

City of White Bear Lake Welcoming & Inclusive Community Task Force Report



February 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with utmost gratitude that we thank the dedicated members of the Welcoming & Inclusive Community Task Force for their time, perseverance and commitment to the community - and to former Mayor Jo Emerson, for the creation of and participation on the Task Force.

Sincere appreciation is also extended to Councilmembers Dan Jones and Bill Walsh for representing the Council in working with staff to identify a path for this work and serve as liaisons to the Task Force.

And to the Cultural Liaisons at White Bear Lake Area Schools for facilitating the connections with youth, whose voices provided great depth and context to the process.

Finally, and most importantly, we thank all of the residents and students who who took the time and, in some cases, risk to participate in conversations that helped inform this report.



Staff acknowledgements:

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DEFINITIONS



The following are agreed upon definitions that the Task Force puts forth to define the terms and references used in this report. These definitions are not meant to be a valuative statement on how terms should be used in other contexts. Rather, they are for the purpose of providing a shared understanding of the Task Force's report content.

BIPOC

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Community Engagement

Community engagement is a strategic process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by location, special interest, or affiliation to identify, and to address issues affecting them. It's about building long term relationships through intentional interactions with an orientation toward the importance of a community members' lived experience. Community engagement can be complex and require dedicated resources such as time, funding, and people with the necessary skills.

Community Outreach

A one-way communication that tells community members about an issue, problem, opportunity or decision (examples include postcard mailings, newsletter communication, ads in the newspaper, website and social media postings, etc.)

Equity

Equity means recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances. Equity is distinguished from equality, which means providing the same to all. The practice of equity promotes fairness within programs, policies and procedures.

Diversity

Diversity is any dimension that can be used to differentiate groups and people from one another. Diversity is defined by who we are as individuals. The Task Force recognizes that a community's strength comes from the experience, talents, and perspectives of all residents. Diversity encompasses the range of similarities and differences each person, business or organization brings to the community. Types of diversity can include but are not limited to longevity in community, national origin, language, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures . *In simple terms, diversity is the mix.*

Inclusion

To be inclusive is to value and respect all people, their needs, and contributions equally with programs and policies in place that foster an experience of belonging. An inclusive community works toward ensuring that all residents have a representative voice in governance and planning, and that all residents have access to services that ensure their basic needs are met.

LGBTQIA+

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and ally; a term encompassing the spectrum of sexual and gender identities.

Many Faces

Many Faces of the White Bear Lake Area is a collaboration with a goal of building community by connecting the many stories of our area through events that invite personal reflection, a broadened understanding of the community, and neighborly interactions.

<https://manyfaceswblarea.org/>

WIC

Welcoming and Inclusive Community Task Force

WBL

White Bear Lake (City/Surrounding Areas)



COMMUNITY

- About White Bear Lake
- + Around Town
- Calendar of Events
- Community Engagement
- COVID-19
- Demographic Information
- History
- Maps
- Public Mobility Options
- Senior Resources

Contact Information

White Bear Lake City Hall
4701 Highway 61
White Bear Lake, MN 55110

Join Virtual Conversations

Thank you for exploring this site. The Task Force is hosting virtual conversations designed for small groups of 5-6 people, each lasting no longer than one hour. [Click here](#) to register for a conversation.

Conversations will be led by a member of the Task Force with the intention of providing community members an opportunity to discuss their perspectives on what it means to be a welcoming & inclusive community, and how those definitions apply to their experiences in White Bear Lake.

We will continue to add scheduled conversations through the end of August, so check back if there is not a session available that fits your schedule, or call the City Manager's Office at 651-429-8508, or email at ehiniker@whitebearlake.org to schedule a date and time for a meeting to which you would like to invite others.

Some may prefer one-on-one conversations, or in person small group conversations. Both formats will be available in September.

Participant Survey

After attending a Virtual Conversation, please take a moment to send us your feedback using this short survey. [Read more](#)

Web Links

- 🔗 Welcoming Video with Spanish Subtitles
- 🔗 Welcoming Video with Hmong Subtitles

INTRODUCTION

White Bear Lake is unique in its appeal to so many; a fully built-out community with a small town feel, yet part of a large metropolitan area. It is a community that is rich in history and strong in spirit. The majority of residents we have encountered through this process have said they feel welcomed and included in our community; they like living here and the life that it offers. However, the demographics of White Bear Lake are changing, and even long term residents who participated in this process wondered aloud if it is a welcoming and inclusive community for everyone.

This report is the collective result of nearly one-year of outreach and discussion. It was written and reviewed through a collective effort involving all members of the Welcoming and Inclusive Task Force appointed in February, 2021 by then Mayor Jo Emerson. As will be demonstrated below, the work of this past year is neither the beginning nor the end. Rather, it is part of a continuum of White Bear Lake's community engagement efforts.

White Bear Lake has a rich tradition of community volunteerism and outreach. However, the Task Force has concluded that the changing demographics, the growing power and influence of social media, along with increasing demands on people's time pose new barriers to engagement and community-building that must be tackled with new tools and fresh approaches.

BACKGROUND

In February 2021, Mayor Jo Emerson appointed an 18-member Task Force to develop a narrative around the following questions: "What does it mean to be a Welcoming & Inclusive Community?" and "How well is White Bear Lake doing?" The Task Force was asked to guide the City through this process and summarize its findings in a report that includes recommendations for ways the City can further its commitment to fostering a welcoming and inclusive community.

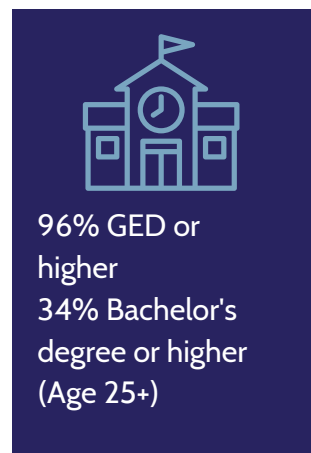
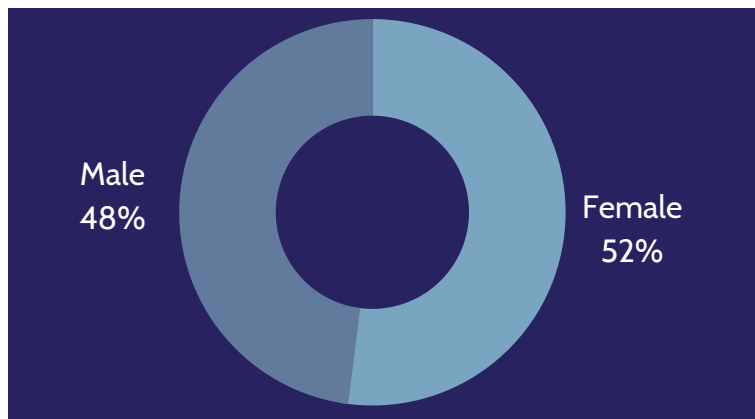
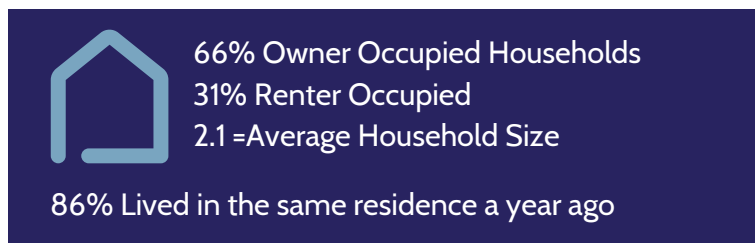
As articulated in the Task Force's statement of purpose, *"Access to municipal services and community assets must be inviting to all. This demands that there is no disparity of access based on longevity as a member of this community, nor on race, culture, age, sexual orientation, gender, physical ability, socio-economic status, geographic location in the City or any other characteristic. It is a commitment to all who live, work, and play in White Bear Lake, that they feel welcomed and have a sense of belonging"*.

