

From: Ashley Traynum-Carson <atraynum-carson@ashevillenc.gov>
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To: Brenda Mills (BMills@ashevillenc.gov)
Cc:
Subject: Steady

This summer while the [City focused](#) on needles in West Asheville, Derrick Lee Jr a 12 year old child was murdered during a drive-by shooting in our city. In September, Brandie Sherelle Angel died from gun violence. I mention these incidents, because the City government is grappling with many complex issues ranging from opioid addiction to gun violence.

Staff has devoted countless hours to working with businesses and residents in West Asheville to address the issue of hypodermic needles and homelessness. The City recognizes the value of the needle exchange program, and like everything there is a process and Steady Collective is aware of that process and has been in touch with Shannon Tuch on a regular basis.

What I find worrisome about this situation is the level of white privilege displayed as we've tried to work through this issue with Steady Collective. I myself, had not considered this until an African American staffer brought it to my attention. Steady Collective has been able to shape a narrative, raise money, and rally the troops for their cause while our children have been murdered, and I never received a phone call. The victims come from communities without access to pro-bono attorneys and financial backers.

In 2017, the City of Asheville, heard from citizens a desire to become a more equitable and inclusive community. To that end the City hired an Equity and Inclusion Director who is charged with pushing staff to take deliberate steps toward advancing equity in Asheville, with racial and social equity as top priorities. What I've learned over the past year is that equity is providing individuals and communities the tools and resources that they need to be successful. When systemic hurdles and barriers have been part of the daily lives of a group of people for generations and centuries; all the while advantages have been afforded other groups based on skin color, inequities in opportunities and access occur. Steady Collective has the tools in term of volunteers, and grassroots organizing ability and the access to negotiate government bureaucracy. We have not been equitable to the families of those slain. We've devoted countless resources to the Steady Collective while mothers have had to bury their children and communities of color deal with their despair in silence.

The City works to be responsive to all of our residents. I also want to challenge residents as they have challenged City staff to pick up the mantle of advancing equity and inclusion.

This is not about addiction versus gun violence, murder versus homelessness; it's an opportunity to call attention to all of the issues that need healing in our community. The City will continue to work with Steady Collective, and moving forward will use staff time in a equitable way to address the entire community not the loudest.

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Ashley Traynum-Carson, Communication Specialist
Communication & Public Engagement Department
City of Asheville
PO Box 7148
Asheville, NC 28801
828.259.5724
[Atraynum-Carson@ashevillenc.gov](mailto:atraynum-carson@ashevillenc.gov)