



# EQUITY & COMMUNITY WELLBEING

## GOAL

Create an equitable, inclusive, engaged, and healthy community that is affordable and accessible to all, that recognizes and removes barriers so that individual outcomes are not determined by a person's identity, and where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

### Sustainability Goal

Hold for goal.

## OVERVIEW

Equity and community wellbeing are valued principles of the Town. Blacksburg aspires to be a community that recognizes and removes barriers ensuring equitable access for everyone, celebrates diversity, supports public health and wellbeing, fosters community engagement, and nurtures community connections. The Equity section of this chapter includes **National Historical Context, Local History, Ongoing Initiatives in Blacksburg, Equity in the Community, and Equity in Town Government**. The Community Wellbeing section of this chapter includes **Livability, Public Health and a Healthy Community, Community Connections and Sense of Belonging, and Community Engagement**.

### Definitions for a Common Understanding

The ideas of equity and community wellbeing encompass many other concepts including inclusion, diversity, community engagement, public health, and sense of belonging. These ideas are used in a variety of contexts and may have different meanings for different people. The following definitions are used to build a common understanding, which serves as the foundation for this chapter.

While most of this Plan focuses on physical development, community wellbeing places emphasis on tangible and intangible elements of the Town. **Community wellbeing** is the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions that are essential for individuals to fulfill their potential and thrive. Community wellbeing involves a healthy, prosperous, thriving, engaged, resilient, and empowered populace. Three broad attributes play a large role in community wellbeing: equity, livability, and community connections/sense of belonging.

**Equity** is when everyone has access to the resources and opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their wellbeing, and thrive, regardless of their identity. Equity differs from equality in that it acknowledges that treating everyone the same may not result in equitable outcomes. Equity can be better understood through examples of inequity such as lack of access to clean drinking water, affordable housing and transportation, quality education, and recreational opportunities.

## **EQUITY**

### **National Historical Context**

In order to address inequities, the community must first recognize the historical impact of planning practices and policies in creating and perpetuating discrimination across the nation. These ranged from specific practices such as racially restrictive covenants, which prohibited people of color from owning, renting, or occupying an individual property or subdivision to broad policies such as urban renewal, which displaced entire communities. Shortly after the first zoning ordinance was adopted in the U.S., Baltimore adopted the first racial zoning ordinance specifically aimed at segregating the city in 1910.

While explicitly racial zoning was overturned by the Supreme Court in 1917, exclusionary zoning followed, which separated out uses by type. In particular, it was frequently used to separate single-family residential uses from multi-family residential uses. In most cases, this still served to intentionally segregate cities both racially and economically with apartments being more affordable for lower-income populations, which overwhelmingly included communities of color. Exclusionary zoning also was used to discriminate against other groups including people with disabilities and homeless individuals by restricting the location of certain use types such as group homes and emergency shelters.

The overturning of racial zoning ordinances also led to the rise of racially restrictive covenants placed on individual properties and subdivisions. Racially restrictive covenants are contractual agreements that prohibit the purchase, lease, or occupation of property by a particular group of people, usually Black and African American residents. A 1948 Supreme Court case held that enforcement of racially restrictive covenants was unconstitutional. Although not legally enforceable, these covenants were not illegal to establish and the practice continued through private enforcement, such as social pressure and vandalism. The impacts of these regulations and practices were exacerbated through redlining lending policies in the 1930s, which typically classified communities of color as risky for home loans. Racially restrictive covenants and overt housing discrimination became illegal with passage of the federal Fair Housing Act of 1968. However, this legislation did not bring an end to all racial discrimination in housing.