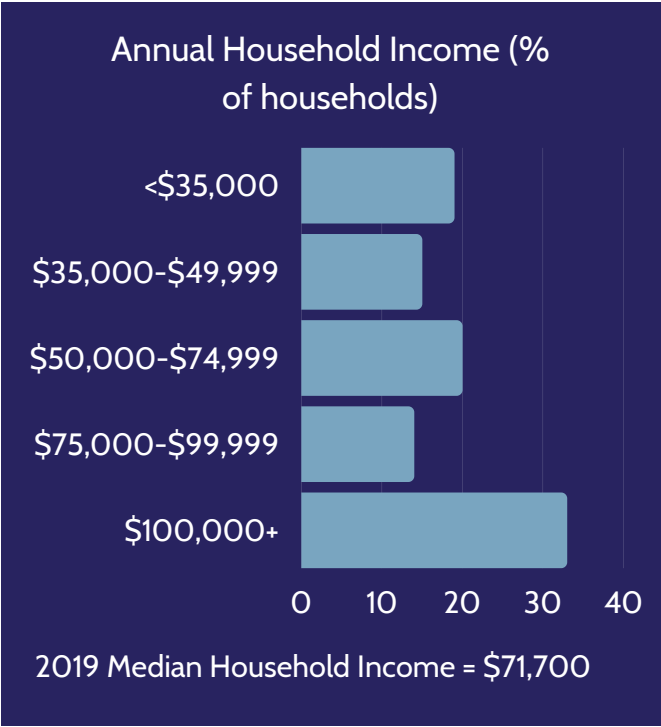
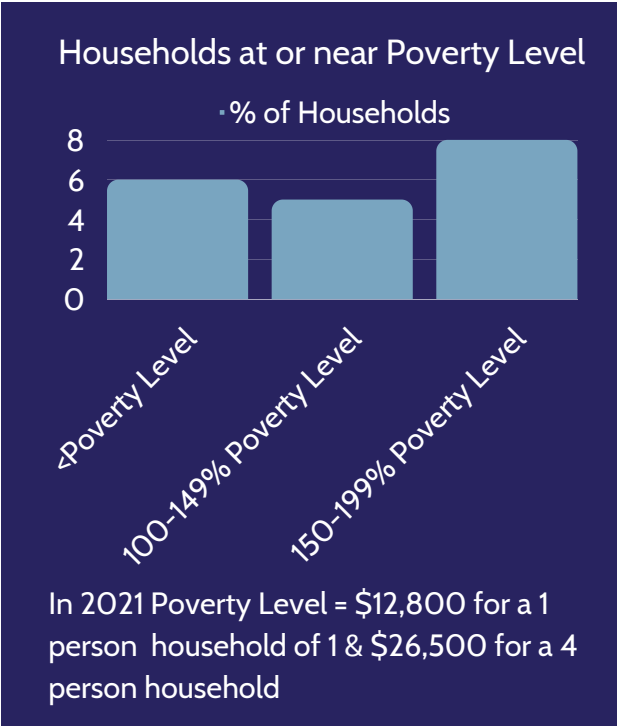
The Task Force was launched with the intent to cast a wide net to capture a broad and diverse representation of experiences of White Bear Lake residents. However, like many communities around the state and nation, critical conversations around race and racial equity have been at the forefront following the murder of George Floyd in 2020. Consequently, many conversations tended toward the topic of race. However, there was certainly discussion among adult and student participants that affirmed the challenges of people with other identities, including but not limited to the LGBTQIA+ community, persons with a disability, persons from a minority ethnic community, socioeconomic status, or where they live within the city.

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

People's experiences and perceptions of belonging within a community can be influenced in part by aspects of their identity. While everyone has a unique set of circumstances that shape their life and outcomes, people who share certain identities, such as gender, race, religious affiliation, or length of residency, may have similar experiences or perceptions. Understanding the diversity in our community is important as we examine whether this is a community where all feel welcomed and included.

Data sources for this section include MN Compass, United States Census Bureau, White Bear Lake Area Schools and the Minnesota Department of Education.





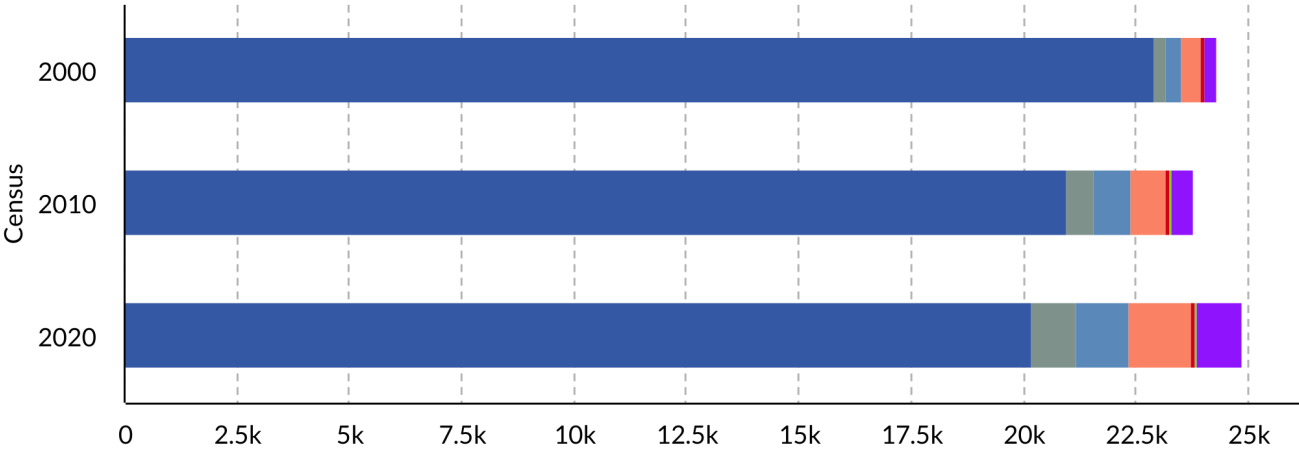
While Minnesota Compass and the U.S. Census Bureau are a wealth of demographic data, not all aspects of identity are easily quantified through current, trusted data sources at the local level. By extrapolating from state and federal data, it estimated that the LGBTQIA+ population in White Bear Lake is between 4.4% to nearly 8% of the U.S. population.

The chart below details the Public Religion Research Institute estimates of Ramsey County residents' religious affiliations based on their polling data from 2020. Data specific to White Bear Lake is not available.

