

Memo

To: Council Committee on Advisory Boards

From: Jaclyn Gilstrap

Justice in Action Committee Mission & Scope

The Justice in Action committee was created several years ago in light of a special project in the town of Chapel Hill: the renaming of Airport Rd. to MLK Jr. Blvd. Since that time, the committee has worked diligently to shed light on issues of justice, diversity, equity and inclusion (or the lack thereof) within our community. We have initiated petitions, led community-wide giving opportunities, provided support and feedback to various town entities and projects, co-sponsored justice-centered events and talks, and more.

Despite the important successes of this committee, and despite the town's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and justice, it is my observation that the committee may have outgrown its initial charge. Having chaired this committee for the last year, I will note that we have had trouble a) identifying how we can best be of service to the Town Council and to the broader community; b) maintaining a full roster; c) encouraging active participation by committee members; and d) deciding who we want to be & how we want to work going forward.

It would be easy to chalk this up to poor leadership, high turnover due to the fact that committee membership is voluntary/unpaid, or simply the wrong people for the job. As the committee's chair, I must acknowledge that it is possible that those are true. However, it is my belief that we must at least also be willing to take a look at the fact that there may be a structural issue at play.

In equity work, it is often the case that the discussions are delegated to people with little decision-making power or at the very least, siloed, separated from conversations of substance happening throughout an organization. I wonder if that is happening here. What would it look like, for example, if each Advisory Board and special committee had a representative whose sole purpose was to keep an eye on justice within the conversations and decisions at hand? Would this help ensure that issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice were more efficiently and more broadly included in the business of the Town? What other ideas may ensure maximum utility of the Justice in Action Committee and its current/future members?

I think it's worth exploring, and I look forward to continued conversations on the matter.

With gratitude,

Jaclyn Gilstrap, Justice in Action Committee Chair

CHAPEL HILL, NC