem and we just break it down into smaller pieces to make it more manageable. And just as in labor, in education, in engineering, you break things apart, you go at it piece by piece, come up with an approach, and I think that's a really effective method for many aspects of life.

Jubal Jones (01:17:46):

There are side effects to trying to solve things in one fell swoop, such as issues can go on for longer, the problems can be recurring, and even other cases of misdiagnosis. A hasty approach can have things overlooked. The wrong thing is looked at. It seemed right at the time, but it wasn't. But in pretending that these problems do not exist is not a mindset that is going to work. We have to constantly reevaluate issues, make changes to things that are already in place, and in doing so, just as described by Mr. Keith Raymond, we need to include a majority of minorities when it comes to making decisions on behalf of their communities.

Jubal Jones (01:18:33):

One final educational point that I would like to highlight is that of developing curriculums that demonstrate the benefits to be had from supporting each other, struggling and troubleshooting together, and putting other's feelings before the self. Struggle isn't easy, but what I've learned from my personal experiences is that I have learned the most from the times I've struggled. And I want to be sure we set people up with their fullest potential. When it comes to hard times, they can go about things systematically and they can uplift others instead of being scared and in the moment. That's the majority of what I had to say. Those are some of the issues I just wanted to bring up. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

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Moonwater (01:19:25):

Thank you so much, Jubal. I appreciate you being here tonight. And I believe we have rainbow up next. Jubal if you want to mute yourself and hide your camera, and Rainbow, are you able to unmute yourself and join us?

Rainbow (01:19:40):

Yes. I am, thank you. I watched the previous listening session as well as tonight's of course. And I had one thing that I wanted to add. To listeners and elected officials. You may be afraid of the ideas proposed by community members will not work. I would point out to you that right now, the system, as it is, is not working. And so we need change. To those who think everything works fine, I ask you, are you a person of color? Are you someone who has tried to navigate the court system? Are you unsheltered? Are you impacted by mental health illnesses? And if not, how could you possibly know? I thank you for your time and I yield the rest of my time.

Moonwater (01:20:27):

Thank you, Rainbow. I believe we have Dena up next. Dena, if you're able to unmute yourself and share your video, if you'd like. [No welcome you? 00:01:20:38] Welcome.

Dena (01:20:42):

Thank you. It's been a pleasure to listen to everybody tonight. I am here tonight to speak in support of our many community members who are farm workers and who have many systemic forces working as obstacles that can prevent them from feeling empowered to speak up, to call for government actions and protections. We have a prevalence of border patrol agents in our county. We have a CBP immigrant holding facility and Ferndale. We have had a 2018 ICE raid that occurred under a climate of unprecedented nationwide persecution of immigrants by the federal government. We have had a record of mistreatment of farm workers at the two farms employing H2A farm workers. One in 2017 and one in 2018. It was in 2017 that Ernesto Silva Ibarra died at one of those local farms.

Dena (01:21:42):

We have a Whatcom County farm advocacy group whose executive director vehemently attacks leaders of advocacy, leaders who call for farm worker protection. And in 2018 books say Family Farming's Gerald Barron outlined using radical rules to attack immigrant and farm worker advocate leaders, a Community to Community Development and Familias Unidas por la Justicia with a focus to quote, "defeat them."

Dena (01:22:11):

I am here to direct a question to County Executive Sidhu tonight. I want to know what commitment you will make, Executive Sidhu, to farm workers in Whatcom County to ensure they will be protected at our local farms during COVID-19 and beyond. Other than Whatcom County making some small headway and offering services to families of immigrants whose loved ones and wage earners are taken from them by Homeland Security agents, that are detained and/or deported, our County has not taken proactive measures to ensure the wellbeing of wage earners in their workplaces for farm workers. Despite much input from farm worker advocacy organizations, our state government agencies fail to act promptly and with effective actions to ensure ample protective measures were taken.