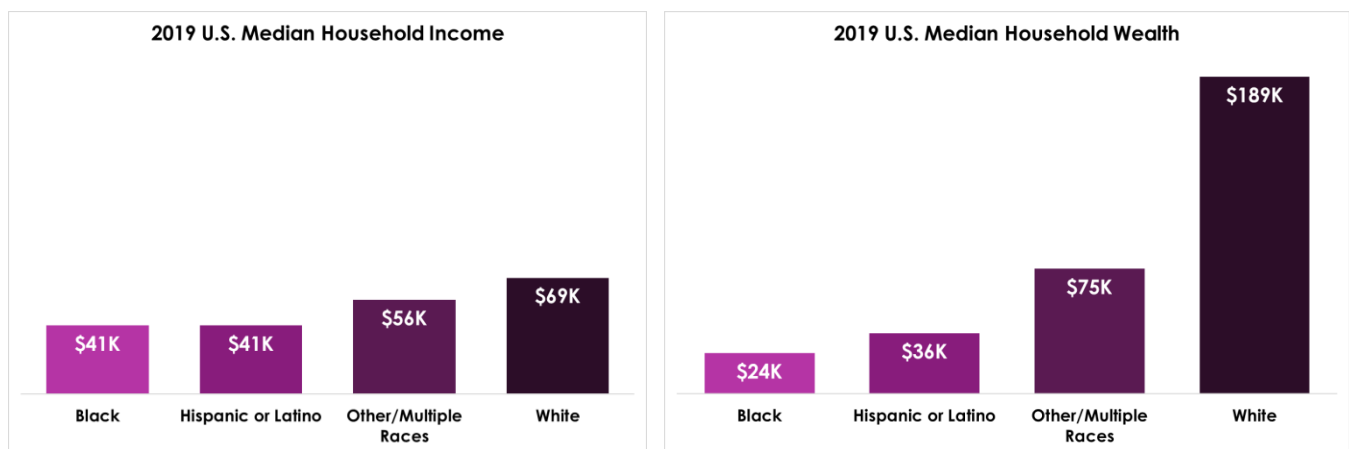
Several pieces of federal legislation were passed from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s leading to urban renewal, which provided cities with public funding to clear urban areas for the construction of new highways and for redevelopment by private entities. This legislation incentivized the clearing of “blighted” areas or “slums,” veiled terms that in practice, intentionally discriminated against minority neighborhoods and disproportionately displaced Black and African American residents and families of color. Urban renewal was closely tied to gentrification, which is narrowly defined as the process where neighborhoods are transformed by investment in redevelopment that is characterized by increases in property values as well as increased rents and cost of living. Gentrification is typically accompanied by an influx of higher income residents and can lead to significant involuntary displacement of long-time residents and businesses. This displacement frequently impacts low-income residents and communities of color. Gentrification in the U.S. largely began in the 1960s, but continues to this day.

“Not in my backyard,” also known as NIMBYism, is a phenomenon where groups of people are opposed to proposed projects, policies, and programs in their neighborhood, and are typically in support of strict land use regulations. NIMBYism is frequently characterized by the following objections to development: incompatible neighborhood uses and density, loss of community character, increased traffic, loss of property value, increased crime, noise and light pollution, strain on public services, and lifestyle conflicts. These types of objections are problematic when combined with an intention to exclude or marginalize certain people or groups, which can normalize racist, classist, and other

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discriminatory views and exacerbate inequities in the community. NIMBYism typically manifests around increased residential density (single family to multifamily), affordable housing proposals, group homes, emergency shelters, addiction treatment facilities, housing for ex-offenders, and industrial uses. When NIMBYism is codified through government actions, the decisions disproportionately impact low-income and special needs populations as well as communities of color.

The displacement from urban renewal and gentrification as well as NIMBYism has burdened vulnerable populations with higher environmental risk, due to the proximity to high-impact uses with greater health hazards. The environmental justice movement arose in response to this risk. The movement seeks to protect all populations from health hazards and environmental risks and provide equal access in the related decision-making processes. While the environmental justice movement and the dismantling of historical policies and practices are steps forward in addressing inequities, these inequities have left a significant legacy on traditionally marginalized and vulnerable populations.



**Impact of Institutionalized Barriers to Building Wealth**  
Source: Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances.

This legacy of harm has led to negative health outcomes, institutionalized barriers to building wealth that prevent economic security and mobility, criminalization of poverty, disenfranchisement in decision making processes, and the tacit social acceptance of these impacts. For example, the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances shows that nationwide, the typical White family has approximately eight times the wealth of the typical Black family and more than five times the wealth of the typical Hispanic family as shown in the chart above. To move towards equity, communities must work to build trust with traditionally ignored, excluded, and marginalized populations, dismantle institutionalized barriers, and address the disparities created by historical policies and practices.

