

City of Milwaukee Common Council

City Hall

200 E. Wells Street

Room 205 Milwaukee, WI 53202

June 9, 2020

Dear Zoning and Neighborhood Development Committee,

My name is Caressa Givens and I am writing today in solidarity with the countless organizations city-wide seeking peace, justice, and racial equality. I am advocating for a thorough and transparent vetting of the next City of Milwaukee Commissioner of City Development, Lafayette Crump.

As a mobility justice advocate, the question is posed often to me, “Why don’t African-Americans ride bicycles?” I quickly respond that *they do*, but I understand that the majority of African Americans *do not*, and if able to bike safely and with convenience, their health and life expectancy would drastically improve. Harmful, racist land-use practices still have a negative impact on how Black Indigenous and Persons of Color (BIPOC) residents of Milwaukee are getting places and living their lives.

Historically, elements of land use regulations in the City of Milwaukee—in the form of actions like exclusionary zoning and predatory lending—have led to racial and economic segregation. Because of government-sanctioned racism, the places we travel in order to live, work, and play *today* are physically sprawling, and having a car is the only reliable way to survive.

Notably, in the field of active transportation, the issue of these land-use practices has played a significant role in Milwaukee County’s reckless driving crisis. Over-parked and over-driven cities lead to a car dominant culture, which makes our neighborhoods unsafe and places a heavy financial burden on a person who has little to no option but to drive. Car ownership, on average, displaces 25% of the American family income. This is a significant expense for most American households, but for BIPOC communities living at or below the poverty level, owning and maintaining a car is oppressive. This is *by design*, and BIPOC communities must stand up against this mechanism that contributes to the ongoing

cycle of poverty and segregation. The ideology and physical manifestation of the importance of car ownership casts non-car users into the welfare line and leaves no understanding or acceptance of personal choice for the interest of maintaining one's health, wellbeing, or even that of the natural environment. Since 2018, 76 people on average have died in car crashes in Milwaukee County. African Americans walking are twice as likely to be hit and killed by a car and Native Americans walking are three times more likely to be hit and killed by a car compared to white people.

Despite the drafting of local plans addressing anti-displacement, improved environmental sustainability, and bike and pedestrian safety, we still invest nearly 50% of our City budget to the police, leaving less City funding for affordable and mixed-income housing programs, upgrading our street network to prioritize people walking, biking and using public transit, and supporting the further investment in the development of neighborhood commercial corridors. Additionally, there is a genuine and real fear of the police, and so as long as the police continue to terrorize Black and Brown people, this will keep residents out of public space and married to their personal vehicles for some semblance of safety.

Positive feedback has been articulated regarding the experience and character of Mr. Crump from many respected members of the community. However, this ask is not to attack the character and experience of Mr. Crump but to articulate the imperative need for more accountability on all levels of government, especially during a global pandemic and recent flare ups regarding community justice and racial equality under the perils of police brutality here in Milwaukee and nationwide. If we are to move towards thriving BIPOC neighborhoods, it is paramount that our newly appointed leaders provide a public course of action nothing short of outlining the investments necessary to improve BIPOC health, education, land-use policies, economic development, and transportation with a committed timeline.

I am asking that the new appointment along with existing elected officials do the following:

- Members of the Common Council, the Mayor, and new DCD Commissioner appointment *publicly* acknowledge the harmful land-use practices that currently racially segregate residents in the City of Milwaukee and *apologize* for this wrongdoing
- The new Commissioner appointment, Lafayette Crump, provides their *public* mission and speaks on their goals for the future of neighborhood development in the City of Milwaukee
- The Common Council and the Mayor, with the full support of the new Commissioner, acknowledge that the divestment of funding from the police budget shall support, in part, radical and urgent prioritization of *fair* and creative land-use practices, skilled labor training and economic development, and high-level internal collaboration with the DPW, MDH, and Common

Council to rapidly transform our street network for safety and access to all neighborhoods, and with the County to improve the bus transportation network.

Why would we ever expect residents to incorporate bicycling into their lives for recreation or transportation when it is still acceptable to use harmful planning practices that continue to contribute to racial segregation? Our streets are still wide, we still provide ample parking and subsidize parking, and death counts due to traffic crashes can compete for Milwaukee County gun homicide tolls. Yet, we've spent an egregious amount of time, effort, and prioritized spending into a streetcar that *still* has to make space for more parking and wide kept streets, and *does not* serve Milwaukeeans in surrounding neighborhoods in their daily needs, majorly defeating its purpose.

It is well documented that people who live active lives live longer. A five-year study of 263,450 UK commuters, published in the *British Medical Journal* in 2017, found regular cycling cut the risk of death from any cause by 41%, and the incidence of cancer and heart disease by 45% and 46% respectively. It is important that even locally, elected officials and appointments have the power to ideologically place driving at the core of determining prosperity. This is a great power, that is quite literally killing residents. If we continue on a path where a driver's license is more valuable than a high school diploma, more valuable than a safer and healthier life, we are not only denying one's physical mental and emotional health but we are actively supporting jobs that are part of the 19th-century unskilled labor market which are largely only conveniently obtainable by car and have actively contributed to segregation and lack of economic upward mobility among people of color.

Segregation is about public space. It's about the way we use our land. It's about realizing that white people don't understand and/or care that they don't have to see *Black Life*, and that is why there are people in power who make policies that both intentionally and unintentionally keep us away from one another. We must do more and we must do better, no more empty talk. It is imperative that we keep all those who hold public office accountable to the community.

Sincerely,

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