Dena (01:23:05):

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And as a result, there have been numerous COVID-19 outbreaks in Washington fruit packing houses and counties east of here. Hundreds of workers had contracted COVID-19 and two Washington State farm workers who tested positive for COVID-19 in early May have died during the pandemic. One was David Cruz. He had tested positive and was an agricultural worker with Yakima based Allan Brothers fruit and on July 31st Earl Edwards, who tested positive for COVID-19, also died. He was an agricultural worker at Gebbers Farm in Okanogan County in Washington. Meanwhile, Latinos are 13% of Washington's population. They comprise 43% of the state's positive COVID-19 cases as of August 9th. So here in Whatcom County information has not been publicized.

Dena (01:24:03):

So here in Whatcom County information has not been publicized about health impacts to farm workers due to COVID-19. But our workers will be suffering under the same fear that those other counties suffered under until health threats were so severe that positive COVID-19 cases were made public and workers went on strike and some workers died. So what will you do, Executive Sidhu, what commitments will you make and follow it for long. I thank you all for being here tonight and thank you for my time.

Moonwater (01:24:35):

Thank you so much for joining us, Dena. I believe we have a few more speakers lined up. Janice, do you have their names for me?

Janice (01:24:47):

I do. We have Marcus, Pat and Emily.

Moonwater (01:24:54):

Okay. Thank you. So, Marcus, I believe we did hear from you last week, as well. And Pat and Emily, I know we have you in the queue and I just want to acknowledge, we have 20 more minutes for speakers. So between the three of you, we're going to ask for your assistance in sharing the time. So, Marcus?

Marcus Dee (01:25:23):

Hi. Marcus Dee. I'm coming from a Unity Village and it's good to be here with you guys tonight. I want to be quick about it. I just want to let you all know that as homeless advocate for Whatcom County, I am listening. I'm paying attention to it. There's a lot of conversations around homelessness going on right now and Bellingham. I'm glad to participate, and I'm really listening. I'm going to yield the rest of my time. But I want to ask you to please respond folks. It's not just, the listening, so we actually going to need some response to people asking for responses. And I've seen a lot of feedback on that. So please, don't be shy about answering some of these people. It'd be great to hear some responses from our leaders. Really appreciate the work everybody's doing here. Thank you. I really appreciate the community too. Much love. Thank you very much. I'm out.

Moonwater (01:26:10):

Thanks so much for joining us, again, Marcus. And let's see. Pat, can you join us with your video and audio if you're able?

Pat (01:26:21):

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Hi, welcome. There's not much I have to say that hasn't already been said. I feel a lot of us tuning into these listening sessions feel the exact same way where we've been talking about these issues for years. And now it's when the Council and the Mayor have decided that it's okay to speak on these issues. And I just want to point that out. It's kind of unfair to the work being done by the communities. Especially, minority led communities here in Bellingham. I said the other day, if you're still listening and you're still learning, then perhaps this isn't the job for you.

Pat (01:27:08):

Again, you should be with us on the ground floor as the audience, instead of having the positions of powers that you do have. A lot of the community is aware. And if not, I'll let everyone know. But president Knutson is part of the Police Pension Fund. And a lot of our city council members actually profit off of school-to-prison pipeline. If you go to the jail right here in Bellingham, it's full of minorities, unfortunately, which is surprising for a community that's predominantly white. And I have tried to contact these individuals. Especially, Mayor Fleetwood and all these people to kind of pay attention to what's happening right here in Bellingham, right under your nose. Because again, if you are not seeing this, it's because you're in a position where you've never been able to see this. And again, we've been talking about these issues for ages, and if you just listened then, maybe we wouldn't have had the issues that we have now.

Pat (01:28:06):

But Chief Doll, for example, is known to turn organization leaders against one another. Getting intel information from them and then using it against them. I just want commitment. I'm tired of people asking and doing this photo activist stuff where it's listening to our issues, but not doing anything about it. Especially, the Mayor. You could literally kneel and take as many photo ops as you want and write up as many articles as you want, but it's literally your job to do these things. And you choose not to. And multiple organizations have already addressed these issues to you and asked you to commit to the very services that we try to provide for our community. And you just choose not to. And I'm just saying your silence is violence. Your non-commitment is violence is inherently contributing to the systems that oppress us, all of us. And it's just very upsetting to see.