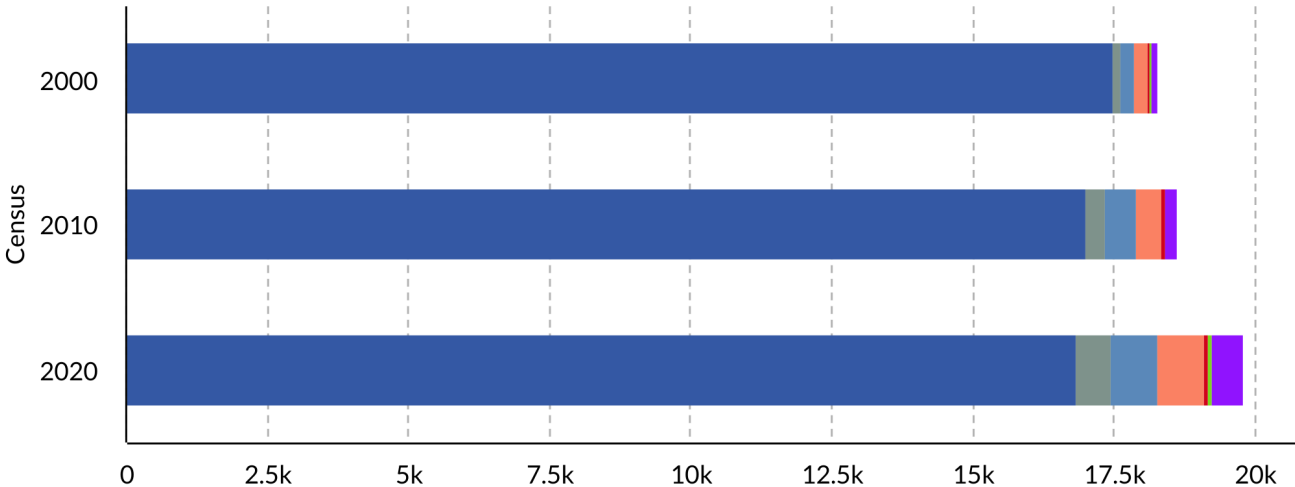
Religious Affiliation	Ramsey County (%)	Religious Affiliation	Ramsey County (%)	Religious Affiliation	Ramsey County (%)	Religious Affiliation	Ramsey County (%)
White Evangelical Protestant	13	Black Protestant	6	Other Christian	5	Buddhist	1
White Mainline Protestant	20	Hispanic Protestant	2	Jewish	1	Hindu	1
White Catholic	19	Hispanic Catholic	3	Muslim	1	Religiously Unaffiliated	29

City of White Bear Lake Population By Race/Ethnicity

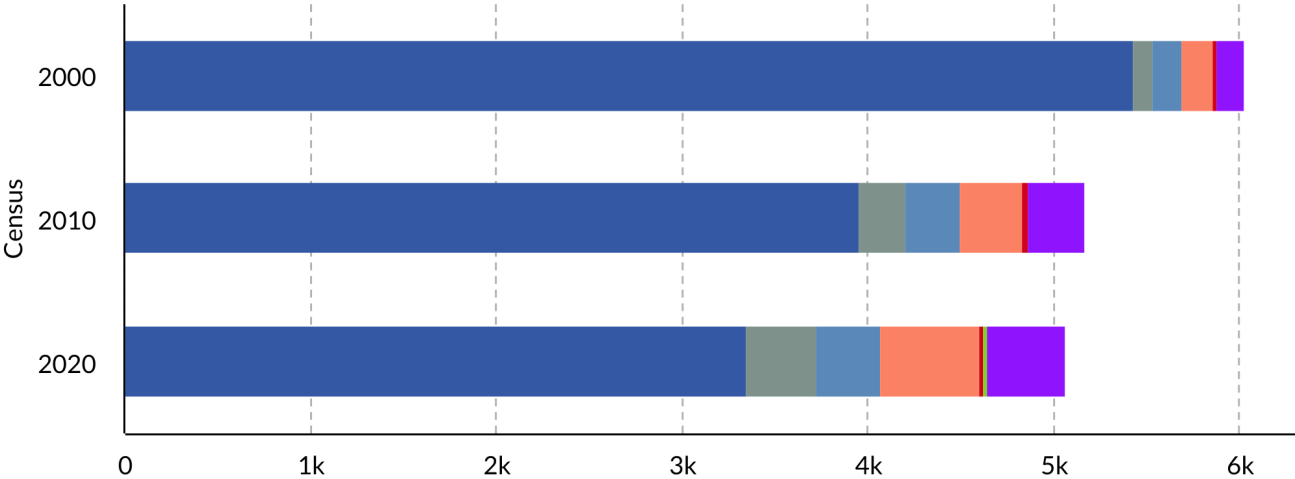
Total Population 2000-2020 Census



18+ Population 2000-2020 Census



17 & Under Population 2000-2020 Census







- White, non-Latino
- Black or African American, non-Latino
- Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Latino
- Hispanic or Latino
- American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Latino
- Other race not listed here, non-Latino
- More than one race, non-Latino

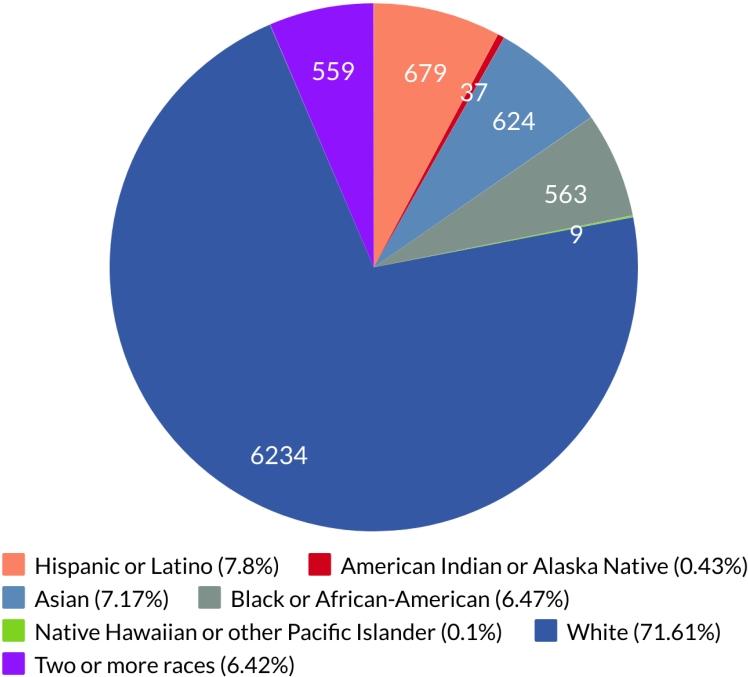
**Chart of figures can be found on page 29 in Appendix

Diversity Amongst White Bear Lake Area School Students

While not all White Bear Lake Area Schools (WBLAS) students live in the City of White Bear Lake, they will at minimum spend nearly half of their school years in the City if they attend WBLAS district schools throughout their elementary, middle school and high school years. As was demonstrated in the Census data, the younger generations represent growing diversity in the community; that diversity is amplified within area schools. Ensuring these young people feel like they belong and that this is their home will increase the likelihood they return to the area to live, work and raise families of their own. For this reason, Task Force members felt it was important to include WBLAS demographics in the report.