## Local History

The previous section reflects on the effects of historical planning practices in creating lasting inequities for marginalized populations in communities across the nation. Many of these populations had already seen horrific effects of non-planning practices such as enslavement and indentured servitude as well as forced migration relocating tribal nations to reservations before the 1900s.

Prior to European arrival, the Blacksburg area was territory of the Tutelo people. From the 1670s until the 1770s, there were land claim disputes between English colonists and Native American nations. Following a series of treaties, concluding in several battles in 1774, the western boundary of the English colonies was pushed to the Ohio River. This land included the area that would be established as

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Blacksburg in 1798. After the area was incorporated in the Colony of Virginia, several plantations were established in Blacksburg and the surrounding area, including Smithfield, Solitude, Whitethorne, and Kentland, enslaving hundreds of Africans and their descendants. By 1850, the population of Blacksburg alone totaled 333 people, 63 of whom were slaves making up almost 20% of the Town. These slaves and their descendants laid the foundations for historic buildings throughout Blacksburg and on Virginia Tech's campus.

Virginia Tech was established in 1872 by the Virginia legislature for white male students only. Women were admitted in 1921 as day students. African American and Black students were admitted starting in 1953 but were not permitted to live on campus or eat in dining halls. At this time, racial segregation was common in Virginia and specifically in Blacksburg until the late 1960s. Due to segregation and racially restrictive covenants, several neighborhoods in and around Blacksburg were established with primarily African American and Black residents during this time including the Jackson Street area, Lee Street/Woolwine Street, Clay Street/Church Street, the Nellie's Cave area, and Wake Forest. In the late 1800s, the Gilbert Street area was established as a primarily African American and Black neighborhood and became known as New Town. The building commonly known as St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall, the only remaining New Town structure, was founded in 1905 and served as the social center of this community. Desegregation, road construction, and gentrification led to the decline and disappearance of New Town as a predominately Black neighborhood by the 1970s. The preservation of St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall is discussed later in this chapter.



**House in New Town, date unknown**

Source: "Photograph, New Town House," *Blacksburg Museum and Cultural Foundation*. [digitalsc.lib.vt.edu/NewTown/2008.02.008](https://digitalsc.lib.vt.edu/NewTown/2008.02.008).

Town staff has come across many examples of racially restrictive covenants attached to subdivisions within the Town between 1900 and 1960. While this practice was ruled unenforceable in 1948, these covenants still show up in the chain of title for properties today. In 2020, the Virginia General Assembly passed a new law to allow an owner to eliminate the discriminatory language from the records through a certificate of release that can be filed with the local court system.

Another example of the re-examination of local history is recent scrutiny of Virginia Tech naming practices that led to the renaming of two campus residence halls. Both historic building names were linked to individuals with white supremacist views. In 2020, one building was renamed for a local

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African American couple, Janie and William Hoge, who hosted African American and Black students that were not permitted to live on campus. The other building was named for James Leslie Whitehurst, Jr. who was the first Black student permitted to live on campus and became the first Black person to serve on the University Board of Visitors. These examples only touch upon the early history and well-known practices that marginalized specific groups in Blacksburg. A deeper examination of local history and the legacy of these policies and practices is vital to assessing and addressing inequities in the community.

## Ongoing Initiatives in Blacksburg

As noted in the previous section, **St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall** served as the social gathering center of the historic African American and Black community known as New Town. While the remainder of New Town has redeveloped since its decline in the 1970s, efforts to preserve St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall began in 2002. In 2005, St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall was donated to the Town and the hall received state and national historic designation that same year. In 2009, the Town restored St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall as a museum and activity center to preserve the memories and contributions of the many families who lived in New Town. The *2019 Downtown Strategic Plan* notes that the hall is currently isolated in the midst of incompatible, auto-oriented uses, suggests that a significant opportunity exists to improve the environment surrounding St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall, and presents a vision for further recognition of New Town's significance to the community.

