



STATE OF THE CITY

Mayor Roy D. Buol

Winter 2021

As we prepare to “turn the page” on 2020, and with the encouraging reports on the development and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, I am optimistic about the “light at the end of the tunnel.” Yet, as we envision the gradual return to “normalcy,” it is incumbent upon us to remember lessons learned that will help us to collectively and actively participate in shaping a new and better “normal” for our citizens.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted our “normal” way of life and ravaged our economy, too many Americans...Iowans...Dubuquers were living in poverty. The pandemic has made life incredibly challenging for those who were already struggling in their daily lives.

The most current data available from the US Census indicates that 16% of our Dubuque residents live in poverty. That is approximately **one out of every six** Dubuquers...a significantly higher number than realized in the average poverty rate of 11.2% across the state of Iowa.

In August 2018, during the City Council’s annual goal-setting session, the policy agenda identified six top priorities, with one being the design and implementation of an **Equitable Poverty Prevention Plan** to reduce, alleviate, and, ultimately, prevent poverty in our community. Data is the foundation for most successful plans and this plan will utilize disaggregated data by race and ethnicity and other factors to assist with examining poverty in Dubuque with an equity lens.

For example, Dubuque’s population consists of 84.3% White residents, followed by 3.8% African Americans, 1.9% two or more races, and 1.8% Hispanics.

However, when the citywide poverty data is disaggregated by race and ethnicity, the statistics tell a different story. This lens identifies that 56% of our African American residents live below the poverty line...significantly higher than the national average of 22.5%.

Over 22% of Hispanic residents live below the poverty line, also higher than the national average of 18.8%. The nearly 13% percent of White Dubuque residents who live below the poverty line is higher than the national average of 10.9%.

In 2019, a consultant was selected to assist in the development of the **Equitable Poverty Prevention Plan** and has been

working with a core group of City staff and, importantly, a larger project steering committee drawn from community agencies and non-profits working with people in poverty. The extensive research, community engagement, and community planning phases of the plan’s development have now been completed.

A draft of this plan will be presented at a City Council work session in January 2021. It is anticipated to consist of multiple components including: (1) defining and understanding poverty; (2) the state of poverty in Dubuque; (3) methodology with regards to research and community engagement; (4) overview of determinants that lead/cause poverty; (5) results of community engagement; and (6) best practices to consider to address poverty.

Of significance to the **Equitable Poverty Prevention Plan** is to *avoid* the traditional poverty narratives including implicit racial and gender stereotypes, victimizing, and blaming people in poverty, and politicizing the issue of poverty. We must recognize the astounding resilience that our neighbors with limited incomes demonstrate day after day. This is not a plan to address a lack in people - it is a plan that focuses squarely on providing the support and opportunities for all people to thrive.

Following the adoption of the final version of the **Equitable Poverty Prevention Plan** at a subsequent City Council meeting, the plan’s implementation will further engage residents and collaboration with members of the community, businesses, business organizations, financial institutions, anchor institutions, government, non-profits, philanthropists, faith and school leaders, and community members who are living with or have lived with the stresses of poverty. The process will continue to examine existing programs for success over time by analyzing data, identifying trends and best practices through an equity lens with creation of annual performance measurements to track progress toward desired outcomes in five years.

As with every successful plan for community improvement in Dubuque, engaging our residents and stakeholders is essential. I invite everyone to watch for additional information on how to become an active participant in ensuring that Dubuque’s “new normal” supports a shared vision that is equitable, healthy, and sustainable for all our residents. Thank you! ☺