17.6% (1,529) of students utilize Special Education services		In addition to English, district students speak 53 home languages		0.7% (63) of Students were experiencing homelessness
	4% (352) of students are English Learners		27.2% (2,372) of Students are enrolled in the Free/Reduced-Price meals program	

White Bear Lake Area Schools Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity



PRIMARY FORMATS FOR GATHERING INFORMATION

It was apparent early in the process that gathering information from a broad and diverse representation of the community would be challenging, especially with limitations to gathering in community due to the COVID pandemic. For this reason many of our engagement efforts were directed toward the digital environment, which in itself limits the ability of some community members to participate.

The Task Force decided upon a variety of methods to solicit participation including the development of an online community conversation format, an on-line survey, opportunities for in-person conversations and Task Force participation in the 5-part series, Community Conversations on Race sponsored by Many Faces, with which the City of White Bear Lake is an active partner.

On-line Conversations

The on-line conversations were made possible through a newly developed web-based application now known as Kazm, (fka Junto). The format provided one-hour conversations facilitated by members of the Task Force and staff using an agenda template developed by the group. Meetings were promoted through the City's newsletter, its social media and the White Bear Press. The on-line conversations were also made available through personal invitation by members of the Task Force. These conversations were held between the months of August to November. A total of 54 conversations were scheduled and available for the public to attend, eight of which resulted in meetings with 32 participants in total.

Community Survey

The Community Survey was available on-line from March through October, 2021. Despite multiple promotional efforts, participation was limited to 139 people from the White Bear Lake area. Polco, an on-line survey tool that the City subscribes to, did not restrict non-residents from participation; however, the tool was able to identify whether or not the participant lived in the City.

In-person Meetings

There were five in-person meetings, one held at Redeemer Lutheran Church and the other four with students from South Campus, North Campus and Central Middle School. The meetings held with students were particularly meaningful, as they represented the voices of our youth and were primarily students of color.

Other Communities

The Task Force invited staff members from two different metropolitan communities, each of which has been actively engaged in racial equity and inclusion work for the past 3-5 years, the cities of Roseville and St. Louis Park. The staff representatives shared past and current initiatives, including lessons learned along the way.

OUTREACH METHODS

The opportunity to join the Task Force was widely promoted through a variety of organizations, the City Newsletter, and the White Bear Press. Also included were four members selected due to their affiliation with Century College, White Bear Lake School District, White Bear Lake Area Food Shelf and Solid Ground. Once selected, Task Force members worked with staff on community outreach efforts through methods traditionally employed by the City, as well as expanded efforts to connect with community members who may not be as engaged with local government.

Outreach efforts included:

- Video promoting the task force application (posted to social media channels, YouTube channel and on City website)
- Video promoting the online conversations
- Partnering in the 5-part series, Community Conversations on Race
- Social Media Posts – Added an Instagram account to further reach
- Updates in City Newsletter
- Press Releases to White Bear Press
- Advertisements in White Bear Press
- Direct outreach to community leaders (White Bear Lake Economic Development Corporation, Rotary, Leadership Tomorrow, Many Faces, Religious Organizations, Non-Profit organizations)
- Direct outreach to local institutions/organizations (Century College, White Bear Lake Area Schools, Solid Ground, Food Shelf, White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce)
- Direct outreach to local faith communities
- Direct mail outreach to residents living in multifamily rental housing
- Direct outreach to City Commissions & Council
- Marketfest Booth (5 of 6 weeks)
- White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce newsletter
- Outreach to students through cultural liaisons including listening sessions with student groups

WHITE BEAR LAKE AREA COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS ON RACE
Listen, Learn, Lead, Act

June 24, July 29, August 19 & September 23 from 6:30pm-8:30pm
Registration and more info at: ManyFacesWBLArea.org/events

Presented by:
MANY FACES MANY STORIES, Minnesota Humanities Center

In partnership with:
Vadnais Heights, White Bear Lake School District

Fostering a welcoming & inclusive community everyone



FINDINGS - WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Community Survey

The survey was open March - October, 2021. There were 139 participants representing the areas shown in the map below.

While informative, the number of respondents was too small to representatively summarize community sentiment. However, it is important that the results be included to honor the feedback provided by those who did participate.

62% of all respondents were female
32% of all respondents were male

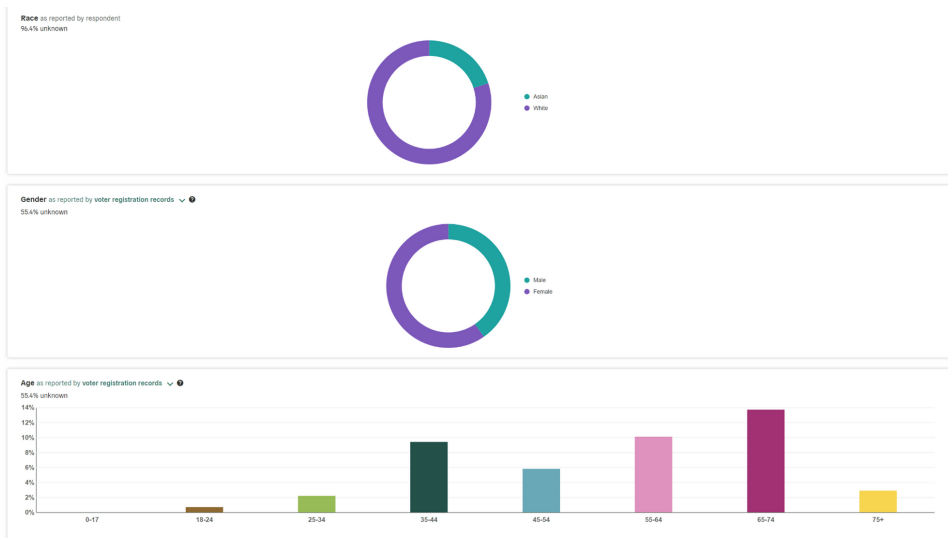
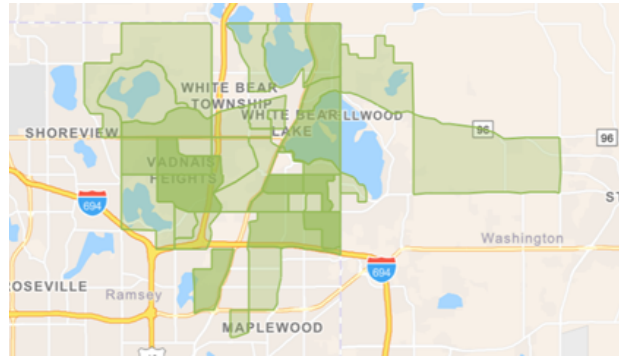
27% of respondents were 35-44 years of age
25% of respondents were 65-74 years of age
20% of respondents were 45-54 years of age

82% of respondents identified as White, non-Latino
23% of respondents identified as BIPOC or Multi-racial
6% of respondents identified as Other

92% of respondents cited English as their first language

73% of respondents identified as heterosexual

35% of respondents identified their political views as liberal
30% of respondents identified their political views as moderate
23% of respondents identified their political views as conservative



Among those who identified as BIPOC, some common themes emerged:

- Several referenced the importance of feeling safe and having strong community values/ties.
- Many highlighted positive interactions with various City Departments including Admin, Fire, Police were cited as generally positive encounters, as well as friendliness of neighbors and the business community. However, others cited experiences that were not as welcoming.
- Inclusion in decision-making and openness to different identities was emphasized by some.
- Some expressed general concern related to judgment due to race, that race was a factor in feeling like an outsider in the community, or feeling unwelcomed.
- A few respondents did not agree with having race highlighted within City or School District initiatives.
- Some were critical of the on-line survey platform. There was concern expressed that the data would be misused, their identity would be known, and/or a lack of trust in the way the survey was conducted.
- It was suggested that City hiring practices be evaluated.
- Some stressed the need for more frequent outreach and use of multiple modes; social media mentioned most commonly. More language options was also mentioned.
- Having more family and community activities/events was popular among respondents.
- 57% of BIPOC respondents worried that someone in their family has or is experiencing unfair treatment to due their BIPOC identity.

