

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Moonwater (00:00:02):

Welcome and good evening. Thank you-

Speaker 1 (00:00:08):

Hi.

Moonwater (00:00:09):

Hello.

Speaker 1 (00:00:10):

Hi, this is Ikindarjit Dhillon, the Punjabi interpreter.

Moonwater (00:00:16):

Thank you. If everyone, at this moment, could mute themselves, I will invite everyone to join us at the start of the first in a series of listening sessions focused on race and justice in Whatcom County. My name is Moonwater and I serve as executive director of the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center. We are an independent nonprofit organization, and my role here tonight is as an impartial moderator for the meeting this evening. This is a public meeting sponsored by the city of Bellingham, Whatcom County, the Lummi Nation, Western Washington University. Representatives of those entities along with city and county council members are here with us tonight and participating as listeners. While the Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office and the Bellingham Police Department were listed as event sponsors, they're not participating formally in the virtual meeting space by request from, and out of respect for, community members and partners.

Moonwater (00:01:20):

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. 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 in advance for your grace and patience with any technical glitches if they arise. If you are just joining us now and would like to speak tonight, you can sign up to speak by visiting [www.cob.org\listening series](http://www.cob.org/listening series). That's [www.cob.org\listening series](http://www.cob.org/listening series). If our Spanish interpreter at this moment could share that same direction for our Spanish-speaking audience to join us, I would appreciate it.

Speaker 2 (00:02:39):

Sorry. I totally lost the screen where it said that.

Moonwater (00:02:42):

That's okay. If you could translate for our Spanish-speaking audience to join us, if they'd like to speak tonight, to go to [cob.org\listening series](http://cob.org/listening series).

Speaker 2 (00:03:00):

July 28, 2020
Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Cob.org\listeningseries. Backslash.

Moonwater (00:03:02):

Yes.

Speaker 2 (00:03:03):

It was there and now it's not. Cob.org/listening. Okay.

Moonwater (00:03:14):

If you can translate that in this moment, that would be lovely.

Speaker 2 (00:03:16):

Yes. Yes.

Moonwater (00:03:16):

Thank you.

Speaker 2 (00:03:36):

[Spanish language 00:03:18]

Moonwater (00:03:39):

Thank you. Gracias. I'd like to invite our Punjabi interpreter to do the same. Thank you. If you can unmute yourself and translate that as well, I would appreciate it. Piku, are you able to unmute yourself and translate for our Punjabi listeners-

Speaker 1 (00:04:23):

Yes.

Moonwater (00:04:23):

... to go to cob.org/listeningseries if they would like to speak tonight?

Speaker 1 (00:04:33):

Okay. [Punjabi language 00:04:32].

Moonwater (00:04:48):

Thank you so much.

Speaker 1 (00:04:49):

You're welcome.

Moonwater (00:04:50):

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Before we get much further, 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 the 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 on the community at large towards further recognition, reflection, learning, and action. Thank you. I thank our city and county council members, and I would ask you all to step into listening mode and kindly turn off your videos at this point, and we will move you to attendees status. We now have the opportunity to hear briefly from Mayor Fleetwood. Mayor Fleetwood.

Seth Fleetwood (00:05:56):

Yeah. Hi. Thank you so much. Thank you so much, Moonwater, for your opening and your help in this. I'd like to thank the government sponsors, the community partners, the elected officials that are participating tonight. A special call out to Ellie, Matt, Marty, and Ben in IT who are helping us with tech support. Of course, in the old days, we'd all identify some public place and people would show up in person and so this is the new world we're in. So I hope everybody can recognize that we're doing our best with Zoom technology and all allow ourselves some latitude.

Seth Fleetwood (00:06:51):

This was born out of, of course, this context. A national pandemic, first, that no one anticipated or saw coming. At least most of us didn't. A recession. And then of course on May 25th, just over a couple of months ago, the tragic killing of George Floyd, which ignited a national movement to address issues of racial equity. Here in Bellingham, this listening series came about, at least as it relates to my role, from a march that happened on June 15th. A couple of hundred people who were marching to bring attention to important issues came to City Hall, knocked on the mayor's office door, and I went out and I spoke to them and there were many calls from them. "What do you intend to do?" I said, "well, we've heard from many, many people to listen."

Seth Fleetwood (00:08:03):

So I said, "I'd like to help create a listening opportunity," so that's where this came from as far as my involvement. There were other community members who had expressed the same interest in doing that, so we've put this together. It hasn't come together perfectly. This is uncharted territory for many of us, and we're well-intentioned and doing our best, but we're certainly going to learn from tonight and do better and try and be as inclusive as we can in the organization going forward. So the purpose tonight is to provide the public with opportunities to share their experiences, to inform commitments to effective change, to create a public record of people's ideas and experiences, and to elevate the importance of these issues and ensure accountability for addressing them. We've heard from many people who, as I say, are wanting us at this initial stage to listen.

Seth Fleetwood (00:09:12):

This is not one and done. Lots of folks have expressed understandable skepticism or cynicism. They've heard these sorts of commitments before, and we just want to say that we're very serious about our commitments to addressing the really difficult work of learning about these issues and then dismantling structural and systemic racism. It's a national movement that's happening. We're a part of it. It's

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

happening in communities nationwide. Public, private, nonprofit, all of the above are working on these issues at the same time and we're committed to making progress. So I just want to thank everybody for participating tonight, and we'll have more of these. This is the beginning of an effort that's going to take a long time and involve taskforce work and really diving into to these issues. So thank you all so much.

Moonwater (00:10:13):

Thank you, Mayor. Executive Sidhu.

Satpal Sidhu (00:10:18):

Hi. Good evening, everybody. My name is Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive, and I welcome you all who are actively investing their very valuable time this evening to participate in this listening series. I firmly believe that we can collectively make our community better and a welcoming place and respectable place for everybody, and today is a small step in that direction. I look forward to listening to your ideas, your suggestions, and your stories. Thank you very much.

Moonwater (00:11:07):

Thank you. Western Washington University President Randhawa.

Sabah Randhawa (00:11:15):

Thank you, Moonwater. Mayor Fleetwood, thank you for taking the lead in organizing this listening series. This series could not have come at a more opportune time. As Mayor Fleetwood said, they're two powerful historic events, the COVID-19 pandemic and the social justice movement in the wake of George Floyd's tragic death that really are forcing us to question our structure, policies and practices. Western Washington University exists in the context of our broader community. Our students, faculty and staff live in the Bellingham community. The work that we do is through our interactions and in the context of Bellingham and Whatcom County. Our real asset is our people. So when we work on attracting and retaining a highly qualified and diverse student body and a workforce here at Western, we can only do so if collectively us, the city, the county can really create a living environment that is inviting, safe and inclusive for everyone. These listening sessions are not just important to me. They are important to my wife Uzma who is joining me today.

Sabah Randhawa (00:12:35):

They are important to members of our board of trustees and our executive and academic leadership, and several members of whom are also signed up to listen to our community. I share a joint commitment with the Mayor and county exec, and I really look forward to the conversation and to listening to our community. Thank you.

Moonwater (00:12:57):

Thank you. And Lummi Indian Business Council Vice Chairman, Travis Brockie.

Travis Brockie (00:13:05):

Good evening, everybody. My name is Travis Brockie. I'm the Vice Chairman for the Lummi Nation, and it's an honor to be on this listening session and hear the stories and the voices of the inequalities that we've seen, not only across the nation, but in our own backyard. I'd like to welcome everybody to our

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

ancestral homeland here in Whatcom County and throughout the San Juan Islands. Thank you, Mayor Fleetwood and County Executive Sidhu for taking the time to be with and listen to the people in our community. Here at Lummi Nation, we are far too familiar with racial inequality and systemic racism. We have a sacred and inherent responsibility to protect our home and our people from these types of threats. By sheer will, unconditional love and perseverance by our ancestors, we are still here today. We come from survivors and our story will live on forever because of them.

Travis Brockie (00:14:13):

Throughout history, we can't forget the history with what happened to our people in regards to the historical trauma that has been passed on from generation to generation, since pre-contact and post-contact of Europeans. We've been fighting assimilation, termination on a daily and threats to our treaty rights that we've engaged with the government and signed a treaty in exchange for our treaty rights. Our people have survived failed federal Indian policies, such as the boarding schools, failed Indian policies, such as the Dawes Act, which was basically taking our land away from us. The Howard-Wheeler Act, also known as the Indian Reorganization Act, which forced upon a Western form of political structure systems across Indian country, and also we didn't become citizens until 1924. Our people are survivors, but we still face the inequalities as just any other race, and by far more with our missing and murdered indigenous women and also our men across Indian country. So I'm here to listen to the stories and thank you.

Moonwater (00:15:33):

Thank you all.

Seth Fleetwood (00:15:35):

Thank you.

Moonwater (00:15:40):

So bear with me for just a few minutes and then we will get started with our speakers. I'd like to thank you all for joining us again this evening. I will transparently share that while I have fairly recently joined in the planning for this evening, I have been able to spend many hours over the last few days in conversation with those involved, to both understand the intent of the sessions and the impact of the planning process. It feels important to name at the outset thus far, that this has been an imperfect process and the meeting tonight will be imperfect. There are members of the community who are unable and unwilling to participate because of the structure tonight, and while efforts have been made to address some of those barriers, much work still needs to be done.