Several Town Council members and Town staff participate in the **Montgomery County Dialogue on Race**. The Dialogue on Race was formed in 2010 and serves as a forum that examines racial issues articulated by the African American community, and develops and implements solutions. The Dialogue on Race has formed five issue groups to take further action on the following topics: education, employment and income gap, law enforcement, limited presence, and white privilege. In 2020, the Dialogue on Race held several events around race and policing, understanding racial trauma, and the impact of racial trauma on Black children.

In order to address the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and consider accessibility, the Town has an **ADA Committee** that is made up of Town staff and community members. This group makes recommendations to the Town around accessibility issues. The Town also formed an ADA working committee in 2018 to provide guidance to consultants working on the Town's Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan update. The ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan serves as a framework to enhance access for people with disabilities regarding the Town's facilities, programs, services, and activities. The outcome of the ongoing process will include a report containing findings and recommendations regarding the removal of barriers.

The Town is engaging in dialogue with the community about policy, practice, and police culture locally. In 2020, the Town established the **Blacksburg Police Advisory Board** to serve as a resource for open communication between the community and the Police Department. This local effort also responds to the national conversation occurring around policing practices, police violence, and systemic racism. The Board membership includes a diverse group of community members that will make recommendations related to law enforcement issues and concerns, community outreach programs, training, and policy.

The Town has several other ongoing efforts around equity issues that are covered in other chapters of the Plan such as affordable housing initiatives (see *Housing chapter*) and aging in place initiatives (see *Housing* and *Sustainability* chapters).

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The following local organizations, institutions, and initiatives focus on equity in the community:

- **The Montgomery County, Radford City, Floyd County branch (MRF) of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)**, which funds scholarships and provides programs around legal redress, prisoner support and re-entry, voter registration, and educational outreach
- **The Christiansburg Institute** which, through storytelling, community outreach and education, and historic preservation, honors the Christiansburg Industrial Institute's 100-year legacy of educating African American students from across Virginia and beyond
- **Virginia Tech's InclusiveVT**, which includes initiatives such as recruiting talented and diverse faculty, procedures for self-selection of chosen names and personal pronouns, and recognition of Indigenous Peoples' Day

## **Equity in the Community**

The Town recognizes inclusivity and equity as strong values in the community. While the previous section describes programs and policies intended to address inequities, the legacy of these historic practices still impacts our community today and continuing to address this legacy is a priority. Blacksburg aspires to be a community where no one group disproportionately benefits or is burdened by how the Town grows and develops. Town policies and regulations should support equitable access to programs, services, and amenities. For example, park access can vary widely for individuals based on where they reside, their mobility options, and the programming offered within the parks, and the Town should work to improve access to parks for everyone. Equitable access must go beyond physical access so that individuals feel welcome, have the information needed to use these programs, services, and amenities, and feel a sense of belonging in the community. The Town must also ensure that individuals feel safe accessing programs, services, and amenities, particularly for minorities whose behavior has historically been criminalized. In order to achieve this, the Town must first identify inequities and develop indicators to measure these inequities. Identifying and measuring inequities can help clarify which policies and regulations create barriers and disproportionate burdens and benefits. Next, the Town should develop strategies to address inequities through a community engagement process that empowers traditionally marginalized and vulnerable populations.

### Equity in Town Government

The Comprehensive Plan lays out the general vision for the community, and equity ties into all of the subject areas of the plan. For example, the Housing chapter addresses equity issues with sections on affordable housing, senior housing, and special needs housing. The Sustainability chapter has sections on climate vulnerability, food systems and access, and a living wage. The Town should continue to evaluate these areas through an equity lens as the plan is updated.

In addition to focusing on equity in the community, the Town should also take a deep look at its internal policies and practices, such as:

- Recruitment and hiring policies
- Representation for committees, boards, and task forces
- Procurement policies

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- Community engagement processes
- Training around anti-racism, implicit bias, and mental health

The Town is committed to the development of an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan in 2021, which will include review of these, and other policies and practices.

## COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Community wellbeing goes beyond the physical features of the Town and beyond the physical needs of individuals. Community wellbeing includes three main concepts: equity, livability, and community connections/sense of belonging. Equity is a critical component of community wellbeing and was covered in the previous section. Livability encompasses the infrastructure, services, and programs offered that support the community. The concept of community connections and sense of belonging considers the social health of the community incorporating mutual care, respect, and trust as well as civic engagement.

