

December 13, 2020

Livermore Community,

To paraphrase the old saw: a misunderstanding can go halfway around Livermore before the facts put on their shoes. That's the situation we now face. A few days ago, several paragraphs from posted notes on the Equity and Inclusion webpage were taken badly out of context. This letter gives accurate information, asks that you help correct the misunderstanding, and invites you to participate in a community project.

This summer, the Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee invited community members to apply to be part of a working group tasked with providing community input. Almost 50 people applied, representing a broad spectrum of people who work and/or live in Livermore. In the interest of fostering inclusion, Council chose to accept all applications. Participants include several members of the Livermore Police Department, along with Chief Young. Working Group members divide into four subgroups: Culture, Policing and Human Services, Youth, and Economics (Housing, Work, and Transportation). Each subgroup has met separately three times.

Public Dialogue Consortium, the facilitating group, is posting notes that summarize each meeting's brainstorming and robust conversations, so that the whole community can see the process, warts and all. Unfortunately, such transparency has led to the misunderstanding that occurred a few days ago. Unlike the very misleading and inflammatory story currently circulating, the Culture subgroup is simply trying to understand the look and feel of Livermore, a project everyone is welcome to participate in.

The Culture subgroup's project to look at the entirety of our city is the community equivalent of an individual looking in the mirror. Our city includes different types of neighborhoods, public spaces, as well as a variety of restaurants, shops and work places. Items such as murals, artwork, holiday decorations and signs contribute to the look and feel of the community. As with the clothes we wear and the cars we drive, our homes and yards communicate our values and culture to others. A sign or flag in a yard or on a house is intended to be seen. As such, that is a matter of free speech: everyone has the right to express themselves freely and no one is suggesting otherwise.

Good communication means being understood and requires more than self-expression. So, if the first step of the Culture subgroup is to gather data, the second is to understand meaning. Understanding begins with acknowledging that feelings are feelings. Dictating feeling—telling someone not to feel pride or shame, sadness or joy never goes well. Dictating meaning has similarly bad results. Rather, listening to what others say about what particular symbols mean to them is how we build understanding and connection among different groups.

Unfortunately, symbols can have very different meanings to different groups, can be misunderstood by others, and can trigger anger and division. For example, some people see the Black Lives Matter sign as a way of reminding others that some groups have been systemically oppressed throughout American history and into the present. Similarly, some people see the Thin Blue Line flag as a way of supporting the people who put their lives on the line to provide public safety.

To come together, we need to hear and acknowledge other people's feelings. We need to understand other people's stories. That does not mean we need to agree with or even like them. But we need to hear them without believing the worst of others.

Everyone is invited to participate in the conversation. You can submit your story, along with why it matters and what it means to you here: info@cityoflivermore.net with the subject line "Livermore Culture Stories." We look forward to seeing and reading everyone's stories.

Sincerely,

The Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee



Bob Woerner
Mayor-elect



Trish Munro
Council Member