Moonwater (00:16:23):

There are many improvements to be made in order to build trust, strengthen relationships, and improve the processes and opportunities that we have before us. What I do know is that tonight's listening session is rooted firmly in a desire to move forward in a good way and in order to do that together, to move forward in a good way as a community, the flaws and imperfections need to be named and addressed and each future iteration of listening and learning together can then be strengthened and improved. So here we are in the middle of a pandemic, perfectly imperfect. I will admit that coming together in this form and format over Zoom for such an important meeting feels uncomfortable to me,

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

and maybe to many of you, and yet here we are with an opportunity before us this evening. So in the spirit of shared understanding for tonight, we'd like to share a slide with agreements for our session. I'd like to review a few agreements before we move forward. Whether you were on the Zoom call or listening in another way, I invite you tonight to listen deeply, to bring with you humility, to reflect thoughtfully, to expect non-closure this evening. Conversations and changes will be ongoing. I also invite you to share the space. So for those of you that have signed up to speak, I invite you to share the space with one another and to try to limit your initial comments to three to five minutes in order to allow as many voices to be heard tonight before the meeting closes at 9:00 PM. This time limitation likely feels wholly insufficient and is one of the many pieces that can be adjusted in future sessions. I also, this evening, invite you to help center the voices of people of color. 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 initially to make space for your fellow community members who do identify as people of color to be heard this evening. If you plan to yield your time and you are signed in as an attendee, you may now use the raise hand function, which is private for our tech team to see, at the bottom of the screen in Zoom and we will shift the order of speakers accordingly.

Moonwater (00:18:59):

I understand that many of you have joined us tonight and have prepared some statements to make, so this is simply a request for your consideration. Time permitting, if you'd like us to come back to you, please stay in the meeting and we'll do our best to return to you. Thank you. As you can see, we also have an ASL translator present and they will be with us, swapping out for the duration of the meeting. As you've heard, Spanish and Punjabi interpreters are standing by if needed by any of our speakers. I will hold up this card to visually cue you to bring your time speaking to a close. So you may see me making that motion as a gentle way to remind you to help share the space. Thank you in advance for your assistance in this regard. Further, just to acknowledge, it is our intent for those who want to speak tonight to have a chance to share their perspective before anyone has the opportunity to speak twice. So thank you again for your help in advance with time management this evening.

Moonwater (00:20:12):

I also ask for your grace and patience 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 an admittedly awkward and very challenging way. Lastly, I'd like to acknowledge in advance the significant energy it takes to show up and speak, especially to share tonight's messages, beliefs, and experiences that may have been shared for years and have not been heard or acted on in a way that was needed.

Moonwater (00:20:45):

So tonight, thank you in advance to everyone who is willing and able to contribute their voices to this listening session. I'd like to invite our tech team to show the slide with the process for this evening. To begin, city staff will be assisting behind the scenes to coordinate the order of speakers, as you now are all 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. Please indicate if Spanish or Punjabi translation would be helpful to you at that time. Once you were done speaking, I ask that you

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

mute yourself. Once the group of three has spoken, they will return to being attendees and the next group of three will be brought into the room.

Moonwater (00:21:45):

We will continue this process until just before 9:00 PM at which point we will close the evening session. So thank you for your patience at this point, as we work to queue our first three speakers and hear these same directions from our Spanish and Punjabi interpreters. If our Spanish interpreter could explain the process to our Spanish-speaking audience now, and if our Punjabi interpreter could follow and share that same process, and we will cue our speakers. Thank you.

Speaker 2 (00:22:20):

Can the slide be put up in the screen again, the one where you just explained it, because it'd be easier that way?

Moonwater (00:22:28):

Thank you.

Speaker 2 (00:22:29):

[foreign language 00:22:33].

Moonwater (00:22:34):

Thank you. Piku, are you able to share the same in Punjabi, please?

Speaker 1 (00:23:27):

So that would be for the speakers?

Moonwater (00:23:32):

Yes, please.

Speaker 1 (00:23:33):

Okay. Okay. [foreign language 00:23: 37] Thank you.

Moonwater (00:24:24):

Thank you. Janice, do we have the first three speakers names?

Janice Keller (00:24:30):

Yes, I have Kai and Caroline and Keith.

Moonwater (00:24:39):

Thank you. We are going to shift them to become panelists. Do we have Kai ready to share your audio and your video if you're willing and able? Welcome, Kai. Thank you.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Kai Rapaport (00:25:08):

Hi. My name is Kai and I speak as a community member in the Roosevelt neighborhood in Bellingham. I want to say that given Bellingham's COVID shortfalls of about 10 and a half million as pointed out by the Western Front, and given that in August we see unemployment benefits from COVID-19 expiring, that 36% of renters in this nation missed their housing bills this July and we're just barely saved by Governor Inslee's eviction moratorium, given that people of color are disproportionately affected by police, including African American, Native American farm worker, the homeless, deaf communities, the Bellingham police uses force 9% in their interactions as of April 2020, despite African Americans being 1.56% of our population in Bellingham and a vascular neck constraint is a use of force, the Bellingham police budget is nearly a third of our city's budget.

Kai Rapaport (00:26:05):

Our police spends large amount of money, as we know, moving homeless camps rather than actually addressing the problem, as the tiny home advocacy organization Homes Now have mentioned. The solution is clear, that despite these community organizations that are helpful, to defund the police. There's been petitions of thousands of people to defund the police, to separate school police officers in elementary schools and in Western, to implement solutions like [inaudible 00:26:37] and many others.

Kai Rapaport (00:26:39):

The answer is not just if we defund the police. The answer's not cutting training. We cannot continue business as usual at our August budget. To the council members and the mayor, I would like a response about these. Personally, I've sent you all the messages. Do you support from the community leaders? Do you support real justice efforts? Do you support Michael Brown? What will you commit to this budget session to cutting the police budget by 50%, to support domestic violence services, cultural spaces for BiPoC people, harm reduction services like clean needle exchange programs, mental health mobile response services, secure, safe, affordable housing, and more? Thank you for your time and I appreciate all of your presence for the Lummi Nation who are helping sponsor this and to all the community members that are part of this.

Moonwater (00:27:34):

Thank you, Kai. Caroline, can you unmute yourself and share your video if you were willing and able? So I think what we will do at this moment, if Caroline is working on her video, is we'll put your space on hold and Keith, could you please unmute yourself and share your video if you are able, and I will try to come back to Caroline?

Keith Raymond (00:28:42):

Hello?

Moonwater (00:28:46):

Hello. Welcome. Thank you, Keith.

Keith Raymond (00:28:52):

So first off, I want to say thank you. I'm new to all of this and the whole system and the politics and everything that goes on that controls day-to-day life for a guy like me and my family. To start off, I've

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

been living in Bellingham for about 12 years and as a black man living in Bellingham, it's not been easy. It hasn't been an easy road, but there was a lot of things that I see in Bellingham that I feel like that needs to be addressed, especially in the poor communities. A lot of things that I heard a lot of people saying and they want to change things, but nobody talk about our kids. That's really disheartening to me, that all these grown folks speaking about different things, but nobody's talking about how to invest money and time into our kids, especially the lower income family kids or the kids that have two parents working, who don't get a chance to spend a lot of time with them.

Keith Raymond (00:30:14):

They may need opportunities and need guidance and things like that, and they may not can afford to be able to get in some of these programs because they don't have the money and the funds, and so we just leave them out. I think there's a big discourse here. I think that in Bellingham, it's more about money than growth of community. I'm from St. Louis, Missouri, and there's community centers there. There's not one community center here in Bellingham. There's not one community center in Whatcom County, and so that tells me a lot about how y'all treat y'all youth, what y'all think about y'all youth, the time y'all put into y'all youth. These kids ain't got nothing to do around her. Everybody want to defund the police and I'm with police treating people better.

Keith Raymond (00:31:13):

I mean, I've talked to Seth and the police chief about those things. But I think the real lapse is the youth, and nobody's talking about that. Nobody's giving time to these kids to help create better human beings so that we don't have problems like systemic racism and police brutality, because they've grown up in a system where they've seen different things and been around different people and been offered opportunities that they may not have had. There's a big problem I see in Bellingham, and I think it really starts with what we do with these kids. There's nothing in Bellingham really to do for these kids except go out and drink and smoke and party and get in trouble and get into drugs, and this stuff is starting at middle school.

Keith Raymond (00:32:19):

This is not even starting at high school. This stuff is starting at middle school with our 12 and 13 and 14 year old kids. I've been here 12 years and I haven't seen any change. I haven't seen any push towards anything collectively to help the youth in the community to grow. Now I want to speak on racism and then I'll yield. But I took my kids out of Bellingham public schools because of racism. My kids haven't been to Bellingham public schools going on four years now because of the racism in the public schools, because of the way my kids were treated.

Keith Raymond (00:33:02):

... schools, because of the way my kids were treated. Because when they did something, they were instantly treated as a villain instead of giving the opportunity and having a side. There's a big problem with racism. And it's not just with police. It's inherently in these communities, what the parents are teaching these kids. I think there needs to be some type of way to start to, I guess, create some type of understanding because listening is good but action is better, and words are just words. I can say anything I want to. I can put my mouth to say anything I want to make my mouth say, but what I do shows what I'm about. Simple as that. It doesn't get any simpler than that. I'm about action.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Keith Raymond (00:34:03):

If you guys are going to do something, city council, mayor, then get it done. I don't know all the hoops and loops y'all got to jump through to get something done but for me it seems like a bunch of BS. I think if there are things that need to be changed right now, then change them. What you waiting for? I'm pretty sure black people who've been dealing with racism for hundreds of years, and so why wait to continue to change the way we police our communities? Why wait to change those things? What I would say is that we need to stop talking and start doing and I yield back.

Moonwater (00:34:46):

Thank you, Keith.

Keith Raymond (00:34:47):

You're welcome.

Moonwater (00:34:49):

Do we have Caroline? Are you present with us and are you able to unmute yourself and share your video, if you would like?

Janice Keller (00:34:58):

Moonwater, we don't see her signed on so we're bringing in the next three. We'd like to invite Carrie Blackwood, Karin Clumpner and Julian Swanson.

Moonwater (00:35:13):

Was that Carrie, Karin and Julie?

Janice Keller (00:35:17):

Yes.

Moonwater (00:35:17):

Okay.

Janice Keller (00:35:17):

Julian. I'm sorry, Julian.

Moonwater (00:35:20):

Julian. Thank you. So Carrie, if you are able to unmute yourself and share your video, if you are willing and able, we would like to hear from you. Okay. So Carrie is yielding her time. Karen or Karin, are you able to join us and unmute and share your video?

Karin Clumpner (00:35:51):

I think I am.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Moonwater (00:35:53):

I hear you. I don't see you. So if you would like to-

Karin Clumpner (00:35:58):

There we go.