Pat (01:29:09):

All these laws and rules are established without the consent of the community. And it's all about that. I just want some sort of commitment. Since last week, I've been tuning into your City Council meetings and you guys literally take two hours to talk about trail rerouting and stuff like that. But you glossed and skimmed over defunding the police. When the examples are there. Suburbs in America don't have heavy policing, but they do have all the money for the resources and all these good stuff. And yet Bellingham is completely gentrified.

Pat (01:29:44):

The resources are there. You have all these organizations, all these nonprofits, literally writing up schemas on how to solve these issues for you. And you still want to listen? How about just handing off your power to the right appropriate people? Since what you've done is not at all benefiting the community. I don't want to be a part of a police state. I really don't. I want to see my people and other people flourish just like the white people in this community. And I've tried. I know I've tried talking to assistant Roxanne and I've let her know, the first step would be to diversify the City Council and the mayoral position. If you look around you and there's just white people, man, it's not normal. It's not

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normal. And the reason you can't write these laws or do these things, it's because you're not part of the community.

Pat (01:30:41):

So how much talking are we going to do before you actually start listening? I know the Lummi nation has been begging, practically asking for permission to use their own land, might I say, to create a space for them to talk and commune and come together and solve these issues. But we don't even have that. If all these people can host these events, where the heck are you guys hiding behind a screen. I've hosted multiple events, I've been to multiple events, all social distancing. And none of that is happening with the people in power. And you guys are getting paid six digits. So my question is, if you're getting paid so much out of our tax dollar, how come you guys aren't doing anything for us? It's insulting to call this collaborative listening, sir. It really is, because community... That would indicate that the communities that you are oppressing have not been saying the same thing for generations.

Pat (01:31:39):

So I wanted some sort of commitment or solidification that there could be some land restoration. And I mean, full restoration, like in Minneapolis. I want the police defunded, all these things. Because you're all perpetuating the very racism you're all say you're fighting. And it's insulting to watch every week. Every week. How you guys, predominantly white, will solve the racist issues here in Bellingham when the community has already solved it for you. But you all, don't listen. So that's all I want to say. And I've tried contacting each and every one of you, personally. But it's like you all don't care. You all don't listen to the people and that's who you're supposed to be serving.

Pat (01:32:24):

All these articles and Southern living, all these amping up stuff, nothing's getting done though. And I also want to add about the police accountability civilian group. That's already been tried in Chicago, a bunch of nonprofits doing police accountability, and it doesn't work. What does work is defunding the police. And the Bellingham police department will guarantee that they are self accountable. When I personally checked their system for recording every incident they report on and on June 3rd, a bunch of white supremacists got drunk, started paroling downtown with their assault rifles. And guess what wasn't in the police report? All the people that called in for the police department to let them know that there's these drunk racist going around with assault weapons. So clearly you all, don't take your own accountability. You're lying through your teeth. We don't want to see no more videos of you all talking about the police perspective. It's literally a job.

Pat (01:33:22):

I've worked like 10 jobs my entire life, and I'm only 22 it's you could literally just stop doing your job. Just allocate the resources where they need to go. Seriously. Because people aren't... This is a state of emergency and people are dying. And it's, you guys are still in the listening process. It's an insult. It's an insulting. As if we haven't already done the work. Is your turn, now. Either do it or we unseat you, basically. And that's all I'm going to say about that. Not a lot of work being done on your side. It's literally your job. And we're watching you. It's all I want to say.

Moonwater (01:34:07):

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Thank you, Pat. Appreciate you joining us tonight. Emily, are you available to join us and unmute yourself or share your video? Welcome.

Emily Wynne (01:34:18):

Hi, thank you. So my name is Emily Wynne and I'm a mom in Bellingham. I moved here with my daughter, who's now 14, when she was a couple months old. She is half black, by the way. And I am also a tribal member, a Rosebud Lakota tribal member. And I want to say, I say a lot of things have resonated with me sitting here hearing people's perspectives. And what really resonates with me is this idea that we need community. We need to come together in unity, is what that means. Come with unity. And so easily, especially when there's high emotions... That I really, I want to honor. They're totally valid. Any feelings that come up for anybody is totally valid. And I want to acknowledge how we've all inherited a mess. And I am 36, almost 37. I'm just now beginning to understand how we've got here.