In 2020, Town Council adopted a goal to “promote initiatives and events to enhance community wellbeing and residents’ connection to each other, individually and institutionally.” This goal acknowledges the importance of social connections in forming a caring and compassionate community. The concept of community wellbeing also recognizes that physical and mental health can affect an individual’s quality of life and sense of empowerment. The wellbeing of a community is enriched by an empowered public that is engaged in decision-making processes. Town efforts can enhance community wellbeing by supporting healthy choices, ensuring equitable access to resources and services for the whole community, removing barriers to participation and empowering historically marginalized populations, and fostering social connections. The Town should develop indicators to measure the components of community wellbeing and create a framework to enhance quality of life.

### Livability

Livability as a component of wellbeing includes the infrastructure, services, and programs within the community. Many topics related to livability are covered in depth in other chapters in the Comprehensive Plan including access to: safe and affordable housing in the *Housing chapter*, affordable transportation options in the *Transportation chapter*, and park lands as well as recreational programs and services in the *Parks & Recreation chapter*. Some livability topics are broader and cross over between multiple chapters, such as living wage employment opportunities found in both the *Sustainability chapter* and *Economy & Employment chapter*. Physical and mental health is a livability topic that crosses into the *Public Safety & Community Facilities chapter* but is detailed further in the next section.

### Public Health and a Healthy Community

According to the World Health Organization, “health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Ensuring that everyone has access to the resources and opportunities they need to achieve a healthy lifestyle is key to a thriving community. Many aspects of the natural and built environment affect the health of the community such as access to clean water and air, affordable and healthy food, and safe, affordable housing. Resources and opportunities that are sometimes considered amenities are vital to positive health outcomes. Access to parklands and open spaces can improve mental health and provide individuals with opportunities to be physically active, which can reduce obesity. Providing dedicated infrastructure for bicyclists and pedestrians reduces safety conflicts with vehicular traffic and leads to reduced car dependency and

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subsequently, better air quality. Street trees and tree canopy requirements for development offer air quality benefits. Air pollution can affect public health through diminished lung function, increased severity for asthma issues, and other respiratory diseases.

A healthy community also encompasses services such as affordable quality care for mental and physical health, affordable quality elder care, and accessible transportation, as well as ensuring economic stability and limiting exposure to risks like environmental contaminants. The Town can advance positive public health outcomes by furthering access to quality affordable health care and assistance, encouraging healthy choices, and limiting risks. Ways to limit exposure to risks can vary greatly jurisdiction to jurisdiction as well as by neighborhoods within a specific locality. The Town participates in regional planning for hazard mitigation and completed a climate vulnerability assessment (see the *Environment chapter* and the *Sustainability chapter*), which evaluate and plan for risks relating to natural and human-caused hazards and climate change. The Town can continue to assess and limit community exposure to risks through these and other efforts.

Access to affordable quality care for mental and physical health, including preventive and long-term care, is vital for the whole community. There are two large health care providers in the region, LewisGale and Carilion, as well as countless smaller independent providers. The region is actively participating in health care education through programs at the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, Radford University, and New River Community College. The Town is a part of the New River Public Health District that provides regional services including health education, family planning, immunizations, supplemental nutrition programs (WIC), and communicable disease prevention.

## Be committed. Be well.



**Graphic from New River Valley Public Health Task Force regional wellness communications campaign for consistent messaging during COVID-19 global pandemic**

The New River Valley Public Health Task Force was convened in 2020 by the Health District Director and the Blacksburg Police Chief and is comprised of partners in health care, emergency services, local governments, state agencies, higher education, and human services. The Task Force has led the regional response around the global pandemic of 2020 including educational outreach and communications, testing efforts, business continuity assistance, and distribution of personal protective equipment. Building on the success of the Task Force as a model, the Town can continue to collaborate on a regional basis to ensure access to quality health care for all of Blacksburg.



Many factors contribute to the mental and physical health of individuals. The Town can provide and support opportunities for individuals to have healthier outcomes by increasing access, sharing resources and information, and improving the built environment. By supporting local food production and distribution through community gardens, farmers markets, and community supported agriculture programs (CSAs), the Town can increase access to healthy food options for the community. For more information on agriculture, food systems, and food access, see the *Environment chapter* and the *Sustainability chapter*. By supporting and partnering with community organizations, the Town can connect individuals with early intervention resources to help prevent negative health outcomes. By investing in placemaking and creating public gathering spaces, the Town can positively affect mental health outcomes and foster a sense of community.