Moonwater (00:35:59):

Okay. There you are. All right.

Karin Clumpner (00:36:02):

I did not expect to be speaking. I just came to listen as well, but since you've asked, I just want to thank you all for doing this listening session. I am a first generation American, but from Germany so we don't need interpreters mostly, but I am very interested in the issues and thank you very much for addressing these kinds of listening situations. Thank you, Moonwater.

Moonwater (00:36:33):

Thank you. I will clarify for everyone who's listening in right now, you are also able to watch on BTV and on YouTube, and so we are making our way through the list of everyone who has signed on to the Zoom meeting to give people an opportunity to speak. So you can simply let us know if you would like to yield, or you can log off the Zoom meeting if you're not interested in speaking and watch in another format. Julian, you are next on the list. Are you able to unmute yourself and join us? Welcome. And you're still muted. There we go.

Julian Swanson (00:37:16):

Hello. My name is Julian Swanson. I'm a Bellingham resident, as well as an active member of many organizations supporting the community of Bellingham. I'm here primarily to talk to Mayor Seth, because well, I'm not expecting there to be a whole lot of the general public able to really hear this. I see that there is about 73 people here now. So I'm here to talk about the actions and responsibilities the mayor has to Bellingham, particularly concerning Bellingham police actions. I have many growing concerns ranging a wide variety of topics, so a three to five minute discussion period is not very conducive to being able to address my concerns. Many of the other people around me and our community have similar problems.

Julian Swanson (00:38:28):

A lot of the people that I know have far worse problems than my own. I recognize that many of our most vulnerable voices are not able to participate, creating a situation where they're not able to participate in these conversations to determine policies. I also recognize that there is an immediate danger to all Washington residents that will begin to take effect August 1st. The deadline I and many of my peers face is that of homelessness during a pandemic when the chief health advice is stay at home. Due to the statewide eviction moratorium ending in August with no rental aid, over 30% of Bellingham is likely looking at August like a barrel of a gun. I would like to make a brief statement here is that I'm made aware that the governor has extended the moratorium in some ways, but it is still a growing concern that this ends way before the entirety of the economy opens. The deadline I and many of my peers face is that of homelessness during a pandemic.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Julian Swanson (00:39:48):

Sorry. I understand that most people in America will move out voluntarily in order to avoid the punishing process that is a modern day eviction, which includes but is not limited to having your name taken into a rental blacklist, just for showing up to court in protest to being evicted. I recognize these as real and legitimate fears among the wider public, as well as an issue I am facing. The debt is racking up to pay our bills. Now unemployed, I have largely run out of money to pay our bills. This is a common occurrence, even outside of the greater disaster of COVID-19, compounding with the forced shutdown of our economy and jobs. As this is a government-mandated shutdown, the people cannot be shouldered with the burden under the same tired victim blaming under the auspices of personal responsibility. I recognize that our government is responsible for preventing this looming catastrophe and as all our larger legislative bodies are unwilling to prevent the hollowing out of our town, this responsibility falls to you.

Julian Swanson (00:41:02):

I am here representing only myself, even though I am part of many community outreach and aids in Bellingham, because all of these organizations and citizen groups are unwilling to validate this Zoom call due to a severe lack of ability or willingness to involve our Bellingham community outside of the local bureaucrats. I am participating in this, for a lack of a better word, farce, to bring to your attention Bellingham residents require you, Seth, to act in the capacity we have elected you and paid you to do. We need a directive from the Bellingham chief of police to have no police response to calls for eviction. This alone will stay any forced removal of people from their homes. Seth, we require that you replace the current police chief with the non-police citizen with a clear directive to halt evictions.

Julian Swanson (00:42:03):

This will not be enough, but it will give us the best start to ease the plight of our city's residents. Additionally, we will require you to personally put an extension on the current moratorium preventing evictions until at least three months after the end of all the shutdown restrictions and zero COVID-19 cases in our area of Whatcom County. These two things will grant us the safety we need as a city to overcome the immediate crisis of massive action this August. This will not be the end of what needs to be done to protect the economic security of Bellingham and our residents. This space you hold as mayor of Bellingham is one that has the power of life and death over our entire society. I, and hopefully the rest of Bellingham, will hold you personally responsible for any choice of inaction, hand-ringing or delays in your response to prevent evictions from being a death sentence. Thank you for your time. My name is Julian Swanson, again. Thank you.

Moonwater (00:43:11):

Thank you so much, Julian. And I see Audrey, you have joined us. I'm going to check in with Janice about the order of the next three speakers-

Audrey (00:43:20):

Thank you.

Moonwater (00:43:20):

... so I can capture people's names.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Janice Keller (00:43:23):

We have Ken Gass, Markis Dee and Audrey.

Moonwater (00:43:31):

Okay. So I'm going to follow that. I'm just checking with our tech team to see if I should follow that order. Audrey, can I invite you to hide your camera? We're trying to follow the order in which people registered. So I'll have you hide your camera for a moment and Ken, if you could unmute yourself and if you are willing to share your video, we will hear from you first.

Ken Gass (00:44:00):

I am not speaking. Sorry. I am listening.

Moonwater (00:44:02):

That's okay.

Ken Gass (00:44:02):

It's my role to listen.

Moonwater (00:44:03):

Okay. Thank you, Ken. So Markis Dee, if you could unmute yourself and share your video, if you would like to. We'll hear from you next.

Markis Dee (00:44:14):

I'm glad to. Can you hear me now?

Moonwater (00:44:17):

Yes.

Markis Dee (00:44:18):

Hi. I am Markis Dee and I am the county-appointed homeless advocate on the Homeless Strategies work group for Whatcom County. I do want to be brief. I do want to yield to our people of color who are definitely need to be spotlighted here. And being a homeless advocate, I also want to speak to the fact that we have an inordinate amount of people of color who are homeless and who are facing homelessness. Listening to the comments tonight, I want you to all to know I'm listening. I'm hearing numbers that are scaring me, and I know it's time for us all to take action. I'm not only the homeless advocate for Whatcom County, I'm also the vice chair at Homes Now. The tiny home community unity village down in Fairhaven is by us. We've also done a couple of tent encampments in Bellingham, one right behind City Hall that was called Winter Haven. Safe Haven was over at the 911 Center off of Alabama and Texas.

Markis Dee (00:45:17):

I just want to say that we need to catch up with a lot of other municipalities at this point to even get tent encampments going. And it's vitally important. Now tent encampments cannot be the end all,

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

okay? Because we need to move on toward other housing. Tiny home villages do work, but if we can come up with something else, apartment living, whatever that is. We have a housing problem and it is about to get really bad. We need to get ahead of the curve. We need to lead. We all need to lead, and we can even lead the state from here because we have the people. We have volunteers. So I just want to energize everybody. I have good news in that the camp cleanups that were not being performed up to policy, that's being shaped up largely to a lot of the work that I've been doing in the last two months. I'm very proud of that and burdened with that.

Markis Dee (00:46:06):

I do that for all of us in the community and I urge you to pay attention to that. In the last year or so during county councils and on the Homeless Strategies, I mean, city councils, excuse me, and on the Homeless Strategies work group, where I sit, I've been asking for reallocation of funds from the camp cleanups to go to funding people to get the temporary shelter and transitioning into better sheltering those very same people that were cleaning up. We don't like to use the term sweeps. So a lot of us are familiar with the term sweep and it seems to have a much worse connotation than a camp cleanup. Anyway, the camp cleanups, when we clean them up, it's very expensive and then we'll see you again next week. We are in an emergency. We need to not be doing that. The Health Department has recommended against it. The CDC has recommended against it, and we can do so much more anyway.

Markis Dee (00:47:04):

We need to take a massive amount of that funding, let's start with 50%, and take it away from that program and put that toward emergency sheltering immediately with the promise of a stronger shelter than just tent encampments by this winter. Because we do know that tents don't work in the winter. I mean, let's all face it. We don't want to do that. So I do want to yield the rest of my time. I want to say that I'm going to try and stay with all of these listening. I'll be listening and anybody who's got a message to get to me, you can get to me at homesnow.org. You can hit me and we'll just talk. But I definitely want to make myself available here too. I'm listening and I do yield the rest of my time, and I hope to hear more from all of you. Thank you.

Moonwater (00:47:48):

Thank you so much, Markis. We do have Audrey who was next in the queue, and we seem to have lost the video feed for Executive Sidhu, so we'll work on that. Janice will also work to queue the next three people. So Audrey, we can see and hear you now, I believe. Welcome.

Audrey (00:48:12):

Hi. I apologize. First of all, I hardly know how to use Zoom, so probably appeared out of nowhere there. I, like Keith, am really concerned about there being no afterschool programs, especially for children with families of little means. I grew up in a pretty affluent community. There were a lot of school programs that children were literally bused from the school directly to the Boys and Girls Club. It was the land of Bill and Melinda Gates so they gave a lot of money, a lot of support. I'm not sure why we're not getting that in Bellingham, but Keith is absolutely correct.

Audrey (00:48:56):

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Kids have nothing to do here that's safe. My daughter's now 24, but she grew up here in schools starting in the first year of high school, but I could not believe the lack of activities, structured activities for kids in this town. I think for kids to also mix interracially, inter-culturally, that's a very important aspect of it. People are able to go outside of their typical circles when they're involved in those kinds of activities. My other concern, a big one, is how is community action, the Opportunity Council, going to step up and distribute millions of rental assistance dollars that is going to them. Historically, it has been almost impossible for people to get rental assistance in a timely manner efficiently, even on the verge of eviction. I know reading recently with the CARE Act, a lot of the money that's going away from unemployment is going to rental assistance.

Audrey (00:50:07):

My fear is that they're understaffed and not equipped to be able to distribute those funds to the people, the working poor, the people that have worked, that are two paychecks away from the street. A lot of them, just like the last gentlemen said, are close to being on the street and we need to know that the people that we're entrusting our tax funds with actually can deliver the goods. That's a big concern of mine, definitely. The defunding of the police reallocation. I'm definitely against the homeless camp sweeps because I know, again, the Opportunity Council, Whatcom Homeless Service Center, has the funds, has the people to be able to offer resources and not have to sweep those camps. Reallocation of money that's given to the police can be used to create other agencies to do all the work that they're doing very badly, very badly.