Emily Wynne (01:35:59):

And just now beginning to engage in this conversation of racial justice. And I so appreciate the opportunity and I appreciate people, the City Council members and Mayor and everybody else bringing us here together tonight to share and to be heard. And I also want to empathize with all the people who are on the streets and feeling completely frustrated and discouraged. It's all so real. And so how can we do our inner work? How can we be present with what is alive, right now, and really live into this idea of coming together as a community. And it's so easy to go to one side or another and taken these discriminatory thoughts. Some of them might be all cops are bastards and I don't think that's true. Another one might be black men are dangerous and criminals, and I don't think that's true. And I think it's time to really get honest with ourselves and with each other and just be open and speak. And I'm really happy that we're doing that here, today.

Emily Wynne (01:38:14):

What I'm learning is that change, it's a slow process. But we just take one step at a time. And I want to restate something that the first person who spoke, Michael Raul, said, "United we stand, divided we fall." And I really think that's so relevant. I think, if any of us are not included, don't feel love, don't feel belonging, we all suffer. So how can we come together and be united and rise? And I am curious where answers to questions that have been posed are going to be answered, where they're going to be posted. And I have a question. I wonder how much of the City's budget goes to the Police Department? What percentage, precisely.

Emily Wynne (01:39:27):

So, thank you.

Moonwater (01:39:28):

Thank you so much for joining us, Emily. And we appreciate your time tonight.

Moonwater (01:39:39):

I'm just going to do... Transparently, do a time check. I believe it is 7:43. We do need to conclude tonight's meeting by 8:00 PM. And I believe we are going to hear some closing remarks and reflections from Mayor Fleetwood. And so it's important that we leave a bit of time for that at the end of tonight's meeting.

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Moonwater (01:40:08):

Janice, we may have time for one more speaker so long as there's an understanding that their time would be limited to five minutes, instead of the 10 that we began the session with. So if there is still someone in the queue, we do have sufficient time for one final speaker with five minutes.

Janice (01:40:31):

That would be Myra. And then Matt is moving her into the room, now.

Moonwater (01:40:36):

Okay. Thank you.

Moonwater (01:40:38):

So Myra? Myra, if you are able to share your video, if you'd like and unmute yourself. Welcome. And we just have about... Invite you just to limit your comments to five minutes. Thank you so much.

Myra Ramos (01:40:56):

My name is Myra Ramos. I live on Lummi Island. And my comments are addressed to County Executive Sidhu. I want to call attention to the situation of our County Health Department and its capacity to serve all members of our community, including farm workers. I'm aware that there is a Health Advisory Board that is doing the best job that it can under daunting circumstances, but its mandate has been limited and it was understaffed and underfunded even before the pandemic. Now, it is seriously under resourced to address our current health challenges and the needs of the people in the County. So I propose that the Health Department mandate be expanded to deal with serious public health issues and that its funding be significantly increased to support that effort.

Myra Ramos (01:42:05):

Where to find these additional funds? The County budget for the next two years is being prepared now. And now is the time to seek reallocation of funding. One could start with the Sheriff's office, which currently receives the major share of the County budget. Finally, Satpal, I would ask that you come back to tell us what your budget review shows, what the opportunities are to reallocate and what you think can be done to create a strong Public Health Department for us in our County. Thank you very much.

Moonwater (01:43:02):

Thank you so much, Myra. We appreciate your comments this evening.

Moonwater (01:43:09):

And it looks we are bringing our speakers to a close at this point. So, Myra, if you can hide your video. I'd like to welcome Mayor's Fleetwood to share some summary reflections from this evening we've heard from such a variety of folks tonight. So Mayor, I will turn it over to you. And then I have just a few seconds of closing comments, after your remarks. So thank you, Mayor.

Mayor Seth Fleetwood (01:43:40):

Thank you, Moonwater. I mean, we've all participated in and listened and I want to go through and just reiterate all the things that I've heard this evening. But I do want to thank people for taking the time to

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express themselves. And this is not easy. It's not comfortable. And all of us who are in these positions of policy making, can't take things personally. It comes with the position. We've just got to continue to do our very best to try and understand the work that's in front of us.

