Summary of Mayor Sheehan’s Responses to Questions Posed in CFLJ’s April 7, 2020 Letter

1. Do you believe structural racism affects the operations of the Albany Police Department? If not, on what do you base that belief? If so, what steps do you intend to take to address the impact of structural racism on APD operations?

Mayor Sheehan responds that there are many definitions of “structural racism,” and that it is a term that she has seen used interchangeably with “racial inequity”, “institutional racism” and “white supremacy.” The Mayor cites the Aspen Institute’s definition of “structural racism” as:

“A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with ‘whiteness’ and disadvantages associated with ‘color’ to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist.”

Mayor Sheehan believes that, using this definition, structural racism impacts the operations of every institution, including government, healthcare, education, housing, social services, law enforcement and criminal justice. She does not believe the impact of structural racism can be addressed by focusing on only one of these institutions.

However, Mayor Sheehan continues, as a leader of one of those institutions she believes we can work to address structural racism in the areas we have influence over. The City’s Equity Agenda, which was codified by the Common Council last October, was the culmination of a commitment to the very hard work of viewing all our operations through a lens of structural racism. The Mayor attached a copy of that legislation to her response, and the Center is posting it along with this response summary.

Mayor Sheehan states that the Albany Police Department also introspectively reviews policies and procedures, especially during and after unfortunate events. She cites as one of those events, the tragic death of Dontay Ivy in April 2015. Then-Police Chief Brendan Cox made a commitment to sharing evidence with the Ivy family and openly sharing information with the community because he understood the importance of transparency and communication. Since then, APD’s progressive and innovative police strategies received national attention when the White House and the US Department of Justice selected Albany as one of 15 cities in the country to serve as a model for implementation of the recommendations from President Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing. The Mayor states that these are the same strategies the Albany Police Department remains committed to today.
2. Are you willing to deem structural racism a public health crisis in the city of Albany? If not, why not? If so, on what date do you plan to make that announcement?

Mayor Sheehan responds that from the very beginning of her administration, she has stressed the dire consequences that decades of racism and inequity have had on the City. She has changed policies, allocated resources, and focused on improving the most impacted neighborhoods. The equity advisory committee evaluates policies and makes recommendations using the social determinants of health as a guide. The Mayor states that she has already deemed structural racism as a leading cause of the inequities we see in our neighborhoods and systems (healthcare, social service, housing, etc.) in the City of Albany.

3. Are you willing to direct Chief Hawkins to release the Department’s racial profiling and use-of-force policies to the public? If not, why not? If so, on what date do you plan to give Chief Hawkins that direction?

Mayor Sheehan responds that the Department’s racial profiling (titled Bias Based Policing) and use-of-force policies are both available to the public, and that both policies were attached to the response provided by Chief Hawkins.

4. Are you willing to direct Chief Hawkins to include racial impact statements on all new or revised departmental policies, and to provide annual data reports to the public? If not, why not? If so, on what date do you plan to give Chief Hawkins that direction?

Mayor Sheehan responds that the policies of the Albany Police Department are examined and certified nationally through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), and statewide through the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). Both entities have far greater resources to perform racial impact reviews. The Mayor states that notwithstanding the City’s resource challenges, she is willing to explore how we could accomplish this. It would be helpful to have examples from departments that are providing such statements so that we can better understand what it would entail.

5. What are your plans to appropriately resource and strengthen the LEAD program? Will you provide an annual LEAD report, including annual data, to the public?

Mayor Sheehan responds that as one of the founding members of Albany’s LEAD program, she has dedicated a staff member from her office to be a liaison to the Policy Coordinating Group (PCG) overseeing the purpose, philosophy, and ideology of the partnership. The PCG – a group that includes the Center for Law and Justice – also oversees program management. The creation of the LEAD program report is facilitated by the program director, a full-time position that is currently vacant but that the PCG is actively advertising for. In the absence of a full-time program director, the PCG actively reviews diversion data and discusses how to expand and further improve the program. The City of Albany has also committed financial resources to the LEAD program by awarding approximately $100,000 to the Center for Law and Justice through the
Albany Community Development Agency to create and execute on community outreach initiatives to inform our residents about what the LEAD program is, its importance, and its impacts.

6. Are you willing to send a letter to the Governor and legislators urging repeal of Civil Rights Law 50-A? If not, why not? If so, on what date do you plan to send that letter?

Mayor Sheehan responds that transparency is critical to fostering trust between institutions and the people they serve, however there must be a balance between transparency and safety. The Mayor states that she supports reforms to Civil Rights Law 50-A that ensure public employees are transparently held accountable for proven acts of misconduct. Any reforms must take into account the legitimate safety concerns of public employees.

7. Are you willing to co-sponsor and personally participate in Albany’s “Recommitment to Community Policing” Symposium to be conducted by the Center for Law and Justice in the fall of 2020? If not, why not?

Mayor Sheehan responds that she is willing to participate in the symposium in accordance with public health policies promulgated in response to the current global coronavirus pandemic.
Questions about eCode360? Municipal users Join us daily between 12pm and 1pm EDT to

[HISTORY: Adopted by the Common Council of the City of Albany 10-21-2019 by Ord. No. 35.101.19. Amendments noted where applicable.]

§ 183-1 Legislative intent.
Equity is a cornerstone of a thriving democracy and must be embedded in the internal and external actions of local government that contribute to the health and well-being of everyone in the City. Racial and social disparities persist across key indicators of success in Albany, including education, economic development, health, housing, jobs, criminal justice, the built environment, service equity and arts and culture. The Mayor’s office established an Equity Agenda Advisory Committee in 2014 to advise the administration on executing an equity agenda. The goal of this equity agenda is to focus on achieving equity across all communities and ending the injustices caused by institutional and systemic racism and discrimination. The Common Council of the City of Albany seeks to more actively oversee and assist City departments as they utilize available tools and resources to end inequities across key indicators of success. Equitable budgeting is a “funding shift” to focus on those neighborhoods with the greatest needs.