Audrey (00:51:16):

Community action can't do everything for everyone. A lot of people think it's a catch-all and that they do everything, but they don't have medical people. They don't have any psychological help. They don't have any drug treatment. It's not a catch-all. The Opportunity Council is a community action agency. They get most of the dollars to help people in these kinds of situations, but their services are very limited and should they be? I don't believe so. So anyway, that's my biggie. But I want to thank Keith for bringing up the afterschool issue because that is a really big one, especially about children of color, people trying to get out of the situation that they live in to see a different type of person, different type of life, different culture, different languages, and it's important. So I'm here to listen and hear what everybody has to say. Thank you.

Moonwater (00:52:13):

Thank you so much, Audrey. Janice, do we have...

Janice Keller (00:52:18):

Yes. The next three are Kristina Martens, Theo Wheeland, and Representative Debra Lekanoff.

Moonwater (00:52:31):

Thank you. So Kristina, are you able to unmute yourself and if you would like to join us with your video, to start your video?

Kristina Martens (00:52:41):

I think I've got that all.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Moonwater (00:52:48):

You do. Welcome.

Kristina Martens (00:52:50):

Yay! Thank you for having us, everyone, all of the people and hosting these. Yes. Since no elected official is speaking, I do have some questions. The first is does Seth, our mayor, even think that there is a problem? Because I've been in many meetings across the board with lots of different people, and what we get from the top is that the system's working fine. It's working as it's intended. Or, "We can't do anything because the policy's written that way". So I would like to hear from our mayor when he's available and ready. Does he even think that there is a problem that we need to be addressing and then if there is one or 10 or 35, what is the best way that he thinks we should go about fixing them?

Kristina Martens (00:53:44):

We are people. I am a real estate agent. I was thrown into activism about eight weeks ago when there was just a lot of clamoring on the streets with the people that I know and love and work with on a daily basis. We all, especially myself as a black woman in America, I see problems every day. I'm not paid to solve these, though, and all of our elected officials in theory are. If I'm wrong about that, if that's not what elected officials are supposed to be doing, I would love to know who it is that we're supposed to be looking at to solve these problems. So I would like to hear what the mayor, city council, Satpal has to say about what they think fixing any of the problems that they think they're dealing with are. The third one being, since Seth was endorsed by the Bellingham police department in his last run, is there a conflict of interest if he does decide to proceed down the defund avenue that a lot of the community is calling for if he still wants their endorsement for the next election cycle, which was a big deal? It's a lot of people that actually vote. So I'm just wondering if there's any conflict of interest there. Then to go a step further, does anyone in city council and in positions of power think that the Birchwood food desert is a problem and if so, what can we be doing about that in general? Again, you're our elected officials and you're paid by our tax dollars. So we see that there's a problem. Could you please help us try to solve this?

Kristina Martens (00:55:23):

I know that there's issues with leases and Haggen, Kroger, however it may be, Albertsons, whatever happened over there, but it seems like something that we should be actively working to fix. Another question, I have had meetings with a lot of people in city council and whatnot, and I keep hearing them refer to other people of color in the community as, "Yeah. They met with so-and-so. Yeah, they met with this person. Yes, they heard what our fears are, our worries are." If they're going to keep coming to the set, maybe, five names that I keep hearing thrown about as you all are being paid as part of your job, would it be a good thing to have a taskforce of what seems to be obviously people of color, but then maybe a younger demographic to help bridge the gap in what we seem to be shouting on the streets?

Kristina Martens (00:56:18):

It seems to be the younger generation that's really carrying this mantle. Would it be useful for the city of Bellingham to employ people of color that are of the younger generation to help deal with these issues as they seem to be the ones bringing them to the table? This is a lot of work as our elected officials know, going through all this paperwork, seeing who's responsible for what and how the budget is spent.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Kristina Martens (00:56:45):

So if you, in this listening session, just like right now, are asking the community to do the research to bring to your attention, what is incorrect and what's happening, it seems like a failed double redundancy when we elected you because everyone in power said, "I can make a difference. I will help make that change." We are sitting here asking you to make a change and that you want to listen to us and you're letting us be heard, but these are not new problems. We've been fighting this as a black person since the 1600s when they brought my ancestors over. So here we are in this new cycle of it. I talked to friend's moms that remember marching in the 1960s over the exact same things. It wasn't as well-publicized or social-media-shared, but it's not a new fight And these are not new problems to anyone.

Kristina Martens (00:57:42):

Again, no answers today. But if we've been facing down the barrel of this cannon for so long, and everyone in power has been promising that they can help bring about change, in what aspect can you bring about change? Maybe even bring it to us as we have to go about our day jobs, if anyone has them left, and we have to worry about a roof over our head and food in our refrigerators. This is what we pay you for, to help see what the problems are and just get it done. You're in the rooms with the lawyers. You speak the jargon. You're literally paid to be researching in our best interests. Again, I moved from Southern California to this tiny, amazing gem of a city, but this is something that's been happening around forever, even in and outside of this bubble that is the beautiful Bellingham.

Kristina Martens (00:58:36):

It doesn't seem like this should have taken anyone by surprise. The last point that I've just been mulling over as we go through all this to everyone who's listening, is that it doesn't seem to be a problem when anyone needs our votes. They have an open line of communication. They're ready to talk to us. They want to hear what we want to say. It seems that we've really had to corral everyone to get any headway here. So everyone who's listening, just remember when they ask for your votes again how inclined they were to listen to you the first time around. I know that was a lot. Thank you very much. I'm sure I'll see many of you in the fight ahead.

Moonwater (00:59:13):

Thank you, Kristina. Up next we have Theo. If you would like to speak, you can unmute yourself and share your video, if you'd like.

Theo Wheeland (00:59:27):

Hello. Why were police created? Profit is unpaid. Excuse me. Labor creates all wealth. Profit is unpaid wages. Profit is theft. Capitalists created police to break labor strikes and protect their factories and machinery of exploitation. Equally important in the history of police is the role of Indian killers and slave catchers. Today, police are murderers, wife beaters, abusers, eviction muscle for landlords and still break strikes. Do police keep us safe? Well, let me ask you, when has a cop ever caught or punished your boss for wage theft, the most common and costly form of theft? I'd like to also recommend these two books, *The End of Policing* by Alex Vitale and *Are Prisons Obsolete?* by Angela Davis. Every worker, every person is entitled to safety and sanctuary from tyranny. We know that the Bellingham police has been uncooperative in the sanctuary movement. They've been complicit with the Trump administration, a massive sum who supposedly represent us here today in this farce of a listening session. So think for

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

yourself. Learn worker's history. Learn our history. Defund the police. Disarm the police. Disband the police towards our collective liberation.

Moonwater (01:01:12):

Thank you for your words, Theo. Up next, we have Representative Lekanoff, but I'm not sure if she is still on the call so I'll give her a moment if she is present to be able to unmute herself and join us. If not, I will ask Janice to share with me the next three names. There you are. Hello, Representative Lekanoff. Welcome.

Debra Lekanoff (01:01:38):

Hi. Hi, good evening.

Moonwater (01:01:39):

Good evening.

Debra Lekanoff (01:01:40):

It's wonderful to see you all. My heart is with Bellingham tonight. Thank you for being so courageous. Thank you for being so understanding. But most of all, thank you for being respectful of one another. The city council and Mayor Seth Fleetwood., You've taken the time and you've taken the courage to hear from your community members and your constituents. The many asks you hear tonight are going to take all of us working together and taken one step forward together.

Debra Lekanoff (01:02:09):

It's going to take our community. It's going to take our elected local officials. It's going to take our state officials, our congressional officials, and it's going to take us stepping forward and saying, "If we're going to make a change, how are we going to change together?" How are we going to change together? How are we going to build the policies that are going to exist not for a moment, but for long term? I hear the sorrow and the hurt coming from many of our people who have a little bit of brown in each one of them. My goodness, you all can probably tell I am 110% Native American. There's no getting away and hiding that. But for generations and generations, my people have suffered the incredible hardship of what it is to be treated as if we don't matter. But I've taken the courage to say, "You know what? In Indian country, in the place where I come from, I'm joining the state legislature to make a difference because I'm a survivor." My people are survivors. All of us, as people of color, are survivors.

Debra Lekanoff (01:03:19):

Every one of us have a little bit of brown in us and it's going to take us linking arms and saying, "We can do things better." Those hard policies are going to come in a big wingspan and they're going to be intertwined from one issue to one policy to one budget to another. So I say to you, my wonderful colleagues at the city of Bellingham, link arms with your representatives, link arms with your congressional members, link arms with community like you are doing here tonight. I'm really honored to be able to be here and support the work that's being shared. But to everyone in Bellingham, my prayers are with you, but I give you most of all, all the hope that was given to me from my ancestors to all of you. So thank you for giving me just a little bit of time.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Moonwater (01:04:12):

Thank you so much. Janice, I've seen a few. Hello, Rosalinda. And I saw Damani a moment ago. Can you share with me, Janice, the order of the next three speakers.

Janice Keller (01:04:25):

Yes, we have Aidan Hersh, Rosalinda and Vernon Damani Johnson.

Moonwater (01:04:34):

Okay. So Rosalinda, if you'd like, you can hide your video for a moment and we'll hear from Aidan first and then we'll come back to you. Aidan, I believe we're ready to hear from you. Thank you.

Aidan Hersh (01:04:48):

Thanks. Yeah, I'd like to speak about the movement to defend the police and while I can't speak for all others at this meeting specifically to eventually abolish the police as we know them. This so-called radical idea is primarily based on a longstanding and justified frustration with the police being an extension of the state that has been and continues to be used to maintain racial and class inequalities. For our local leaders and elected officials to recognize this fact would be the first step towards legitimate racial and working class justice. And so the fact that you're unable to recognize this means that we have a long way to go.

