

# Community Leadership, Responsive Government, and Transparency

---

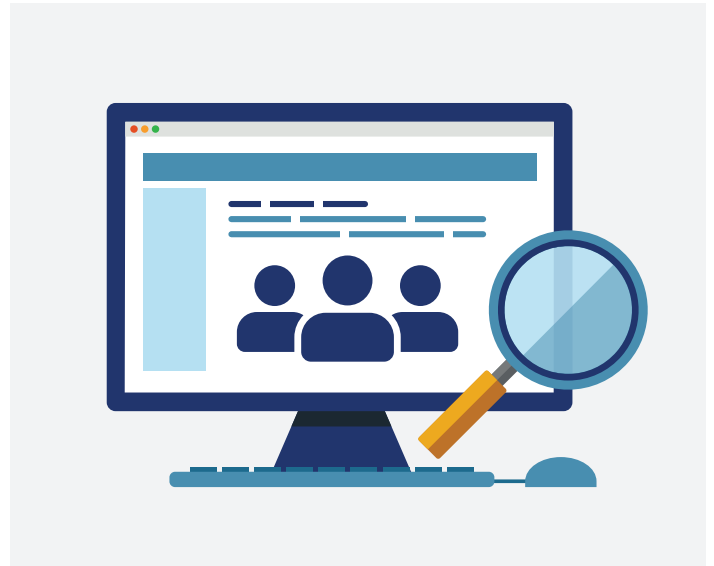
## Context

The City needs to move beyond community engagement to community leadership. Right now, many structures disproportionately negatively affect black and brown residents. Current leadership structures, including boards and commissions, do not yet adequately represent our community, and investment in outreach and education is needed to broaden representation. City meetings, resources, and information must also become more accessible by enacting diversity, equity, and inclusion frameworks in City processes and operations. In acknowledging and accounting for the ways past and current structures created and continue to sustain racial inequities, the City can create deliberate systems and supports that strive to achieve racial equity through proactive and preventative measures. Racial justice and equity means having policies, practices, attitudes, and actions that promote equal opportunity, treatment, and outcomes for people of all races. In order to move toward a more just and equitable New Haven, residents need to both lead in the building of these policies and deeply benefit from the policies that the City and the community create together.

## First 100 Days

### Recommendation 1: Lay the groundwork for an intentional, robust communication strategy.

Via the City website and other tools, educate residents on City processes and the way to get involved. As a starting point, create an



organizational chart for the City and each department, a legislative decision flowchart, and a flowchart for development projects. Utilize the City's online events calendar to include, at a minimum, all public meetings. Create a plan to make all public communications available in Spanish and Arabic, the second and third most spoken languages in New Haven after English.

### Recommendation 2: Increase transparency around community participation.

Create a clear and open process for joining boards and commissions, with an announcement of when applications open, a description of the application and appointment process, a timeline for appointments, and a list of clear criteria for serving. Prioritize representation through intentional outreach to neighborhoods, youth, and other underrepresented groups to ensure that boards

and commissions are representative of the City's residents. Improve residents' ability to participate meaningfully with board and commission activities by listing on the City website all available information on boards, commissions, and ad hoc committees, creating standard procedures for public comment, and updating the website with cancellations and meeting minutes. Broaden notice requirements for development projects to include posting notices for all hearings and zoning changes on the City website, announcing them in press releases, and, where possible, giving notice in schools, libraries, and elsewhere.

### **Recommendation 3: Consult with community and faith leaders.**

Regularly consult with both faith-based leaders who represent the range of New Haven's religious communities and community leaders who represent a broad section of City residents. These leaders can all be called upon to share information, build partnerships to improve community welfare, build on common goals and interests, and advise on critical issues that directly involve specific community groups, faith-based organizations, and/or community-based organizations.

## **Two Years**

### **Recommendation 1: Make public meetings accessible, and ensure they are respectful of everyone.**

Explore partnerships to provide childcare for public meetings and on-site childcare that City employees could pay into. Establish lactation rooms for breastfeeding employees and visitors, and provide toys and children's books in waiting and meeting areas. Provide Spanish and Arabic interpretation whenever possible. Begin meetings with an acknowledgment that identifies the original indigenous inhabitants. Collaborate with the

Board of Education and Board of Alders to explore livestreaming their meetings on Facebook. Plan for an upgrade of the Board of Alders sound system. Unlock the doors of City Hall for all public meetings, even when they begin before 9 a.m..