§ 183-2 Equitable budgeting.
A. Built environment enhancements

(1) The City rates streets on a scale of one to 10. A rating of three or lower indicates a need for repair or replacement. The City shall seek to achieve parity among all wards in the proportion of street ratings of three or higher. The City of Albany Department of General Services and Division of Engineering will provide the Common Council with a ward map identifying the rating of each street at the time that it submits to the Common Council its annual proposed list of street and sidewalk reconstructions/enhancements. This map will break down street conditions by percentage within each ward. Wards with a disproportionate percentage of streets rated three or lower will be prioritized. The Department of General Services and Division of Engineering will also be required to keep an electronic record of requests made for the enhancement of existing streets and sidewalks and the installment of new sidewalks and walking paths. An update on these requests will be included in the report.

(2) Investment in parks must be based on equity, which is measured based on data retrieved from a City-wide parks assets map. The Departments of Recreation, General Services and Water will develop a City-wide asset map that includes, at a minimum: the location and name of each City-owned park; the size of each park, the recreation equipment (including splash pads) in each park, including the age of the equipment, the designed age range for children using the equipment, and the ADA access to such equipment; the number and condition of any court services; the existence and condition of any restroom facilities and water fountains; the existence and condition of benches, picnic tables, chess tables and other such surfaces; and the overall condition of the grounds (including hardscape) of the park. The Department of Parks and Recreation, in conjunction with the Department of General Services and Water Department, will provide the Common Council with a detailed asset map by September 1 of each year.

(3) The City of Albany Planning Department will conduct an annual assessment of lighting to ensure streets, alleyways and parks are adequately illuminated.

(4) The City of Albany Department of General Services will assess if trash receptacles are evenly distributed throughout wards in commercial zones and placed in areas of high activity.

(5) Any proposed qualified capital improvements (other than capital projects required at the City of Albany Landfill) will be accompanied with the name of previous capital projects completed by ward in a four-year period. The selection of wards for capital projects must take into account the need for built environment enhancements and the time period of the last capital project proposed or completed in the ward. Wards that have received zero or a limited number of capital project funds must be prioritized. The list will be submitted to the Albany Common Council annually. Exceptions will be made for state and federal mandated orders.

B. Violence prevention.
The Department of Administrative Services and the Office of the Mayor will be responsible for monitoring, advising and evaluating the City's Equity Agenda in the following manner:

The Department of Administrative Services will ensure that all City employees receive annual training on racial equity, diversity and inclusion.

(1) The Albany Common Council's Public Safety Committee will establish a Violence Prevention Task Force. The Violence Prevention Task Force will be responsible for convening stakeholders every fall to develop action items in preparation for the upcoming summer in anticipation of an uptick in violence. This task force will be composed of members of the Albany Common Council's Public Safety Committee, community members from wards disproportionately impacted by violence, at least one youth representative, representatives from the Albany Police Department, the Mayor's office, the Albany City School District, clergy and members from violence-prevention-related organizations.

(2) Funding will be allocated annually to violence prevention programming and initiatives in Wards with the highest incidence and prevalence of violence. The funds will be allocated based on prioritization through a community participatory budgeting process with involvement from the Violence Prevention Task Force. A separate budget line within the City of Albany's annual budget will be created and titled "Violence Prevention Task Force Funding."

C. Community programming. While the Office of Housing and Urban Development requires that all community block grant funding be allocated to high needs communities, the Albany Community Development Agency will take special care to ensure that CDBG funds be prioritized for organizations that serve communities historically disadvantaged due to racism and discrimination, including African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans.

§ 183-3 Measuring and monitoring Equity Agenda.
The Department of Administrative Services and the Office of the Mayor will be responsible for monitoring, advising and evaluating the City's Equity Agenda in the following manner:

A. The Human Rights Commission will be responsible for reviewing, enhancing and providing recommendations on the City of Albany's Equity Agenda. Recommendations will be submitted to the Office of the Mayor. The Equity Agenda should include policy recommendations for City-wide initiatives and policies to ensure equitable growth among key indicators of success: education, economic development, health, housing, jobs, criminal justice, the built environment, service equity, and arts and culture.

B. The Office of the Mayor and the Department of Administrative Services will develop and implement a communications strategy to promote summer jobs, job fairs, workforce development training centers and information about civil service testing to residents. The communications strategy will be submitted to the Human Rights Commission for enhancements and recommendations. The communications strategy will be implemented City-wide with an emphasis on communities with the following characteristics: minority majority wards, low income and disproportionate crime rates and vacant buildings.

C. The Human Rights Commission will implement an annual dialogue on race, equity and inclusion for the City of Albany community. The forum will be funded as part of the Mayor's Rotunda Evening Series. Funds for this initiative will be made available through an administrative contractual expenditure line in the City's annual budget.

D. The City of Albany Commission on Human Rights, in partnership with the City of Albany's Department of Administrative Services, will track outcomes over time and publish a report on an annual basis on the City's progress towards achieving equity. The City will measure the collective actions and policies in the following equity areas: built environment enhancements; violence prevention; workforce training employment; and education. A report will be delivered to the Council on an annual basis, no later than September 21.

§ 183-4 Employee racial equity training.
The Department of Administrative Services will ensure that all City employees receive annual training on racial equity, diversity and inclusion.