Aidan Hersh (01:05:29):

I also find it ironic that these so-called listening sessions are supposed to be portrayed as some progressive and I quote, "a process of understanding our community's experiences with racism and injustice and taking steps to effectively address these issues," end quote. I find this ironic because it proves that you haven't been listening. It proves that the events that are happening now from Portland to Minneapolis are what is needed for you to simply listen to your own constituents and what is it going to take for actual change to occur? I spent most of my life in a...

Aidan Hersh (01:06:03):

... for actual change to occur. I spent most of my life in a different state. Excuse me. In total, I've spent about five years in Bellingham and yet in that relatively short amount of time, by speaking with friends and other members of the community, I've been able to recognize the troubled and very, very racist history of Bellingham and the larger Whatcom County. I didn't have to conduct a listening session. Now more broadly on the issue of defunding and abolishing the police, I think that there's a common misconception that defunding or abolishing the police means that we'll live in a state of lawlessness and there'll be no one to call when bad things inevitably happen. And that's a lie. Through decades because of propaganda and indoctrination, the idea that the police are the good guys that put the bad guys behind bars has been, frankly, shoved down our throats.

Aidan Hersh (01:06:46):

We've been conditioned to call the police for nearly every possible issue and under the naive assumption that they're going to be acting benevolently. In reality, the police and the idea of policing in general has a deeply racist and elitist history of, but not limited to, forcing native peoples off their lands, suppressing labor movements and perpetuating the mass incarceration of largely African American men.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

And this is not to say that there aren't good people with good intentions behind those uniforms, but rather that the system that the police vow to uphold is antithetical to the needs of the people and those good cops, either reluctantly continue to uphold that system or they're forced out or they quit. Believe it or not, there are alternatives to sending people with guns to solve issues that don't require guns. Even better, you can prevent such issues from arising in the first place and keep people out of the criminal legal system.

Aidan Hersh (01:07:37):

But to get to that point, we need a massive reallocation of funds towards programs that genuinely meet the needs of the people, such as housing and other social services, restorative justice, and the reduction and eventual abolition of the police as a punitive method of controlling citizens. There are millions of dollars being spent on funding the arrests of drug-related crimes and the homeless means that millions of dollars are not being spent on non-coercive, non-punitive solutions to these issues. To quote Alex Vitale, author of *The End of Policing*, "Everyone wants to live in safe communities, but when individuals and communities look to their police to solve their problems, they're in essence mobilizing the machinery of their own oppression," end quote.

Aidan Hersh (01:08:19):

I'd like to finish by seriously stressing that I'm by no means the authority on this issue. I grew up privileged enough to make it to this point in my life by passing through the path of least resistance, to say the least. My frustrations are of a vastly different nature than the people of color and other marginalized citizens who have been fighting this rigged system for generations, and just because I have certain privileges that have allowed me to speak at this meeting tonight doesn't mean that I speak for those who feel firsthand the violence of our unjust system. I just simply hope that by speaking, I have aided rather than co-opted their struggle. Thank you.

Moonwater (01:08:55):

Thank you so much, Aidan. Rosalinda, can you join us now by unmuting yourself and sharing your video again? Welcome.

Rosalinda Guillen (01:09:06):

Good evening, everybody. I am thankful for the opportunity to bring my voice to this space tonight. I want to say that I'm also thankful for all of those courageous folks across the country from Black Lives Matter that have actually sacrificed a lot to get us to this point. If it hasn't been for all of the people across the country, all the black people that stood up for themselves and have demanded this space for themselves, we wouldn't be having this conversation. I want to say that as a farm worker and a Mexican American growing up in the United States, it's always been really clear to us what the system holds for us and where the place our place is intended to be kept. So I want to try to be as brief as I can. There's a lot to be said. Three and a half minutes, of course, is not enough.

Rosalinda Guillen (01:10:05):

However, we have logged in hours with the county council and the city council. Our community has logged in hours testifying about the problems with law enforcement and both the county sheriff, the Bellingham police department, the other local departments across the county, racial profiling and the

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

unfair treatment and the violence against brown farm workers in Whatcom County. So let me just say that this is a militarized county. Whatcom County is a militarized county that sits on the northern border close to Canada. So we have the County sheriff. We have police departments of all of the small towns across the county. We also have ICE. We have Department of Homeland Security. I know that the federal government has Black Hawk helicopters here. There are numerous federal agencies. The taskforce on what is it? The guns and taskforce and drug runners that they go after.

Rosalinda Guillen (01:11:09):

So this is a very highly militarized county, and we as people of color recognize that and have to live with that. The other thing is that as a county, Whatcom County is as an agricultural county. This county survives and counts on their economic survival from agriculture, and so farm workers are the labor for this economy. Also, across the state 40% plus of the infected sick people of COVID-19 are coming from 13% of the Latino population. So there's 13% of the Washington State population is Latinx, and over 40% of the infected numbers right now are coming from that community. My community. Most of it, my community as a farm worker, because Washington State also is an agricultural economy. We have, as a result, our community is suffering disproportionate impacts from COVID-19 and we are living in a very critical time.

Rosalinda Guillen (01:12:16):

I'd like to talk to you about the crisis that needs to be dealt with right now, again, that wouldn't be dealt with if it wasn't for Black Lives Matter and their insistence on the demilitarization, the defunding and the abolishment of the police departments, of the police state that has specifically targeted them and then us also. So we insist that your governance, those of you that are in governance, take a deep fundamental look at how you interact with all of the law enforcement in Whatcom County. Let me just say that there is the moment of crisis we have to deal with, with the pandemic, with the testing and the medical needs that my community, the farmer community, is going to need, which is not even being addressed in a serious manner by the agricultural industry statewide, nor in the Whatcom County. This is a public health issue.

Rosalinda Guillen (01:13:14):

We don't really have a Public Health Department right now and Whatcom County. The Public Health Department right now is impotent to help my community in this pandemic of COVID-19. I demand and our community demands that you reestablish a Public Health Department that really helps our community. You must stop the practice of having the county council be the county health board. We need real medical professionals dealing with public health so we don't have to go through this again in another pandemic. We are asking that you stop allowing law enforcement to be part of governance.

Rosalinda Guillen (01:13:59):

Whether that is included in the policies, in the charter or whatever governmental documents that exist for the county and the cities, you are allowing the police and the law enforcement agencies to be part of the governance process and the decision making process that affect my people. And we have seen this very, very clearly in the city council meetings and the county council meetings, where we have tried to address the police, the law enforcement participation with ICE, with Homeland Security and others, and we have heard from all of you that the Bellingham police department is the best police department in the world.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Rosalinda Guillen (01:14:45):

So if you don't recognize that there is a problem with the militarization of local law enforcement, then we cannot fix the problem. There are ways to fix it that will be better for the community and you have the power to do it if you work with us to make that happen. It is possible. We know it is, and we must take this moment to make it happen. I'd also like to say that post this pandemic and this moment of making this attempt to change the governance structures that leave out the law enforcement and creates instead the type of community policing that is at the service of the community and at the service of governance and not as part of governance. There has to be a way to do that and I know that we can do it if we focus in on it. There will be the economic recovery that's needed. Many have already spoken about that.

Rosalinda Guillen (01:15:47):

The fact that there's going to be evictions. So we have to consider whatever actions we take, the economic recovery of the county, the businesses, the agricultural industry, but also of the workers in the community that need the support from the economic recovery in this post-pandemic. That also includes changes in our governance structure so we don't have to be here again. I've gone way over. I thank you for listening to me and to the voice that I bring from farm workers and some of the Latino community in Whatcom County. Thank you.

Moonwater (01:16:23):

Thank you so much, Rosalinda. Damani. I think you're muted, Damani. Are you able to unmute yourself?

Damani (01:16:40):

Can you hear me now?

Moonwater (01:16:41):

There we go. All right. We're all set. Thank you.

Damani (01:16:43):

Cool. Well, that was an early demonstration of my technological weaknesses, and it's funny because I wasn't necessarily, in the format that we're using tonight, I didn't think there was any particular need for me to speak, but I was a little confused about how it was going to go, in terms of whether in fact there might be some give and take going on. So I ended up putting myself in the speakers list, but I've been more preoccupied in recent weeks with the movement on the ground and making sure that opportunities for us to come together in the way that we have tonight would actually come to fruition. I'm happy to see that they have, and I salute both County Executive Sidhu and Mayor Fleetwood for making it possible for us to begin this conversation. I think we all know that we're at a historic moment in both local and American history when we have the chance to address some of these long-standing, century-long issues of systemic racism and class issues and marginalization of all kinds of populations in this country historically.

Damani (01:18:08):

I've lived in Bellingham for 35 years. I'm a full professor at Western Washington University. So I'm also a part of the elite in a certain way, and so I feel no need to take up any more of the time from voices that

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

really need to be heard more. But since I managed to get into the queue, I thought I would just say that. Thank you both for allowing this time. Again, this is just the beginning, right, of an opportunity that will be long term and hopefully bring us to some results that we can all live with in the future going forward. But thank you so much. I give up the rest of my time. Thank you.

Moonwater (01:18:53):

Thank you. Janice, can you share with me the next three people that we have in the queue?

Janice Keller (01:19:00):

Yes. We have Forrest, Skip Williams and Thomas Anderson.

Moonwater (01:19:07):

Okay. So Forrest, if you would like to speak, can you unmute yourself at this point in time and share your video if you'd like? While we're waiting, I'll just take this moment to thank our ASL interpreters for your presence and assistance this evening. So I don't see Forrest, but I do see Skip. So Skip, we will shift to you. If you could unmute yourself, please? Welcome.

Skip Williams (01:19:46):

Just did. So I'm on this and I plan to be on all of the others because as I see things unfolding here in Bellingham, I become very, very frustrated that I don't hear any specificity as to how things are happening here. What I mean by that is how the media and how the newspapers, whatever, are presenting this. So I'm jumping on this because I've lived in Bellingham since 1989, and I'm a very, very dedicated citizen of this city and I want to be part of the solution to making things right here, because I think the potential of doing that is very, very high. So-

Tom Anderson (01:20:56):

[inaudible 00:14:58].