Among those who identified as White, non-Latino, common themes emerged:

- A welcoming and inclusive community should have diversity, equitable policies, equal treatment and access to services.
- Friendly neighbors and safety were also common responses.
- Many respondents disliked the nature of the survey and felt it was divisive, while others expressed appreciation for the effort.
- Some felt the City should tackle racial equity issues, while others thought the City should not address race at all.
- The majority felt included and welcomed in almost all places including businesses and public spaces. Many remarked about people's friendly and polite interactions.
- There were several acknowledgements by those who identified as White that their experience may be different from those who are not White.
- LGBTQIA* and those with disabilities raised concerns about accessibility and acceptance
- Many respondents cited political beliefs as a large reason for feeling unwelcome.
- Political division was mentioned as creating heightened tension within the community.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

VISIT
[POLCO.US/WHITEBEARLAKE](https://polco.us/whitebearlake)

TO GIVE YOUR INPUT ON OUR WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY SURVEY

RESPOND TO THE SURVEY BY SEPTEMBER 3RD AT 11:59 PM

WHITE BEAR LAKE RESIDENTS WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR STORIES

WHITE BEAR LAKE MAYOR EMERSON APPOINTED A COMMUNITY TASK FORCE TO GATHER FEEDBACK ON HOW WELCOME AND INCLUSIVE THE CITY FEELS TO YOU.

WE HOPE YOU WILL SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH THE TASK FORCE VIA OUR COMMUNITY SURVEY AND ONLINE CONVERSATIONS.

STORIES WILL BE SUMMARIZED IN A REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL TO GUIDE EFFORTS TO FURTHER OUR COMMITMENT TO FOSTERING A WELCOMING COMMUNITY FOR ALL.

On-line Conversations - Junto Format

The Task Force developed an on-line discussion format for small groups to facilitate conversation around what it means to be a welcoming and inclusive community, and how well the participants feel White Bear Lake is doing. The hope was to gather a range of views through engagement with a variety of community members. Numerous opportunities to participate were made available to the public and promoted through a variety of means. Ultimately, seven (7) of these formatted small group discussions were held, six (6) on-line and one (1) in-person at a community church.

Getting people to participate in these conversations proved to be much more challenging than anticipated, which was a lesson in itself. There are a variety of reasons why people chose not to participate, but it was clear early on that building momentum for meaningful engagement requires time, time to build relationships and trust. This challenge is not unique to White Bear Lake, as was shared by other cities and described in academic research.

We did hear directly from many BIPOC community members who expressed their reluctance to share their stories and/or expressed doubt that their feedback would lead to meaningful change. Those who attended the community conversations were fully engaged in the discussion with great interest in the process.

On-line Conversations - Junto Format

Listed below are the major themes that emerged from these conversations. Specific comments and discussion summaries are included in the appendix of this report.

- White people who live in White Bear Lake have different experiences than BIPOC living here.
- Feeling safe is an important part of feeling welcomed in a community.
- Feeling welcomed includes accessibility for people with disabilities, street lights, good sidewalks, accessible signage in other languages, welcoming signs such as “ All are Welcome, Black Lives Matter”, free and affordable activities. The fishing pier at Veterans Park and other park features are great examples of ways the City has worked to enhance park experiences for people with disabilities.
- Many residents in White Bear Lake don't know their neighbors (or haven't made connections with them), so building relationships is hard.
- There are many people who were born in WBL or have lived in the community for many years. It can be difficult to be a newcomer in the community.



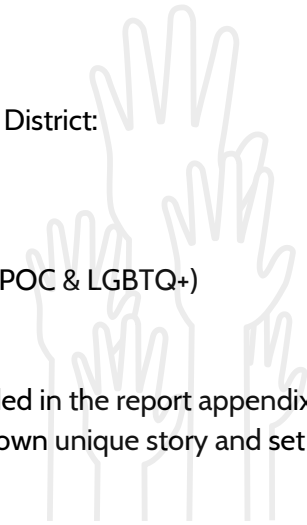
Conversations with Students

Four meetings were held with students from the White Bear Lake Area School District:

- South Campus Black Excellence Club - 15 student attendees
- North Campus Black Excellence Club - 32 student attendees
- Central Middle School “Speak your Voice” Club - 28 student attendees (BIPOC & LGBTQ+)
- WBLAS Student Culture Club - 16 student attendees

Detailed summaries of comments and feedback from each meeting are included in the report appendix. In summarizing the conversations, we are mindful that each student has their own unique story and set of experiences; however, general themes clearly emerged.

- Many students shared personal experiences about being targets of direct, racially charged comments, both at school and out in the community.
- Many expressed that they felt out of place in a mostly white community.
- Others shared positive feelings about living in the White Bear Lake area, however mostly with qualifying comments, such as noting the limited connection between the BIPOC community and the community-at-large.
- At each of the meetings, students expressed their interest in community events that celebrate the racial and cultural diversity of our community.
- The WBLAS Youth Culture Club was particularly interested in finding ways to work with the City and other organizations to organize community cultural events.
- It is important to note that many of the students shared a concern that their input would not lead to meaningful outcomes, expressing a general distrust of the process and its authenticity.



Community Conversations on Race - 5 part Series

Many Faces of the White Bear Lake Area partnered with the Minnesota Humanities Center to host a five-part community conversation series with the goal of learning and understanding how we experience and recognize racism in our community, how it impacts the community, and how we can educate ourselves to learn and to lead work in creating a more welcoming and inclusive community for all.

Participation in this series ranged from 50 - 70 people, with the highest number of attendees present at the last event as momentum continued to build. At the end of the series, there was expressed interest among the participants for additional facilitated community conversations on race to expand opportunities for community dialogue.

This session is designed to give community members an opportunity to listen to and learn from neighbors of color sharing about their experiences of racism in the White Bear Lake Area using a story circle format. At this first session, participants heard their neighbors share painful encounters and experiences that informed many robust conversations that followed in the series.

