

President's Opening Remarks for February 5, 2020 RPCL Board Meeting

My fellow residents:

As you know, on the afternoon of January 13th hate was brought into our community in one of the most vile and abhorrent ways. As I posted in my statement shortly after this incident, our Board is committed to standing against this hate and working collaboratively with the many stakeholders of this community to bring healing, understanding, and a path forward to a much better tomorrow.

I know the words of that racist woman do not reflect the hearts and minds of the great majority of people in our Greater Roland Park neighborhood. Many, including some in this room now, have spent their lives personally and professionally fighting for social, economic, and racial justice. And it is precisely **because** of this that we must rise to this new challenge and do even more. There are no "Yeah, buts" when it comes to fighting racism. We fight it full force, head on, with strength and resolve until every molecule of oxygen on which racism breaths is removed. Period.

There is no one right way to move forward, and I am sure some will find their own quiet way. But I have consulted with other community leaders, been referred to online resources such as the Community Response Guide by the Southern Poverty Law Center and The Racial Equity Resource Guide by the Kellogg Foundation, and most recently met with Amanda Brown the principal of RPEMS who has access to many city resources through the school system that we would otherwise not have available to us. They have asked us to join with them and the other schools of our neighborhood, along with businesses, and other community organizations in a multi-pronged approach. In fact, I met with these local stakeholders last night in an incredibly positive and collaborative meeting. I have discussed these meetings and resources with members of the Executive Committee of this board and we have the following initial recommendations.

This Board will participate, likely this coming month, in a facilitated workshop which will give us the tools to recognize our own implicit biases as well as the tools to recognize insidious acts of racism and act upon them effectively. We encourage our community to attend a similar forum being organized by the RPEMS Parents Association planned for a date in March. This is a crucial

opportunity to have discussions in a small, safe, facilitated setting. As I mentioned at the Annual Meeting last May, we absolutely cannot make change happen online. Social media has destroyed the fabric of our community. It is not the place to have civil discussions about nearly anything, most especially racism. And additionally, we will financially help with the RPEMS visibility campaign which will include (though they are still working out the details, costs, and wording) T-shirts for every child, banners at the school, and community signs that make it clear we are all committed to 1.) supporting our neighborhood public school, 2.) welcoming and celebrating diversity, and 3.) respecting and honoring children of every color. This last action is key: boldness and visibility: and I will tell you 2 brief stories on why I am asking this board to approve support for it and encouraging our residents to participate. When I was discussing this incident with my daughter who is a high school student at RPCS, and that our possible responses to it might include signs, she said “You know Dad, my friend and her mom drove by our house on the way to school and saw our Black Lives Matter sign. They thought that was pretty awesome.” Spoken like a true teen. And on a personal note, after the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando when 49 LGBT people (a community of which I am a part) lost their lives, I suddenly noticed all the signs with rainbow hearts that said United against Hate and people wearing their No Hate t-shirts with a rainbow EKG tracing; a pulse. It really is powerful and meaningful after a trauma to know that there are so many more people who have your back and are fighting for you. We cannot let those with hate be the loudest voices in our society. We should embrace this visibility campaign and I encourage all of you to join me.

At last month’s meeting, before this incident occurred, I quoted the words of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. in honor of his birthday. It is now Black History Month and those same words take on even more meaning today: “Darkness does not drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate does not drive out hate, only love can do that”. I plan to lead this community with light and love. We are at the beginning of this process and there is much more work to be done, but together with all of our community partners we can do this, heal, and make our city a much better place...for everyone.