### **Community Connections and Sense of Belonging**

The Comprehensive Plan Survey identified “small town feel” and “sense of community” as two of the top four elements respondents like most about Blacksburg. There are many facets that contribute to a sense of community including the natural environment, events and programs, and gathering spaces provided by the built environment. Sense of community also encompasses the way a place makes an individual feel. A connected community is inclusive and welcoming, shows mutual care and respect, and has a culture of compassion. As Blacksburg continues to grow, this should be expressed and exercised through social interactions built on kindness and empathy, social trust, and support of one another. Blacksburg aspires to increase equity and inclusivity to help foster a sense of belonging amongst everyone in the community. Blacksburg can be enriched through strengthening social relationships and ensuring that the individuals see their culture reflected in the community.



***Wheels & Wagons and Summer Solstice seek to enhance community connections***

Local events and programs in Blacksburg that create a more connected community range from artists’ coffeehouses, street festivals, and community dinners to literacy volunteers and refugee partnerships. The Town can foster these connections by providing gathering spaces and support for programs and events that offer opportunities for formal and informal social interactions. Information on investing in public spaces and the importance of placemaking can be found in the *Economy & Employment chapter*.

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## Community Engagement

Community engagement is a core Town value and is encompassed in the concept of community connections and sense of belonging. To ensure an engaged and empowered community, the Town should employ a robust public participation process where all are involved. Community engagement involves intentional interactions between the Town and individuals where the Town values the experiences and opinions of the community and these interactions influence decision-making. The community's future should be the result of a shared vision, based on the community as a whole. To create the shared vision, the Town should work to establish a long-term dialogue recognizing that inclusive planning requires active engagement, rather than simply informing the community of the decision-making process. In particular, some segments of the community have historically been marginalized, ignored, or excluded. This has led to inequities in the decision-making process and a lack of trust in the government.

The Town can create a more inclusive planning process by examining and addressing inequities, removing barriers to participation, and building trust with the community. Steps to examine and begin to address inequities were discussed in the previous sections in the Equity portion of this chapter. In addition to historic inequities, marginalized populations face many potential barriers to engaging in decision-making processes, including language barriers, transportation challenges, work schedule or childcare conflicts, and technology barriers. Community engagement is also directly tied to public health; when people are not healthy and do not have their basic needs met, they cannot fully participate in decision-making processes that may affect them. Building trust with the community is an iterative process that should acknowledge inequities in prior engagement efforts, establish new engagement practices, and focus on listening to and understanding the needs of community members.

The Town has historically used traditional outreach and engagement methods around long-range planning. For this 2021 update of the Comprehensive Plan, the Town combined various methods of outreach, including open houses, news articles, survey gathering at community events, and social media. In response to the global pandemic of 2020, the Town launched a new web-based community participation tool, Let's Talk Blacksburg, which allows individuals to engage in conversations on various topics at the time and place of their choice.



***Diesel, the Planning Pup, was part of the community outreach process for the 2021 Comprehensive Plan***

An inclusive planning process with an actively engaged community is informed by local experiences and knowledge, provides for a better understanding of the needs and vision of community members, builds trust between the Town and the community, and ultimately leads to better outcomes with

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community supported plans and projects. To foster an inclusive planning process, the Town should ensure that all community members feel welcome and empowered to participate. This can be achieved by providing a wide range of convenient opportunities, providing transparent and responsive communication, and applying innovative engagement methods.

## **EQUITY & COMMUNITY WELLBEING**

### **Objectives & Policies**

#### **EQUITY:**

##### **Ongoing Initiatives in Blacksburg**

- ECW.1. Support and partner with local organizations, institutions, and initiatives that focus on equity in the community.
- ECW.2. Continue to increase equity in the community by supporting and expanding efforts such as the Montgomery County Dialogue on Race, the Blacksburg Police Advisory Board, the ADA Committee, and the preservation of St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall.