In order to develop shared understanding and prompt the community into action, the series deployed three primary strategies:

- Increase understanding of racism and its impacts on the community by:
 - Listening and learning from BIPOC community members about their experiences
 - Learning from community leaders about local efforts to address racism in the community
 - Providing the economic and business imperative for addressing racism in the region
- Calling in the community to take action in their sphere of influence by:
 - Taking personal responsibility to respond and take action in response to what we learn
 - Identifying where we have the ability to lead
 - Growing their networks
- Demonstrating a cohesive effort to address racism in the community by:
 - Learning from leaders about current efforts
 - Building connections to other initiatives and resources in the community through listening and dialogue
 - Identifying core priorities important to Many Faces leaders and the community



Initiatives in Other Communities

Thomas Brooks, Inclusion Manager for the City of Roseville

The City of Roseville developed a strategic equity plan in 2018 following its year-long participation in the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) program, hosted through the League of Minnesota Cities. However, they found the Plan difficult to sustain when put on top of the day-to-day duties of existing staff. Subsequently they hired a consultant to finalize an action plan, which narrowed their focus to three priorities: Diversifying their workforce, diversifying boards/commission, applying racial equity lens to all decisions.

The City then reoriented its communications staff to more intentional community relations/engagement, which included the additions of digital media specialists. The new roles and expertise shifted the day-to-day office work to being out in the community through direct engagement.

The City also has a Human Rights, Inclusion & Engagement Commission which advises the City Council on outreach and engagement efforts with a stated goal of fostering a sense of community for its residents and businesses.

Yariet Montes-Huerta, Racial Equity & Inclusion Outreach Assistant for the City of St. Louis Park

The City of St. Louis Park engaged in a community-wide visioning process in 2017, out of which racial equity was identified as a priority.

Ms. Montes-Huerta was hired in 2018 with a background in community organizing work. She shared that as a Latina, she expected her cultural heritage would help break down barriers with the BIPOC community. However, her identity as a government employee overshadowed her personal identity and created some distrust. After attending more workshops and classes focused on cultural competency, she experienced much more success by modifying her approaches to community engagement.

Fostering trust and building relationships has taken a lot of time and effort through attendance at a variety of school and community events. Ms. Montes-Huerta also organizes pop-up events that include staff from other departments, held at apartment complexes and city parks to connect more directly with residents.

Lastly, Ms. Montes-Huerta described the City's Human Rights Commission which is charged with advising and engaging around activities that promote equal opportunities for and participation of all residents.

Initiatives in Other Communities

Q & A - LESSONS LEARNED

The guest speakers emphasized the following:

- Make sure that you always follow up on surveys or conversations; BIPOC communities are over-surveyed and never know what happens with the information.
- Leadership must be on the same page or staff will experience burnout.
- It is important that participation be across all departments so that engagement initiatives are not dependent on “specific people”; rather, they are institutionally engrained.
- Relationship building must be authentic and not simply transactional.
- Once work begins, it must be sustained, or the community will no longer trust that the relationships were authentic and meaningful.



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Constructive relationships between communities and the institution of local government make community engagement not only desirable, but necessary as it is likely to lead to more equitable, sustainable public decisions and improve the livability, the image and the economic vibrancy of the community.

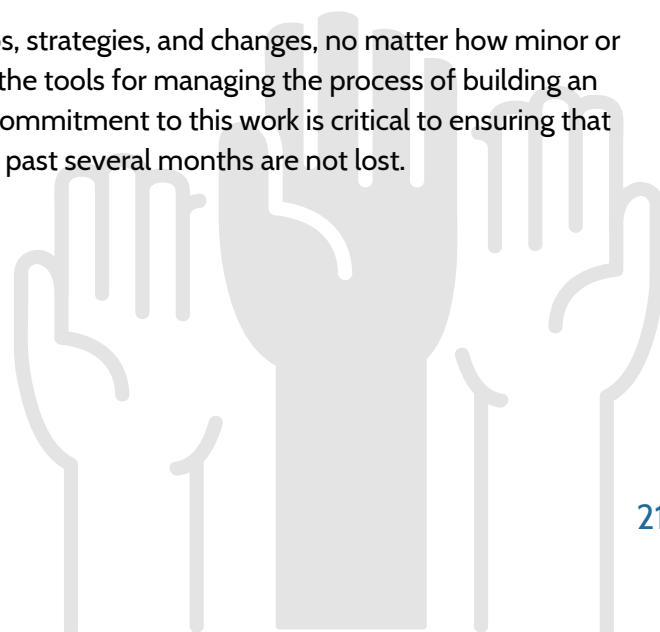
White Bear Lake has demonstrated its commitment to community engagement over the years through community-wide strategic planning efforts, sustained involvement in local civic and non-profit organizations, participation in community events and celebrations, and through its dedication of time and resources toward police and fire events and outreach efforts.

However, as time and attention of its residents become increasingly scarce due to technology and competing demands, community engagement grows more challenging. Through this process, we experienced that many people either do not trust government institutions, including at the local level, or are simply too busy or disinterested. It became evident that the development of trusted relationships toward productive dialogue and engagement with a broader segment of the community is a commitment of dedicated time and resources.

Reinforcing and building upon intentional and proactive community engagement is especially critical as White Bear Lake demographics continue to change. With that change comes a shift in community culture, which can create both challenges and opportunities. While proximity of diverse cultures can lead to familiarity and acceptance, without intentionality in community building, it can also lead to division. For that reason, proactive community engagement is necessary to foster learning and understanding through dialogue and relationship building.

To achieve authentic engagement, all residents must feel included in the dialogue. Building an inclusive community is not an event that has a beginning or an end. It is a process that continuously evolves. Sometimes, it may feel like a community makes three steps forward and then takes two steps backward. What is considered success and progress, as opposed to failure and regression, depends on the individual, group, and institution.

Regardless, it is important to sustain the relationships, strategies, and changes, no matter how minor or insignificant they may seem, because they become the tools for managing the process of building an inclusive community. The City Council's continued commitment to this work is critical to ensuring that strides made through connections fostered over the past several months are not lost.



Benefits of Community Engagement

While research regarding the benefits and importance of community engagement varies, the Task Force found a summary of key opportunities provided by Penn State's Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology and Education instructive:

- **Increase the likelihood that projects or solutions will be widely accepted.**
Citizens who participate in these processes show significant commitment to help make the projects happen.
- **Create more effective solutions.**
Drawing on local knowledge from a diverse group creates solutions that are practical and effective.
- **Improve citizens' knowledge and skills in problem solving.**
Participants learn about the issues in-depth. Greater knowledge allows them to see multiple sides of the problem. Citizens can practice communication and decision-making skills.
- **Empower and integrate people from different backgrounds.**
Groups that feel ignored can gain greater control over their lives and their community. When people from different areas of the community work together, they often find that they have much in common.
- **Create local networks of community members.**
The more people who know what is going on and who are willing to work toward a goal, the more likely a community is to be successful in reaching its goals.
- **Create several opportunities for discussing concerns.**
Regular, ongoing discussions allow people to express concerns before problems become too big or out of control.
- **Increase trust in community organizations and governance.**
Working together improves communication and understanding. Knowing what government, community citizens and leaders, and organizations can and cannot do may reduce future conflict.

Source: <https://aese.psu.edu/research/centers/cecd/engagement-toolbox/engagement>

Recommendations

The Task Force discussed a variety of initiatives that could be explored by the City, many of which are included below. The initiatives have been considered through the lens of three intersectional categories:



Community Engagement

As was so clearly demonstrated through this process, sustained and meaningful community engagement requires a commitment of time and resources. As such, the Task Force would strongly encourage the City Council to *consider adding a position to support this work*. More immediately, however, the Task Force recommends the *creation of a new City Commission to serve in an advisory capacity* similar to the Parks and Environmental Advisory Commissions.