### **Recommendation 2: Deploy personalized electronic communications.**

Develop a citywide email list that can be segmented by interests and location—e.g., local events, citywide events, citywide policies, zoning changes, and new developments. Provide text alerts for residents who prefer texting or who do not use email that links to email content; do this alongside a parallel social media strategy.

### **Recommendation 3: Continue ongoing community canvasses by the Mayor and senior staff.**

This could include an hour of door-knocking per person per month that involves open conversations or topic-based questions from staff.

### **Recommendation 4: Collaborate with youth to design avenues for youth leadership in City government.**

Work with youth-led community groups, high schools, and the Citywide Student Council, among others. Programs could include Mayor for A Day, continued leadership on the Board of Education, and youth service on boards and commissions.

### **Recommendation 5: Support strong census outreach.**

Continue to support ongoing efforts to have a strong census year. Focus on ensuring that all residents feel comfortable participating, regardless of immigration status, since increased participation increases the availability of state and federal funds and programs.

### **Recommendation 6: Facilitate improved public engagement with the budget.**

To help residents more easily follow progress on the budget, collaborate with the Board of Alders to arrange staggered budget workshop times so they no longer occur only late in the evenings, as well as provide the City budget in an easily shared and sorted electronic format (see Budget and Finance recommendations). Provide financial information to residents upon request rather than requiring formal Freedom of Information Act requests. The Police and Fire Departments should publicly share a cost itemization of overtime budgets.

### **Recommendation 7: Improve community connections with the Registrar of Voters.**

Recruit more poll workers, and publicize information about voting-related changes. Work with schools to identify suitable volunteers and paid staff to help on election days. Ramp up voter registration efforts going into the 2020 election.

## **Longer Term**

### **Recommendation 1: Partner with Community Management Teams.**

Help residents and City officials understand how CMTs are currently perceived and how their functions can be improved to fit the needs of each district. Provide staff time for outreach, and seek funding for childcare and interpretation to ensure accessibility and inclusion. Consider building in time at each CMT meeting for residents to meet and discuss issues both with and without the presence of City officials.

### **Recommendation 2: Enhance the transparency of Livable Cities Initiative and Economic Development transactions.**

Create a clear, accessible list of all City properties and developments. Regularly update SeeClickFix about inspections, inspection results, and residential licenses. Via the City website, outline how to apply to lease, buy, or use City property; supply application materials; and enumerate criteria for consideration and approval. Prioritize applications from New Haven residents for community-oriented purposes. All applications should be reviewed and receive a response within a specified time frame. Negotiations around developer incentives (e.g., tax abatements) and affordability should be made public, and the Affordable Housing Commission should be given a stronger voice in decision-making.

### **Recommend 3: Implement a City open data policy.**

Many public debates about City matters are not fully informed by available public data. As data are digitized and processed, they should be made anonymous and published in the most accessible format available. Examples include publishing the City's motor vehicle crash data and lead abatement statistics.

### **Recommendation 4: Develop a citywide equity initiative.**

Establish a permanent office or program to examine and address structural racism and promote racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity.



### Recommendation 5: Invest in New Haven as a city friendly and safe for LGBTQ+ residents.

Run an audit on LGBTQ+ funding to determine what percentage of the budget is currently allocated specifically to the LGBTQ+ community and LGBTW+ issues. Develop a permanent LGBTQ+ Commission with the goal of supporting the LGBTQ+ community in New Haven and making sure the City is friendly and safe for members. Create an LGBTQ+

resources section on the City website. Ensure that LGBTQ+/queerness is a diversity factor considered in hiring City staff. Support programming for queer youth, especially queer youth of color.

### Recommendation 6: Plan for revision of the City Charter and potential redistricting.

In advance of the 2023 Charter revision, design an inclusive process for identifying community needs and priorities.



Photo: Lucy Gellman