Skip Williams (01:20:59):

Hello? Can you hear me? And-

Moonwater (01:21:03):

Yes, we can hear you.

Skip Williams (01:21:03):

Oh, okay. So I'm mostly here to listen to various folks talk about the issues that are impacting Bellingham and Whatcom County and to see where there's a path to a solution. I really don't have anything to add to this conversation other than that but other than to say, I plan on being on all of these listening sessions and listening to what folks have to say, and hopefully make some contribution at some point to being part of the solution to this. So that's why I'm here and that's all I have to say. So-

Moonwater (01:21:59):

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Thank you so much, Skip. Thank you. So you may hide your video and mute yourself at this moment. I saw Tom a moment ago. If he would like to speak and wants to join us, he can share his video and unmute himself. Welcome, Tom. Oh, do we have your audio? Can't hear you very well at the moment. I think your audio is not working properly.

Tom Anderson (01:22:35):

[inaudible 01:22:41].

Moonwater (01:22:41):

No, we're not able to... Let's do this, Tom. Let's give you a couple of minutes to try to work on that and it looks like we have Forrest back in the room and we'll work on bringing you back in, Tom. Forrest, if you'd like to speak, you can unmute yourself and join us by video if you'd like. I'll just wait a moment to see if you are going to join us, Forrest. Okay. So let's see if we can come back then. We'll give one more try to Tom, and then we'll look for the next three folks in the queue. So Tom, if you'd like to try one more time unmuting yourself and sharing your video and I'll let you know if we can hear you properly. No, I don't think so. I'm going to ask that I hope that you're able to join us on another evening and you also are able to submit written comments if you'd like following this session, so we will provide some information about that. I'm sorry, Tom. Thank you. Janice, can you share with me who the next three people are in the queue?

Janice Keller (01:24:09):

Yes. I have Julie Mauerman, Madeline, and Nick.

Moonwater (01:24:14):

Thank you. So Julie, if you would like to speak, could you unmute yourself and share your video if you'd like?

Julie (01:24:26):

Hi, this is Julie and I only need to unmute myself to say, I probably didn't understand the directions. I signed in just to be a listener tonight. So thank you all for being here and for making this happen.

Moonwater (01:24:42):

Thank you so much, Julie. So next in, let's see, I just see a message we have. Madeline is yielding. So Nick, are you interested in speaking this evening and if so, you can unmute yourself?

Janice Keller (01:24:58):

Nick left as well. So let me find the next ones. Just a moment.

Moonwater (01:25:03):

Okay. And thank you all for bearing with us as we're navigating this new-to-us process of registration and identifying who's interested in speaking. It's clunky to say the least, but you're doing a great job, Janice.

July 28, 2020
Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Janice Keller (01:25:18):

Thank you.

Moonwater (01:25:18):

Thank you for your help.

Janice Keller (01:25:19):

So we're going to try Kim, Charlotte and Petra. Nope. Kim and Charlotte have left as well. Petra, Roberta and Elizabeth.

Moonwater (01:25:38):

Okay. So Petra, if you would like to speak, you may unmute yourself and join us with video. I'll wait a moment to see if you would like to speak. And that's Petra. Okay. So I think we will shift to Roberta. If you would like to speak, you may unmute yourself.

Janice Keller (01:26:12):

I think she's left now, too. People are coming and going, so our apologies.

Moonwater (01:26:20):

Okay. Do we have-

Janice Keller (01:26:21):

How about Beth and Michael and Sharon?

Moonwater (01:26:32):

Okay. So Beth, are you interested in speaking this evening? If so, you can unmute yourself and join us. Okay. What we have right now for folks who are watching is just a combination of people who've joined us on Zoom who were simply interested in listening and some of those folks want to speak, and it's hard for us to tell the difference. So we are making our way through the list and we appreciate your patience. Michael, are you interested in speaking? If so, you can unmute yourself and share your video.

Janice Keller (01:27:18):

I also see Petra and Beth in the room now, Moonwater.

Moonwater (01:27:22):

Okay. So let's try again with Petra. Are you interested in speaking? If so, you can unmute yourself. If everyone remembers in the beginning of the meeting, I said there might be a few awkward moments. I'm going to admit this is one as your moderator, as we're just juggling through this. So thank you for your patience. Elizabeth, have you rejoined us? If you'd like to speak, you can have the floor. Okay.

Janice Keller (01:27:58):

I see Tim Costello in the list as well, if he's ready.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Moonwater (01:28:03):

Okay. Janice, can I just come back to you. After Michael, was it Sharon? Did you say that name or did I make a mistake in my-

Janice Keller (01:28:14):

I said that name, but she has subsequently signed off.

Moonwater (01:28:18):

Okay. So Tim, are you interested in joining us and do you have something to share tonight? If so, you can unmute yourself. Okay. So we're going to name a few more names and it's perfectly fine if you've just signed on to listen. Just bear with us. We'd like to try to find the folks who want to speak. I'm wondering if they are all attendees. For people who still want to speak, we could try the raise hand function in Zoom now to visually cue our tech team if you would like to speak. At the bottom of your screen, there should be an icon that says Raise Hand. We could try that. You could press that, and we will try to make our way to you. In the meantime, Janice, do you have additional names for me?

Janice Keller (01:29:16):

I think I do. How about Melissa Gragg? We're now starting to work through some of the folks who had yielded their time so it may take them a moment to be prepared.

Moonwater (01:29:31):

Okay. And if there are additional folks who are watching on YouTube or BTV and you do have something to say and you'd like to join at this point, it's certainly not too late. You can go to www.cob.org/listening series and register, and your name will show up and we still have some time to be able to hear from folks this evening. I think I just saw Melissa's video. Melissa, we are ready to listen if you would like to speak this evening.

Melissa Gragg (01:30:06):

All right. Can everybody hear me?

Moonwater (01:30:13):

Welcome. Yes.

Melissa Gragg (01:30:13):

All right. Thank you. All right. So my name is Melissa Gragg. I'm basically here on behalf of domestic violence victims of Whatcom County, because we've been so abused, mistreated and mishandled at every single step, that there's pages of people coming to me for help. Because we've been abused by the police. We've been abused by the sheriff. We've been abused by the prosecuting attorney's office and we are being arrested at insane rates, and this has been going on since 2006. You guys keep doing domestic violence commissions where you talk about it and same thing's happening.

Melissa Gragg (01:30:59):

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Nothing changes. In fact, the DV Commission, when they asked me about my situation, straight told me that they had no power and they were just collecting data on how our lives have been destroyed. I actually talked to Officer Doll and what he kept coming at me with was, "How do we do this? How do we do this? How do we do this?" Christina very lovingly pointed out all the labor at which we are doing for free, her at an exorbitant rate, by the way. With that bloated police budget, they're asking her to be a liaison without payment and that's just goes to show you how much our country can't survive without free black labor. It's disgusting. So if it wasn't for the BLM movement, you people wouldn't even be listening to me right now. I would still be living in a gutter.

Melissa Gragg (01:31:53):

I can't get any help from DVSAS or the Community Opportunity Council. I've been to literally everyone. You could ask me any one of our lovely facilities and I haven't had help. I've been arguing with and screamed at by just about every officer on the force except for Claudia Murphy. But what that brought up was not only when I was arrested for defending myself against my own rapist, which by the way, you're prosecuting attorney's office is still going after me for but has yet to address my rape report from nine months ago, but they're still holding me to an Assault 4 charge against my own rapist and the woman who covered for my pedophile husband. They let my pedophile husband lived next door to the Bellingham High School four times within walking distance, 486 feet, to the point where my daughter had to drop out before COVID in her senior year, because her literal abuser was next door.

Melissa Gragg (01:32:57):

Sergeant Fountain was nice enough to call up my daughter after I talked to her and she used my own abuse against me, called up my daughter of her own accord and screamed at her and called her a liar and told her she was making things up. So yeah, five minutes is not adequate in any line of reasoning for any of this. I have pages and pages of notes. So all of this like, "We just need to talk it out." I've got notes for you guys. You guys, I've got plenty of stuff for you guys to do that doesn't cost a dollar. I went to jail in Bellingham, in Whatcom County. Spent the weekend in there. 80% of the people in there were not white in a 90% white county. That's an issue. The fact that there was 13 or so women in there with me and all but three of us were in there on drug charges? Not okay.

Melissa Gragg (01:33:49):

The fact that we have a million different supposed places for domestic violence victims to get help and I'm sitting here a year and a half in and nobody's helped me and I'm still married to that man and I can't get any services and I'm still living with my friends in a bedroom with my teenage son, well about to be teenage, unacceptable. And this is not even remotely the first or only time that these things happen. I again have pages. I have [inaudible 01:34:20] violently raped and the police want her to do her own finding of all the women that he's raped over the millions of years. He's got a record and they want her to go and drum up all these women. I've got [inaudible 00:28:33]. She's the kid in the bathroom. Kid reported the school for abuse, and they crammed him in a bathroom and there's a dozen or so kids on that lawsuit and that dude's still working there.

Melissa Gragg (01:34:48):

Her dad supposed to get 11 years for raping her. He got off six months with therapy, and now he's in our newspapers again for raping another person. There's pages and pages. All that I can think of that they do when it comes to sexual abuse and sexual assault is allow the abusers to continue to abuse us and not

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

do anything to help or protect us. All I've gotten from every person I've talked to is the police blame the prosecutor, the prosecutor blames the police or the police go, "Oh, that's the Sheriff's office." And the Sheriff's office goes, "Oh, you've got to talk to the prosecutor." Nobody will take responsibility and you've got a really great system of passing the buck so that, well, my life continues to be ruined and I can't get any help and these people continue to attack me and harass me and not even a restraining order helps.

Melissa Gragg (01:35:41):

All I get is a bunch of people who, when I get upset and angry because I'm not getting any help, look at me. I'm obviously violent, crazy woman, right? It's not the fact that my husband molested my child and is now free in Bellingham less than a year later and I'm still stuck in the court system. No. It's just because I have tattoos and I'm angry. All of these things are so far inappropriate that I can't even begin in three to five minutes to explain all the things and these are not new, and these are not things you need to be sitting and listening to. These are things you need to be out there helping us fix. We are dying. Dying. There are women on the streets with drug addictions that are all linked to abuse and cases in this town that were not handled properly.

