

LETTER: Grant helps address disparities, find equitable solutions

April 17, 2021

To the Editor:

In November, the Duke Energy Foundation awarded both the City of Sanford and Brick Capital Community Development Corp. grants to focus on social justice and racial equity in our community. These grants were intended for nonprofits and government entities with a history of championing social justice and racial equity work on behalf of Black Americans, as represented in their mission statements and previous bodies of work. Further, grants were for organizations with specific programming that addresses social justice and racial equity.

The city received a grant of \$5,000 which enabled it to launch the Sanford Equity Initiative and Task Force in the fall of 2020. The Task Force has made great progress examining and creating recommendations to dismantle racial and ethnic disparities in Sanford and Lee County. The Task Force plans to spend one year engaging in this work, and it consists of 13 residents appointed by the City Council with expertise related to education, workforce development, criminal justice, health care, social services, economic development and housing.

To support this process, the city contracted with researchers from the Building Integrated Communities initiative at UNC-Chapel Hill. The UNC-BIC team is supporting the work of the Task Force by conducting research and supporting the monthly convenings of the group and its sub-committees. The Task Force has convened public meetings six times since November and created six sub-committees, which have convened an additional 36 times to discuss priorities and create strategies and recommendations.

Brick Capital received a grant of \$25,000 which enabled the nonprofit to hire an additional housing counselor with the specific goal of increasing homeownership for people of color. As a U.S. Housing and Urban Development approved housing counseling agency, Brick Capital helps families navigate the home-buying process, especially for first-time homebuyers. And according to the study that the UNC-BIC team conducted in the summer of 2020, the homeownership rate in Lee County was 74.4% for White households as opposed to 51.0% for African American households and 46.4% for Hispanic households. So, in February, the nonprofit hired a new bi-lingual housing counselor whose role will be to assist both African American and Hispanic families to become homeowners. In addition, Brick Capital has continued to build new homes for families to ensure that homeownership can be affordable and accessible for everyone; the goal is to build 10 new homes in 2021.

The City of Sanford and Brick Capital CDC would like to thank the Duke Energy Foundation for its generous gift to our organizations to help us continue to focus on social justice and racial equity. We still have some work to do in our community regarding these issues, but with the Foundation's support, we are now better positioned to address the disparities that we face and find equitable solutions for all of the citizens of Sanford and Lee County.

Kerry Bashaw, Executive Director of Brick Capital Community Development Corp.

Byron Buckels, Sanford City Councilman