##### **Equity in Town Government**

- ECW.3. Develop an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan for the Town that centers the priorities and perspectives of historically marginalized populations.
- ECW.3.1. Examine local history and the legacy of these policies and practices, such as restrictive covenants and zoning regulations, to assess inequities in the community.
- ECW.3.2. Develop indicators to measure inequities to identify policies and regulations that create barriers and disproportionate burdens and benefits.
- ECW.3.3. Develop strategies to address inequities through changes to regulations, policies, and practices such as:
- Recruitment and hiring policies
  - Representation for committees, boards, and task forces
  - Procurement policies
  - Community engagement processes
  - Training around anti-racism, implicit bias, and mental health
- ECW.4. Develop and implement Town policies that ensure equity in programs, services, and amenities.

#### **COMMUNITY WELLBEING:**

##### **Public Health and a Healthy Community**

- ECW.5. Continue to participate in and expand efforts to evaluate, plan for, and limit risks relating to natural and human-caused hazards and climate change.
- ECW.5.1. Continue to participate in regional hazard mitigation planning with a focus on environmental justice.
- ECW.5.2. Implement strategies from the Climate Vulnerability Assessment (Report).
- ECW.6. Collaborate with organizations and institutions on a regional level to ensure access to quality health care for all, including mental and physical health, addiction services, emergency care, and long-term care.
- ECW.6.1. Identify health inequities in the community and develop strategies to address the issues that create these inequities.
- ECW.7. Encourage the provision of programming that supports healthy and active lifestyles by improving general physical and mental health and promoting healthy aging.

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- ECW.7.1. Encourage employers to provide health and wellness programs for employees.
  - ECW.7.2. Continue to provide health and wellness programming through the Town as an employer.
  - ECW.7.3. Continue to provide Parks and Recreation programs and services that support healthy and active lifestyles.
- ECW.8. Provide and support opportunities for individuals to have healthier outcomes by increasing access, sharing resources and information, and improving the built environment.
- ECW.8.1. Support local food production and distribution through community gardens, farmers markets, and community supported agriculture programs (CSAs) to increase access to healthy food options for the community.
  - ECW.8.2. Support and partner with community organizations to connect individuals with early intervention resources to help prevent negative health outcomes.
  - ECW.8.3. Invest in placemaking and create public gathering spaces to foster a sense of community and positively affect mental health outcomes.
  - ECW.8.4. Continue to provide and expand access to park land and trails to support healthy and active lifestyles.
- ECW.9. Evaluate Town policies, programs, and regulations using a public health lens to identify opportunities to address public health through topic areas such as Transportation, Parks and Recreation, Housing, and Sustainability.

## **Community Connections and Sense of Belonging**

- ECW.10. Foster a connected community that is inclusive and welcoming, shows mutual care and respect, and has a culture of compassion.
  - ECW.10.1. Promote and support programs, activities, and events and provide community gathering spaces that help strengthen social relationships.
  - ECW.10.2. Support and collaborate with a range of local organizations and institutions to ensure that individuals see their culture reflected in the community.
  - ECW.10.3. Encourage community service and volunteerism by providing information about these opportunities.

## **Community Engagement**

- ECW.11. Ensure an engaged and empowered community by employing a robust public participation process where all are involved.
- ECW.12. Use active engagement methods to create a shared vision for the community.
  - ECW.12.1. Establish a long-term dialogue with the community through active listening and open communication.
  - ECW.12.2. Recognize historical inequities and work to repair relationships with segments of the community that have historically been marginalized, ignored, or excluded.

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- ECW.13. Create a more inclusive planning process by examining and addressing inequities, removing barriers to participation, and building trust with the community. See Equity Objectives and Policies.
  - ECW.13.1. Acknowledge inequities in prior engagement efforts.
  - ECW.13.2. Establish new active engagement practices.
  - ECW.13.3. Focus on listening to and understanding the needs of community members.
  
- ECW.14. Ensure that all community members feel welcome and empowered to participate.
  - ECW.14.1. Provide a wide range of convenient opportunities for engagement.
  - ECW.14.2. Provide transparent and responsive communication with community members.
  - ECW.14.3. Seek out and apply innovative engagement methods.