Melissa Gragg (01:36:26):

This is trauma and damage that you people are inflicting repeatedly on us and we can't take it anymore and we are dying. I am in therapy. I am permanently disabled and I have severe PTSD just from the weekend I spent being abused by your police when I was having an actual mental breakdown and they should have taken me to the hospital. I found out that day that my husband was molesting my child and half the child in Bellingham, and they threw me in jail while I was having a mental breakdown and the police mocked me. I cried and screamed, "Please, please, please, help me. Save me from that man." I had no idea where he was. He ran off. I said, "My family's not safe." And you know what those cops did? They said, "That doesn't concern us, ma'am. We just follow the law."

Moonwater (01:37:12):

Melissa, I appreciate you showing up tonight and sharing your story. Thank you very much for your time.

Melissa Gragg (01:37:18):

Yep. So I hope that future, we have a lot more action than just listening because the listening part's way passed over at this point. We're all dying and I think we've made that abundantly clear tonight. So thank you to the BLM movement. Again, none of us could do this without them, and yet again, more free black labor for us white privileged people and that's sad and disgusting, but I'm glad that they're here for it. So thank you for listening and I really, really hope that you guys take this stuff to heart because we're dying out here for real. Thank you.

Moonwater (01:37:50):

Thank you, Melissa.

Janice Keller (01:37:57):

Moonwater, your microphone's off.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Moonwater (01:37:59):

I knew I was going to do that at least once this evening.

Janice Keller (01:38:02):

So we have Dena Jensen, Terry Hall and Mary McIntosh.

Moonwater (01:38:15):

Okay. So Dena, if you can unmute yourself, if you'd like to speak.

Dena Jensen (01:38:25):

Hi. I had raised my hand earlier to yield my time, so I'll just say thank you to everyone and it's been a pleasure listening to everyone. Thank you.

Moonwater (01:38:35):

Thank you. And I believe Terry is also yielding their time. Was it Mary next?

Mary McIntosh (01:38:43):

Hi. I would just like to go on what other people are saying. There are so many ways that money could be used differently right now to help people of color, the people of color that are in the street. It's significantly...

Mary McIntosh (01:39:02):

... in the street, it's significantly a disproportionate number of people of color are on the street and there is no plan to help them. When the rents come due and the moratorium on rent is over, who is going to help? What is the plan to help all the people that will be homeless? There's no plan in place. That needs to be considered. That needs to be taken into consideration. Also, defunding the police and reallocating that money to mental health issues would help the woman that spoke before me, would help so many people remain out of jail, remain out of our court system and would actually provide benefit to the people of our community rather than just locking them up and then releasing them later with no benefit and only charges and expenses to follow them around. I just think that there's so much better we can do both with our homeless people, with all people that need the services of the police.

Mary McIntosh (01:40:11):

The biggest thing that is currently a case is right now, are the sweeps that are happening or the cleanups. Taking that money that was spent, doing that right now during the pandemic when they shouldn't be moved, and reallocating that money into tiny homes, not just tent encampments, but tent encampments that are turned into tiny homes for the winter so that they can sustain the winter, would be a semi-permanent situation that would really get people off the street and save a lot of lives this winter. That's it. Thank you.

Moonwater (01:40:48):

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Thank you, Mary. We are coming close to the close of our time this evening so I think depending on the length, we may have time for just a few more speakers. Janice, do we have anyone else who is in the queue?

Janice Keller (01:41:05):

I have three. Brel, Joy and Alexander, and I believe they are in the room already.

Moonwater (01:41:18):

Okay. So Brel, if you are interested in speaking, you can unmute yourself and share your video if you'd like. Welcome.

Brel Froebe (01:41:28):

Thank you. Good evening. My name is Brel Froebe. I'm a resident of the Birchwood neighborhood and a restorative justice facilitator and youth empowerment educator. I'm also a member of a coalition to defund the police in Whatcom County. The coalition calls for at least a 50% cut to Bellingham police department for funding for the 2021-22 budget and a reallocation of those funds towards community-led health and safety systems, as well as other programs for community well-being. There seems to be a perception among some of you that the BPD is not part of the problem when it comes to racial violence in Whatcom County. Yet the data tells a different story of Bellingham residents who are black, where 9.43% of use of force incidents were against them. Native American people make up 1.3% of residents and 10.99% of use of force incidents.

Brel Froebe (01:42:35):

If you are for real about dismantling [inaudible 00:03:37], you will defund the police and the sheriff department. BPD receives more funding than the parks and recreation, emergency medical services, libraries, and low-income housing funds combined. By Chief Doll's own admission in an online community forum last month, the police department isn't the appropriate entity to be the first responders for many community crises, including mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence and sexual assaults crises. In a time of economic scarcity, it is essential that you take some of the bloated BPD budget to fund the following programs: substance abuse evidence-based inpatient treatment services, mental health mobile response services, similar to the CAHOOTS program in Eugene, stable housing for people experiencing homelessness, cultural spaces for black and indigenous people and community youth centers, community-led restorative justice programs, housing for domestic violence and sexual assault survivors and workers co-ops and land trust. The expansion and creation of these programs respond to the root problems that cause community crises. The racist prison industrial complex, for which the police serve as first responders, is not a healthy or just way to deal with our community problems.

Brel Froebe (01:43:55):

I urge you to be on the right side of history and join the national Black Lives Matter movement in defunding the police. As Keith said in the beginning of the listening sessions, actions speak louder than words. Please listen to the wisdom given to you in these listening sessions, otherwise this will have been a total waste of time. For community members who are interested in joining the campaign to defund

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

the Bellingham police department, please visit defundbpd.org for action steps and ways to get involved. I'll see you in the streets. Thank you for listening to my words.

Moonwater (01:44:32):

Thank you, Brel. Let's see. Joy, if you would like to speak this evening, you can unmute yourself and share your video if you'd like. Welcome, Joy.

Joy Gilfilen (01:44:44):

Hi. Thank you, Moonwater, and thank you, Satpal and Seth and the others who are listening and to the ASL interpreter who I have no idea what your name is. My name is Joy Gilfilen and I am President of the Restorative Community Coalition. I'm not here tonight to speak on behalf of the coalition, although I could do it for hours. I'm here to speak as a citizen of Whatcom County who has been studying for 10 years, deeply the multilayers of structural failure that we have in our social, civic and economic and justice systems. I started out not interested at all in the prison industrial complex and had no interest. My professional background is in career development, leadership coaching, free enterprise development, and the only reason I got involved in the justice system is because I ended up unexpectedly thinking I was going to pitch a leadership sales training course to a reentry group that I thought had to do with middle class people who were...

Joy Gilfilen (01:45:55):

I was invited by a headhunter, an executive headhunter, to come present and talk to them about a product that I was selling. When I got there, I found out that it was a reentry meeting on the prison industrial complex. I was stunned to find out that Whatcom County had our entire social, economic and civic systems, has basically been co-opted by the mass incarceration industry movement. It's a contrarian economic system that is actually driving most of our economy and even the people who are working inside the system don't see it. The reason they don't see it is because they're too close to it. We are siloed. We have systemic structural, and I'm not going to call it racism, I'm going to call it discrimination. We are primarily a white community and it has taken me 10 years to go layer by layer by layer underneath the problem to find it.

Joy Gilfilen (01:46:50):

But what happens is I happen to be a white female. I happen to be representing a criminal justice group, the most underprivileged, polarized, demeaned, discriminated against people there are. Every person who gets arrested, you lose your economy. You lose your home. You lose your background. You lose your network. You go into poverty. You end up with mental illness problems and it's taken me years to figure all this out. At the bottom end of the system we have, as a county, spent, over the last 10 years, \$3 million hiring jail building contractors to build a jail system. We just recently hired another jail building contractor who's acting as if they are going to be dealing with mental health and social justice issues, but they're not. There has been no money effectively put into solving the social justice issues that we have, the reentry issues, the mental health issues.

Joy Gilfilen (01:47:56):

Instead, over the last 30 to 40 years, we have actually eroded the dual diagnosis, the addiction industries and things. Moonwater, you've gotten some work in doing some restorative justice work, but

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

you know what? Every single time the Restorative Community Coalition, and I guess I will speak to this for a minute, we have tried to bring solutions to the county council repeatedly. We delivered entire programs to the environmental impact statement process for the jail industry. Everything that we have brought forward has been dismissed and not listened to. At first I thought it was because I was a woman. And then I thought, "Well, it's because we're talking about criminals." Then I thought, "Wow, it's because of this or that." It's taken 10 years to dig all the way down and eventually I ran for Sheriff of Whatcom County on purpose to force the conversation to the public domain.

Joy Gilfilen (01:48:52):

Do you know what? I ran for County Executive. The City Club did not host a debate on a County Executive race. When the jail and justice system and the jail initiatives came forward, the Restorative Community Coalition, the organization that I represent and work with who has been pushing and fighting back the most aggressively on the jail industrial complex problem, we were not allowed to debate at the City Club. We were not allowed to debate at any of the official debates having to do with this subject. We're allowed three minutes at public meetings and that's it. We were not allowed to... God, when I ran for Sheriff, I wasn't allowed to debate. It's fascinating the structural racism, which is not racism in Whatcom County. We're mostly white, but the structural obstruction of listening to people who have an opinion that is different than the establishment is pandemic.

Joy Gilfilen (01:49:56):

I'm calling it rank-ism. It's anybody who ranks higher than the other one, because you know what? I'm not seen as being prejudiced against. I'm not discriminated against because I'm a white female. Well, I'm sorry. You know what? I'm not allowed to speak at a lot of the groups because I'm a white female. I'm supposed to just listen. And yet, you know who I'm representing? The very criminals, the very people who are absolutely tearing our economy apart, and the reason they're tearing our economy apart is because they end up in poverty. They end up without jobs. They end up with mental illness. I finally went and did this study. 79 people I studied in Whatcom County to find out why the criminal justice system didn't work. The very Institute couldn't do it. The Whatcom County council wouldn't study it. The Incarceration Prevention and Reduction taskforce would not do it.