Similar to many other communities, the *purpose* of the Commission could be to *evaluate* the City's outreach efforts, activities and engagement opportunities, *advise* on strategies to improve outreach and communication to help increase engagement and inclusiveness, *advise* on policies and procedures related to inclusion and *engage* in events and projects that support the Commission's mission.

With that in mind, following is a list of suggested initiatives to be further explored by a standing City Commission:

- Identify opportunities to explore, engage and celebrate the diverse cultures and identities within the community, partner with WBLAS Student Culture Club and other community organizations.
- Develop creative outreach efforts to welcome New Residents (i.e., New Resident mixers or dinners, volunteer New Resident Welcoming Corp).
- Host city “pop-up” events in neighborhood parks and in conjunction with other school or community events to create personal connections with residents that may not otherwise have the opportunity, time or understanding of how to engage with local government.

- Partner with the WBLAS District and/or participate in 'Intentional Social Interaction' dinners already taking place in the schools, which draws in many families around topics of interest and concern in the community. *(ISI is an idea generated by Marnita's Table, a 501(c)3 organization that seeks to close gaps across differences through Intentional Social Interaction events where members of the community not typically at the table are invited to participate and connect.)*
- Partner with local businesses, civic and commerce-related organizations, and commercial property owners to support a business community that reflects our population's ever-growing diversity and an environment that fosters and represents the special talents, expertise and knowledge of all backgrounds and perspectives.
- Develop a Citizen Academy (similar to Citizen Police Academy) that provides exposure to how our City works and what are the avenues toward civic participation.
- Foster education about and exposure to different cultures and identities through continued partnerships with Many Faces and the WBLAS Community Education program.
- Collaborate with Public Safety departments to model successful engagement efforts with all city departments.
- Provide resources/support existing community members to work within their neighborhoods/organizations to build community and strengthen relationships within their neighborhoods, (i.e., create a new neighbor ambassador program at the neighborhood level, educate residents how to start a neighborhood night out gathering).

The above-mentioned are a sampling of ideas among many that could be pursued by a standing City Commission focused on community engagement and inclusion.

The Task Force brainstormed a variety of ideas for names of this proposed commission and landed on the following for Council's consideration:

Community Engagement Welcoming & Inclusion Advisory Commission

Organizational and Administrative Systems

The Task Force supports efforts to expand staff development toward strengthening cultural competency skills in order to build organizational capacity as the racial and cultural diversity of our community continues to expand.

In addition to staff development, the Task Force recommends that the City seek opportunities to partner with the WBLAS and Century College to provide internships and work shadowing opportunities for students. Providing these opportunities would serve as an investment in our young professionals, giving stock to setting them up for future success. This would help give an opportunity to explore government positions, learn the intricacies of working for our city, and gain helpful insight for future endeavors, helping to build confidence, success, and experience along the way. Having these opportunities available would also act as a representation to White Bear Lake's commitment to building and supporting thriving community members.

And importantly, the Task Force recommends that the City invest in intentional and creative ways to recruit more diverse candidates for staff positions and City Commissions including BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, multicultural and persons with disabilities. This becomes increasingly important as the community becomes more diverse to ensure the people who serve and lead the community reflect the diversity of the community they serve.

Equity/Inclusion

The Task Force believes it is ultimately important that all city initiatives and policies be considered through an equity and inclusion lens; in other words, that we continue to ask ourselves how an initiative or policy impacts those who may identify with a culture or lifestyle different than "our own", (decision/policy-makers). Does the initiative or policy unintentionally have a negative impact on underrepresented populations? How do we effectively communicate our messaging in consideration of underrepresented populations? ...and so on.

This exercise is not easy to apply, but is critical to sustaining a livable community, one that feels welcoming and inclusive to all. Specifically, this lens should be used to review all investments and strategic plans within housing, transportation, economic development, policy, and city hiring (recruitment) and retention/promotion practices. We feel this would naturally follow as a result of work done at both the organizational level and through an outwardly focused commission.

CLOSING STATEMENT

As stated in the introduction, the work of this Task Force was neither the beginning nor the end, but rather, part of a continuum as the City works to engage with its residents toward meaningful and productive exchange. The recommendations in this report provide additional opportunities for the City to provide structure, support, and tools for more engagement and inclusion of its residents and students. Many local governments are taking the next steps to bring together their citizenries and strengthen the trust between local government and residents.

Now more than ever, connections are needed to build trust and to welcome an increasingly diverse community. Task Force members are honored to have been part of the process and stand ready to support the City in its engagement efforts. Additionally, hundreds of community members participated in the process and have expressed their hope for the continuation of relationship-building and dialogue.

While there is clearly no “magic formula” to creating a community in which everyone feels welcomed and included, we believe there are many things that can be done to bring us closer to this aspirational goal. We are confident that with the Council’s leadership and support, the community will continue to move forward in the spirit and tradition of White Bear Lake, a place residents are proud to call home.

Welcoming & Inclusive Community Task Force Members



Louis Baheriy

My name is Louis Baheriy and I am a newer resident to White Bear Lake, and a proud parent of a White Bear Lake HS student. I joined the Task Force because I felt I could bring an outsider's view and experience, as well as be another voice to help share a different perspective. I try to live by the Ghandi quote, "Be the change you wish to see in the world" and thought what better way than to give my time and service to my new community.



Rebecca Blaesing-Bauer

My name is Rebecca Blaesing-Bauer and I live in South White Bear Lake. White Bear Lake has been my home for nearly 30 years and I've raised three children in White Bear. Since transplanting from out of state, I still love the lake and being a part of a broader Twin Cities community. It offers so much in arts and entertainment just as much now as when we first moved here. I joined the Task Force because I care about our community. I felt the Mayor was heartfelt and honest in her quest, alongside the Council to make WBL a welcoming and inclusive community for all that work, live and play here.



Teresa Eberhardt

My name is Teresa Eberhardt and my husband and I moved to White Bear Lake over 20 years ago to raise our family here. I joined the Task Force because every person in our community is important and should be treated with the respect and dignity we all deserve. As an educator I also believe that there is always room for greater understanding and growth. As Senator Paul Wellstone said, "we all do better when we all do better."



Mike Greenbaum

My name is Mike Greenbaum and I have worked and lived in White Bear Lake for over 25 years. I am the father of three current White Bear Area High School students and another that has graduated. I spend my days as the Executive Director of Newtrax, a nonprofit transportation organization located in White Bear Lake. At Newtrax, I lead an organization that provides approximately 1,600 daily rides to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and seniors in the NE metro area. Both professionally and personally, I have great pride in the White Bear Lake community and benefited from the terrific people and resources. I joined this Task Force with the hope that I could help in some small way to assist in moving in a direction where everyone has the same access to the wonderful aspects of this community that I have enjoyed.



Samantha Gunderson

My name is Samantha Gunderson, and I am a lifelong resident of White Bear Lake with experience working in its education system and for the city. I joined the Task Force because as someone who experienced bullying in my youth and witnessed it throughout my life, I personally recognize the significance of inclusion and a welcoming environment. My experiences helped to develop one of my top strengths as "Includer," in which I am naturally inclined and skilled in helping others to feel accepted, valued, and advocated for, and hope to do so in making a difference in our community.



