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Care First Envisions a Just, Inclusive City

By Andres de Ocampo
The Review

Care First South Pasadena, a coalition of residents, is working toward economic and social justice through community activism focused on reimagining South Pasadena as a more just and inclusive community.

The group formed in 2020 after Black Lives Matter protests across the nation, including South Pasadena, brought hundreds of thousands of Americans together to rally against police brutality and to call for justice following the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer.

Since its formation, Care First has advocated for various city programs and policies that align with the coalition's vision for South Pasadena.

On Jan. 18, L.A. County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, District 5, presented Care First with an award recognizing the group's advocacy efforts as part of South Pasadena's Sundown Town Resolution. The Board of Supervisors partnered



Photo courtesy Care First

Care First co-founders Bill Kelly, Ella Hushagen and Helen Tran were presented an award from L.A. County Supervisor Kathryn Barger for their advocacy and activism in the South Pasadena community.

with the county's Commission on Human Relations to recognize organizations for their work on impactful projects during the annual John Anson Ford Human Relations Awards, according to Barger's press statement.

The Sundown Town Resolution that unanimously passed by City Council in February 2022 denounces South Pasadena's history of "institutionalized racism," according to the resolution. The term "sundown town" refers to local zoning and other municipal laws that excluded people of color, particularly Black people, from residing or working in a city after sundown.

Following the passing of the resolution, the document outlines that South Pasadena would condemn the city's historic racism, support inclusionary initiatives through policy and legislation, promote diversity in city commissions and, ultimately, move forward with an inclusionary and equitable outlook in all city pursuits.

"Inequities from our past — no matter how long ago they occurred — must be addressed and corrected. Care First South Pasadena shone a light on local discriminatory practices and policies that excluded people of color from buying homes and barred their children's access to community programs," Barger said in a statement.

Bill Kelly, a 30-year South Pasadena resident and a co-founder of Care First, spoke about the coalition's end goals and how the community advocacy and activism relate to the group members' vision for South Pasadena.

"There has been in South Pasadena, and there tends to still be, in certain segments of the community, a parochialism; the idea that South Pasadena is a small town that does things its own way and is an island among a sea of everchanging social and economic changes in the state and country," Kelly said.

"I would like to see South Pasadena change and do the things needed to provide housing, good educational opportunities, improve the environment and not only acknowledge racial, ethnic or income diversity — but embrace it.

"[All of this purposed toward] South Pasadena becoming a model of what the future could be, instead of a community clinging to a past that is being overtaken by massive [social] changes," he said.

Co-founder of Care First Ella Hushagen outlined her idea of the organization's work and vision for South Pasadena.

"In our small city there is so much that a small group of people can do... and working in this community, to try and make it more inclusive and to live up to its ideals — that is where my motivation comes

"Sometimes our policy making falls short of that and we can do so much more. ... There are opportunities to lead on important issues of our time, like housing, the envi-

ronment, budgeting for community care instead of for hardheaded law enforcement approaches — these are all important issues where we can make some change," she said.

Regarding Care First's reimagining and work toward equitable policing within South Pasadena, a collaboration between the coalition and Occidental College produced a report of SPPD arrests and dispatches from 2012 to 2021. The analyzed data is available on Care First's website and was gathered through the coalition's public records request filed in 2021.

The data indicated that "SPPD arrests Black and Latinx/Hispanic individuals disproportionate to their representation in the city of South Pasadena," according to the Care First analysis.

"Black individuals make up 12% of arrestees, while only making up 2% of the city's population [and] Latinx/Hispanic individuals make up 54% of arrestees, while only

making up 21% of the city's population," the analysis reads.

"We're planning on continuing to ask for [city] records and work with Occidental College professors because, so far, the city hasn't created a system that has made the data transparent, it isn't readily available. ... In order to learn more, you have to have more information released to the public," Hushagen said.

In the Jan. 18 city council meeting, councilmembers voted for an item to award Raftelis, a local government and management consulting firm, no more than \$99,500 to conduct an organizational assessment of SPPD. The action item was passed unanimously.

Jonathan Ingram, senior management with Raftelis, spoke at the meeting about the police department assessment and community engagement and said, "What we've proposed and what the community has asked for is a fo-

cused effort around engaging with members of the community to make sure that their perspectives on public safety and law enforcement services are reflected in the organizational model we developed."

Though the contract is still being negotiated, Ingram said that an outreach plan, community surveys, opportunities for one-on-one conversations, engagement with the public safety committee and through a community forum are to be expected in "the near future."

As far as Care First's initiative and advocacy relating to housing in South Pasadena, a public comment, submitted during last week's city council meeting, by the coalition outlines the respective goals and ideals of the group.

Care First's public comment begins by saying: "Amid the housing crisis, we urge the city to redevelop vacant, decrepit Caltrans properties into affordable housing instead of turning them over to private owners."

"Under state law, the city gets to buy at least 20 vacant Caltrans properties at the very low prices Caltrans paid in the 1960s. In exchange, the state law requires that the city facilitate their conversion to housing affordable to low- and moderate-income renters and buyers. This new affordable housing stock will benefit rent-burdened low- and moderate-income South Pasadenans, workers in the South Pasadena economy like teachers, public servants, and retail employees, young people just starting their careers and seniors who live on fixed incomes, among many others," the comment reads.

In a recent South Pasadena Review issue, Mayor Jon Primuth spoke about the Caltrans housing topic and said, "Twenty houses might come to the city, some of them are historic. The historic houses will be rehabilitated and put back into private ownership. Thirteen of them will be dealt with according to city council — put back into private ownership, put back into private rentals but the goal is to restore our neighborhoods."

Care First suggested, in the public comment, that the city should be allowed to sell

the seven historic Caltrans properties to private buyers at market rates, as long as the city builds three affordable units per each house within its borders.

Additionally, the nonhistoric properties, amounting to the remaining 13, cannot be sold at market rates and must remain "affordable" for the next 45 to 55 years, whether they are rented or owned.

Ultimately, the suggestions in the public comment are efforts to "create income-diverse neighborhoods, increase the racial and ethnic diversity of our city and schools," while integrating more affordable housing into the whole community and adding density to meet housing goals and more.

"I think it's [about] differential treatment and the way people feel when they enter this public space," Kelly said.

"Do they feel welcome? Do they feel like they're being treated equally? Like they're being taken as seriously as someone else in the community who doesn't share the same background?"