Joy Gilfilen (01:50:55):

And you know what I found out from actually talking to the inmates? Was I found out how we create mental illness with the way we do law and justice in Whatcom County. And you know what? This is a massive economic development system that is contrarian. And you know what, folks? It's not your fault. It's not my fault. We are a generation that has inherited an ancestral behavior pattern for hundreds of years. The Lummi Nation people are afraid. It's only been, after 10 years of trying to talk to them, that I finally found a woman who was willing to honestly talk to me about the racism problems that she's faced in Whatcom County over the past 50 years.

Moonwater (01:51:39):

Joy.

Joy Gilfilen (01:51:40):

Yes.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Moonwater (01:51:41):

Please forgive me for intervening. We're coming to the close of our broadcasting time, and I believe there's one more speaker.

Joy Gilfilen (01:51:48):

Can I finish one sentence?

Moonwater (01:51:49):

Please. Yes.

Joy Gilfilen (01:51:51):

The bottom line is we have a contrarian economy that is driving our entire system and you guys are not at fault, but it is our legacy. We are the baby boomers and 47.5% of the millennial generation who are ages 18 to 34, they just did a study on them in June, 47.5% of that generation is feeling anxiety and depression right now because of all the crisis we've got. We got a problem. We need to fix it. We're the grownups and I'll do anything I can to help you. Thank you.

Moonwater (01:52:26):

Thank you so much, Joy. We have one final speaker in the queue if they would still like to join us. I believe it was Alexander. If you can unmute yourself. I can see you now. You'll be our final speaker for the evening, and then we'll close the session.

Alexander Heaton (01:52:47):

Greetings. Thank you, Moonwater. Thank you for giving me the floor. Well, we've heard many, many things tonight. It's rather difficult to synthesize what I'd like to say being the last speaker, but I'd like to point out that what we're dealing with here is intersectional. Given what we've heard so far this evening, it's very apparent that the plethora of issues that we face given what we're seeing on the ground and from the movement, are very serious issues and that the demands that are being called for by the movement must be adhered to, and that they are not ridiculous or radical demands. These demands are to uplift and empower our communities. I'd like to begin with a couple of statements directly to the Mayor of Bellingham. Mayor Seth Fleetwood, you began this meeting by stating a claim that you and the rest of the elected officials are committed to community and are committed to taking action to solve these issues and respond to what the movement is calling for.

Alexander Heaton (01:54:12):

I also heard you say that that commitment looks like listening. I question what your commitment actually is, and a couple other speakers have questioned it as well. I'd like to point out that two ethical principles that we must adhere to as we attempt to solve these problems are truthfulness and non-violence. Part of non-violence is listening. Well, the marginalized have been asking the dominant culture and the status quo to not only listen, but to act for many, many years. I'm not just talking 10, 12. I'm talking decades, centuries. They've been asking you to listen and now you're committed to listening. So what that means to me is that you and the rest of the elected officials who are just now beginning to listen, have been actively practicing violence for all those years. That's quite clear in what everyone else has spoken about.

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Alexander Heaton (01:55:16):

I've heard people speak about the lack of afterschool programs for youth. I've heard people speak about domestic violence there. I've heard people speak about so many forms of what the institution of policing in America does to our communities and how it hurts them and how it perpetuates violence against them. And yet here we are with just a passive step in solving these issues, which is the listening. I'd like to honor that while I have much to say about this, we are close to close and I would like to highlight something very important that has come to my attention. One is that, again, Mayor Seth Fleetwood has said that he is committed to solving these issues. Well, we let it be known that the Defund Bellingham Police Department Committee has delivered seven demands, the first being to defund our police department by 50% to Mayor Seth Fleetwood, and the only commitment we're getting is to listen.

Alexander Heaton (01:56:20):

So I question the integrity of the claim that we've heard about commitment. The second thing I'd like to highlight is that an activist that I spoke with today, who would like to remain anonymous, informed me that the Bellingham police department has applied for assistance from the Department of Homeland Security. Rosalinda spoke earlier highlighting and making it known that Whatcom County is an extremely militarized county. Now our liberal community and our liberal elected officials will tell us time and time again that the Bellingham police department isn't part of the problem, yet here we're seeing them request an increase in militarization from the Department of Homeland Security. I find that interesting because it's not like they're not already militarized. Let's not forget that in 2011, the Bellingham police department violently evicted the protesters from the Occupy Bellingham movement.

Alexander Heaton (01:57:25):

Let's not forget that there was nothing peaceful or non-violent about the cops showing up in riot gear to evict the peaceful protestors who were exercising their first amendment rights in downtown Bellingham. The Bellingham police department is indeed complicit in the problem of state-sanctioned violence. And so my question for you, Mayor Seth Fleetwood, is will you follow in the violent steps of Mayor Dan Pike, or will you stand with democracy? Will you stand with freedom and will you stand with liberation? We're at time, so I will yield my time. However, I don't know how many people are on this call, but I would like to make it well-known to our community what the Bellingham police department has requested from the Department of Homeland Security and as a constituent and as a community member in Bellingham, I am outraged and appalled that that is going on and that that hasn't been addressed and at the lack of transparency. Given what we're seeing in larger cities in the United States, each and every citizen, including our elected officials, should also be alarmed at what we're seeing. Thank you.

Moonwater (01:58:43):

Thank you, Alexander, for your time and words this evening. That does bring to a close the community speaking portion of our session tonight. I would like to just, as moderator, just acknowledge and appreciate everyone who is listening in on YouTube and BTV and who joined us this evening to share their words and experiences and perspectives. I will just remind folks that there is another session that is currently scheduled for August 10th from 6:00 to 8:00 PM. I will share some additional information at the very end, but I'm going to create some space now to hear from Mayor Fleetwood and Executive Sidhu and potentially WWU President. So Mayor Fleetwood, may I turn it over to you to help us close the evening?

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

Seth Fleetwood (01:59:47):

Certainly. Thank you. I would just thank all of the participants and the people that have tuned in and listened. I took a lot of notes. There were a variety of questions that were asked throughout the course of the evening and I will respond to them, and I believe that we'll give some consideration to how we respond. Certainly I'll respond if we've got the emails to the particular individuals that asked, but we'll put together a variety of answers. I look forward to continuing to work with the stakeholders and community partners. I know that we're going to convene a meeting before the next series and have a conversation about what we observed and how we want to proceed and whether we want to change things up. I know that we are all earnestly, sincerely committed to making effective change and [inaudible 02:01:00] participating tonight.

Moonwater (02:01:03):

Thank you, Mayor Fleetwood. Executive Sidhu.

Satpal Sidhu (02:01:10):

Hi. Good evening, everybody. And I also... Can you hear me? I also appreciate you coming out and having the patience to sit and listen to all the comments and things, and I've been making notes as well. One of the observations I want to share is that this establishment or systemic racism, systemic inequalities have taken decades to creep into our system of governance. This has not happened at just one administration or two administrations came and made these changes. Actually, the [inaudible 02:02:04] has been that where we started from and where we are going is in positive direction. It is happening soon enough? No. But at the same time, and I bring it up that I am a first generation immigrant, person of color. I came to this community 30 years ago, and our county, whole county, not only Bellingham, gave me this opportunity as a County Executive. This is a change.

Satpal Sidhu (02:02:47):

This is not a change for me as a person. This is a change for our community overall, that this has been possible. Now, I just want to assure that Mayor Seth, or mayor of any city, not Bellingham, but a county executive of any county of our size, no matter how much efforts or powers we use, they are still not enough to bring the change with the quickness I expect myself and I think my fellow residents expect themselves. I would like to bring that change much more quickly. But I think that I promise that I will strive the best possible course of action we can do and take. This is not something that we can dismantle and reconstitute a governance system in one term of any executive or any sheriff or any other police department.

Satpal Sidhu (02:04:20):

But it doesn't mean that commitment is not there, but it doesn't mean that I do not want to try. Yes, we are learning. I've been on the job for less than six months. Not that as an excuse, but that is just learning the system itself is the first lesson before you start saying, "I want to make the change." There are councils. There are unions. There is a state. The State Supreme Court. All these things, and these are not excuses. These are the realities on the ground, that any one person or one organization or one group want to pick up and bring that change. But I think that the commitment I make is that we will strive to make this as a welcoming and respectable place for everybody like I said at the start. Thank you, Moonwater. You're such a calm personality. I think that it's very refreshing and a lesson to learn. I think

July 28, 2020

Community Listening Series on Race and Justice

that we appreciate everybody else who stuck around, who listened through this thing. Thank you very much.

Moonwater (02:05:47):

Thank you, Executive Sidhu. President Randhawa, did you want to share any closing remarks?

Sabah Randhawa (02:05:52):

Thank you, Moonwater. First of all, thanks for your facilitating this conversation. It takes a lot of courage for people to come out and share their stories, particularly in public, so I'm sincerely appreciative for those who took the time to do so. As I reflect a little bit and certainly as the mayor and county exec said, we'll time to do some thinking. There are certainly some common themes that emerged from the two-hour conversation, themes around homelessness, youth education, economic recovery, public health crisis, domestic violence, certainly the relationship of the law enforcement with the community. I think there are some major opportunities for us collectively to see how we can make progress in some of these issues going forward. But thank you very much for everyone who took the time to share their stories and their suggestions, and thank you again very much for facilitating the session.

Moonwater (02:07:01):

Thank you all for your comments. In closing this evening, I will just say again, I appreciate people's participation. While much was shared tonight, there was much that we didn't hear, and for folks who would like to share feedback and suggestions about how future sessions can better support more engagement and participation and safety and comfort for our community members, please share your feedback and suggestions to the email addresses that will be listed on the slide that we will show in closing, to contact your elected and appointed officials, and to continue communicating with one another and working together in this community that we have here in Whatcom County. Thank you all for joining us this evening and good night.