Ellen Gurrola

My name is Ellen Gurrola and I have lived in White Bear Lake for 3 years. My family and I rented townhomes and apartments until finally settling into a home we bought in the summer of 2021. I have been a science teacher for ten years and understand the important role children play in communities. I joined the Task Force because I have two children of my own in the community as well as being in an interracial marriage. Having children who identify as Latino gives me a strong desire to do what I can to make White Bear Lake a community that is welcoming and inclusive for all.



Stephen Kelly

My name is Stephen Kelly and I have been a resident of White Bear Lake and member of the local Rotary Club. An anthropologist by training, I have served as the innovation program director in the Minnesota State colleges and universities system, supporting projects that lead to better learning outcomes and help address the technological / sociological challenges confronting systems of higher education. I joined the Task Force because communities are better when they are welcoming and inclusive. I think White Bear Lake is welcoming and inclusive in many ways, but as is the case everywhere, there is always room to do better and be better. I care about our community and want us to be the best we can be, so here I am.



Greg Moxness

My name is Greg Moxness and I am committed to helping people through assisting students in technology at Century College. I joined the Task Force because I want to help create a culture of inclusivity to help us grow as a community. I hope this work develops more friendships and connections within WBL. I hope my contribution to this task force will help that happen.



Jodie Nelson

My name is Jodie Nelson and apart from managing a family business, I split my time between business travel and hanging out with my husband. I have been a poet and writer since the age of 12 and enjoy dancing, kiteboarding, and writing. I joined the Task Force because I wanted to see White Bear Lake taking part in creating a better community through dialogue and storytelling.



Amelia Oslund

My name is Amelia Oslund and White Bear Lake has been my family's home since 2009 where we have experienced a welcome spirit amongst our immediate neighbors . I have met a variety of people in our community and realized that we have a lot of gifts among people, which should be encouraged to be shared. I joined this Task Force because I have grown up caring about people, and want to be part of a community that does the same. My hope is that these conversations will be helpful in letting all people's voices be heard in our community so that together we can care about each other. When we hear each other's stories relationships are created and the community is strengthened.



Jane Schroeher

My name is Jane Schroeher, and I've lived in White Bear Lake for 36 years with my husband, Gary. We raised our three children here. I enjoyed working with children/youth as a public health nurse and school nurse for many years. I joined the Task Force in White Bear Lake to become a more active participant in my community. I hoped to connect with others who had similar passions to advocate for everyone to feel that they belong and are included in our community. I also wanted to learn more about my neighbors who live and work in White Bear Lake and to discover their perspectives on feeling welcomed and included. Since I retired, I've missed having connection and dialogue with people from more diverse backgrounds and experiences. Getting involved in my community is one way to do this.



Christina Streiff-Oji

My name is Chris Streiff-Oji and I currently work at my own real estate investment company and recently began serving on the White Bear Lake Area School Board. I have a passion for ensuring all families feel safe and included in their community and schools. I joined the Task Force based upon 26 years of experience serving diverse students and families in K-12 and Higher Education in Minnesota. I bring personal experiences and knowledge around equity and inclusion as a teacher, principal, director and strategic leader.



Alexis Varner

My name is Alexis Varner and I am currently working through the equity department in Roseville schools where I get to view equity in play right before my eyes. I intend to do equity-based work for my future career, since it is something I am truly passionate about. I joined the Task Force based upon how I felt about my city via my mother's, little sister's, and my own experiences living in the city of White Bear. Growing up in the city I felt like I was never accepted based on my own skin color. I was bullied in elementary school and still received ignorant comments throughout my years in middle school and high school. This is a topic I felt strongly about and since joining the task force

Not Pictured: Rachel Blair-Paladino & Eaden Herbert,

APPENDIX:

Census Figures

	Total Population					
	2000 Census		2010 Census		2020 Census	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Population	24,325	100.0%	23797	100.0%	24883	100.0%
White, non-Latino	22,919	94.2%	20976	88.1%	20184	81.1%
All BIPOC residents (Black / Indigenous / People of Color)	1406	5.8%	2821	11.9%	4699	18.9%
Black or African American, non-Latino	253	1.0%	582	2.4%	1007	4.0%
Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Latino	377	1.5%	844	3.5%	1179	4.7%
Hispanic or Latino	425	1.7%	791	3.3%	1361	5.5%
American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Latino	71	0.3%	82	0.3%	81	0.3%
Other race not listed above, non-Latino	14	0.1%	19	0.1%	77	0.3%
More than one race, non-Latino	266	1.1%	503	2.1%	994	4.0%

	Population 18+					
	2000 Census		2010 Census		2020 Census	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Population (18+)	18,295	100.0%	18,622	100.0%	19813	100.0%
White, non-Latino	17,492	95.6%	17,021	91.4%	16,834	85.0%
All BIPOC residents (Black / Indigenous / People of Color)	803	4.4%	1601	8.6%	2979	15.0%
Black or African American, non-Latino	140	0.8%	326	1.8%	636	3.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Latino	229	1.3%	560	3.0%	829	4.2%
Hispanic or Latino	255	1.4%	446	2.4%	826	4.2%
American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Latino	52	0.3%	59	0.3%	60	0.3%
Other race not listed above, non-Latino	9	<0.1%	12	0.1%	60	0.3%
More than one race, non-Latino	118	0.6%	198	1.1%	568	2.9%

	Population 17 & Under					
	2000 Census		2010 Census		2020 Census	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Population (17 and younger)	6,030	100.0%	5,175	100.0%	5,070	100.0%
White, non-Latino	5,427	90.0%	3,955	76.4%	3,350	66.1%
All BIPOC residents (Black / Indigenous / People of Color)	603	10.0%	1,220	23.6%	1,720	33.9%
Black or African American, non-Latino	113	1.9%	256	4.9%	371	7.3%
Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Latino	148	2.5%	284	5.5%	350	6.9%
Hispanic or Latino	170	2.8%	345	6.7%	535	10.6%
American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Latino	19	0.3%	23	0.4%	21	0.4%
Other race not listed above, non-Latino	5	0.1%	7	0.1%	17	0.3%
More than one race, non-Latino	148	2.5%	305	5.9%	426	8.4%

A note on terms used for Census population data

The above tables and graphs used to illustrate the City's demographics by race contain the official terms for race groups as defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. We use these for consistency with the data as reported by the Census Bureau while emphasizing the following: Each of the groups has considerable diversity within it. For example, the Black population includes both descendants of enslaved people and recent African immigrants, while the Asian population includes Asian Indian, Chinese, Hmong, and Vietnamese residents along with many other groups. Many people prefer to be called by those more specific cultural community names rather than the federal government's broad labels. The redistricting dataset does not allow for distinctions among communities within these race groups; please see the Council's Equity Considerations dataset (<https://metro council.org/Data-and-Maps/Research-and-Data/Place-based-Equity-Research.aspx>) for more information. Many people prefer different language for these broad labels. For example, in place of "Latino," some use "Latino/a," "Chicano/a," or gender-neutral alternatives like "Latinx" or "Latine." And in place of "American Indian," some use "Native American" or "Indigenous."