CFLJ COMMENTARY

Before we begin today’s commentary, the Center would like to remind everyone to watch New York NOW on WMHT this Monday night (October 26th) at nine o’clock. The program features two panel discussions about systemic racism critical to the Albany Police Reform Collaborative’s work, one with Albany city officials and one with community members. You can see panel members’ names and profiles here (https://www.timeforreckoning.org). The two panels are part of a month-long symposium co-hosted by the Center, the New York Writers Institute, and several other community partners: “The Time for Reckoning: Confronting Systemic Racism, Seeking Justice and Reimagining Society.”

Relegated to the “Parking Lot:” the Trauma of Systemic Racism and Brutality in Albany

When does the Police Reform Collaborative intend to provide a forum for Albany citizens to tell the government about the impacts of systemic racism on their lives? The Center can’t find any mention of such a forum on the Collaborative’s web page. The “minutes” of the five Albany Police Reform Collaborative meetings that are posted on the Collaborative’s web page are not really “minutes” at all, but a listing of attendees, meeting goals, and agenda items. Here are the goals of the Collaborative meetings posted on their web page:

August 18: “To understand the importance of dialogue and create a foundational understanding of intergroup dynamics.”

September 8: “Provide collaborative members with a fundamental understanding of the internal operations of the police department in order to assist with the reform recommendation process.”

September 15: “Provide collaborative members with an understanding of APD data – calls for service, crime statistic, use of force, etc. so as to give collaborative members a better understanding of how APD currently deploys public safety resources now, and the impact that has particularly in communities with higher numbers of police – community interactions.”

September 22: “For collaborative to finalize working groups’ mission and build timeline to complete police reform and reinvention recommendations.”

September 29: “For the collaborative to finalize the draft working group proposal and build the timeline for working group meetings.”

There is a lot of emphasis on making sure citizens understand police operations, but no indication that the City wants to hear anything at all about the experiences of citizens at the hands of the Albany Police Department. Exactly how will they assess what changes are needed? Oh wait --- there is a reference to the trauma of systemic racism and brutality. It appears in the “minutes” of the very last Collaborative meeting:

“Parking Lot: Discussion about Trauma related to systemic racism and brutality”

A discussion about trauma related to systemic racism and brutality in Albany has been relegated to the “parking lot” --- typically a resting space for topics to be considered at the next meeting. But the Collaborative’s last meeting was on September 29, 2020. They have now organized into five
“Working Groups,” whose topics were determined by the City. The Collaborative will not meet while the Working Groups are meeting.

These Working Groups are tasked with making recommendations to the Collaborative regarding concerns about Albany policing. But --- has the Collaborative even defined the problem, without talking to the citizenry?

In stark contrast, the White Plains Police Reform Committee has already offered citizens four mechanisms through which to provide comments regarding their police experiences:

1. The City of White Plains and the White Plains/Greenburgh NAACP Branch are co-sponsoring a series of public listening sessions for members of the reform committee and the White Plains community as a whole;
2. Comments can be provided in person, individually, at City Hall;
3. Comments may be submitted in writing to policereform@whiteplainsny.gov; and
4. Comments may be provided by visiting a “trusted community organization” (five are listed) and commenting in a private, one-on-one setting.

The only opportunity to submit public comment to the Albany Police Reform Collaborative thus far is an invitation for residents to submit emails not to the Collaborative, but to the research group conducting the Racial Bias Audit of the APD.

White Plains also differs from Albany in its general approach to the Collaborative’s work. Said White Plains Mayor Tom Roach in announcing the formation of the reform committee:

“I am pleased to be working in collaboration with the White Plains/Greenburgh NAACP on this important initiative and I am also pleased to announce that the President of the White Plains/Greenburgh NAACP Branch, Ms. Janice Griffith, will be chairing our Police Reform Committee.”

Imagine that --- the White Plains Mayor has named the NAACP president to chair their collaborative! The Albany NAACP was not even invited to be a member of Albany’s Collaborative. Additionally, the Westchester Coalition for Police Reform, a group founded in 2011 to help build safe communities with improved community-police relations and greater police accountability and transparency, serves on the White Plains collaborative. No criminal justice advocacy groups were invited to serve on Albany’s Collaborative.

The Working Groups were to have started during the week of October 19th. No new information has been posted to the Collaborative web page since the September 29th meeting minutes. The community doesn’t know who is chairing each committee, or when they are meeting. Upon inquiry to the City, the Center was advised that information regarding the Working Groups will be posted when it becomes available. Also --- the City is requiring only that at least one of each of the Working Groups’ meetings be public.

Sigh. So much for transparency and inclusion. To see how a truly community-centered Collaborative works, visit the White Plains Police Reform Committee at https://www.cityofwhiteplains.com/908/White-Plains-Police-Reform-Committee.