Mayor Seth Fleetwood (01:44:38):

I don't believe that the work of dismantling structural racism is going to be easy work. There's been some criticism of me... And I won't use this opportunity as a retort to things I've heard. But there's been an expression from one particular group, that I'm not committing to things that have been requested. Why am I not committed to defund police 50% or 25%? Or the questions of demilitarizing the police forces as some I have expressed. And the answer is very simple. I'm very much a process person. Process in mind, I view good public process is the thing that insures fairness and ensures that voices are being heard. This is work that's going to involve among other things, taskforce work with lots of voices. I've heard a lot of things tonight from people that will inform that work. I like that the idea of convening a number of different committees that all work in collaboration to inform this change that we're in the midst of. I'm a collaborative person. I want to convene the Council in all of these discussions. It is policy after all, and I'm not a dictator.

Mayor Seth Fleetwood (01:46:23):

So I want us to be collaborative throughout our community.

Mayor Seth Fleetwood (01:46:29):

To the voices that have expressed frustration and their anger about why this hasn't happened before in this nation. I would just suggest that regardless of all the complex reasons, that account for a good answer to that question, I would just observe that we have an amazing opportunity right now. Things are coming together. As John Lewis said, "This particular moment of civic and civil activism around issues of racial equity feel," he said in his view, "far more inclusive." I think it's truly going to be a movement that doesn't end until we've made real progress. And we're one community. We're one out of 3,500 counties in this nation and we're one of 10,000 cities or so. And we're going to do our best to be inclusive and collaborative, here. And so as we go forward, we're going to continue to look at ways that we can improve the listening.

Mayor Seth Fleetwood (01:47:37):

I apologize for people that express frustration with the fact that we're listening. That was an effort to be responsive to things that we heard. And it was early on after the George Floyd killing, when that was one of the demands we heard frequently. It was, "This is the time when you, especially white people, should be listening." And I think that to a very large degree is what we've been doing. I've been among other things, getting a number of book titles and reading Ibram Kendi, for example, 'How to be Anti-racist.' I think that's going to inform the work that I take a part in, in the coming weeks and months. And, of course, I will partner with County Executive Sidhu, and so many others in crafting how that work should come together.

Mayor Seth Fleetwood (01:48:34):

So I appreciate everything tonight. People have asked, where can we have answers to this? One of the questions that are posed and that's an absolutely fair question. One question is whether or not we can fashion something at some point where we're able to facilitate some kind of a process by which we can

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have a dialogue. And I think we're going to work on that so that I'm in a position to answer questions that are asked, that County Executive Sidhu, council members have that opportunity. And we can engage in a more robust dialogue in that respect. So we're committed to that.

Mayor Seth Fleetwood (01:49:18):

So thank you all, and look forward to seeing you, again. Thank you, Moonwater, and everyone who's worked so hard and putting this together. It's not easy. It's complicated. It's complicated by the pandemic, that's making everything more difficult. Yeah. We're trying, and we'll continue to do our best. So thank you.

Moonwater (01:49:44):

Thank you, Mayor Fleetwood. And thank you everyone for joining us this evening to listen. Thank you to the community members who spoke tonight and who have shared the space with us. Thank you to those who have provided feedback, suggestions and outreach support in this planning process for this listening series. Thank you to the city and County staff, who've helped to coordinate logistics. Thank you to our translators. We hope you'll continue to spread the word about this opportunity and we hope you will all join us again this coming Saturday, August 15th from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM.

Moonwater (01:50:25):

We're continuing to try to do additional outreach and further refine and strengthen this process so we can invite and hear from an even broader spectrum of the community. Additional meetings by the planning group will continue to help shape the next listening sessions. And as I've shared before, feedback about the structure of tonight's meeting and suggestions for future meetings is warmly welcomed and can be provided to the Mayor's Office at mayorsoffice@cob.org and to the County Executive's Office at executive@co.whatcom.wa.us.

Moonwater (01:51:07):

I thank everyone, again, for participating, for listening, for sharing and I look forward to us continuing that as we move forward as a community. Thank you. And good night.

END [01:51:29]