Speaker 1:

Well, I'm doing well, glad to be here tonight. And what a great group you have. I'm really encouraged and impressed by people's willingness to share about their own experiences, and really come into this space with authenticity. So that's what we're all about tonight. All right, well we have two questions and I'm going to go ahead and start to drop the first one into the chat. And they're the same questions that Kim went over in the larger room just now, but who would like to be our reporter? Who would volunteer to be our group reporter to report back to the larger group when we come back together? It's got to be somebody. You can just take some brief notes and just share the highlights. It doesn't have to be a full on in depth report out of all that we discuss.

David:

I'm happy to do it, oh.

Speaker 1:

Okay.

David:

Tiffany, you want to do it?

Speaker 3:

Sure.

Speaker 1:

Okay.

David:

You want to do it or you want me to do it?

Kate:

I think I heard your voice first [crosstalk 00:01:33].

Speaker 1:

All right. Commissioner Alexander you're up. All right, sounds good, thank you. There will be many times throughout our work over the coming months for people to report out, so everybody will get a chance. All right. Let me pull up my agenda here, just want to give us a sense of how long we have. I think we have until about 8:15 or so for a breakout group, so we've got the better part of 30 minutes, about 25 minutes now. So we've got a good amount of time to have quick conversation. Sounds good, okay. Our first question is do you think a racial caste system exists in Brookhaven, and why or why not? All right, so this of course reflecting back on Isabel Wilkerson's explanation of the caste system as being race in America. Iksa do you want to share something?

Iksa:

No, seeing that question and listening to Isabel, I think if you remember the presentation from the ARC a month ago, he talked about Brookhaven and the Cap County. And basically he said your experience in Brookhaven or the Cap varies depending on your race and your age. I knew he, all the piece of data that he kept showing us, he kept coming back to that. He kept coming back to that depending on your race and your age, you're having a different experience as a resident of Brookhaven. So I don't know if I would call it our racial caste system, but there is definitely a system where race has a strong correlation with economic indicators, and access to healthcare, and access to education, and where you live, which determines where you go to school, which determines a lot about your future. So I don't know if I would call it relational caste system but there is a system where race, maybe ethnic origin, to be cast a wider definition does play a big role in the outcomes of your life.

Speaker 1:

That's a great point. Going back to the ARC presentation. I think we all remember those maps that he spoke from last time, it was really sobering.

Iksa:

Powerful his data.

Speaker 1:

Thank you for that. All right. What do others think?

Kate:

I think, this is Kate.

Speaker 1:

Hey Kate.

Kate:

I think it does exist. And I say that because my daughter, I have a 10 year old daughter, and she used to attend Ashford Park. And I felt like, she's biracial, so I felt like you are treated differently because you are not white, to the point where I had to move out from Ashford Park and take her to a private school in [inaudible 00:05:20]. And I mean this school is an elementary school and she was in kindergarten. So I can definitely say that I experienced that.

Speaker 1:

Hmm. Well, that's a powerful story. Thank you for sharing.

Kate:

And then I have other people who are different races who felt the same way.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, okay.

Speaker 3:

Can you hear me?

Speaker 1:

Yes, ma'am.

Speaker 3:

Okay, I had to change my microphone. I didn't hear all that you shared commissioner, and the art presentation was very impactful. I never really paid attention until I saw it that there is no middle school in Brookhaven. So in thinking about the children going, kind of migrating out of the public school system, and this isn't what we're talking about but bear with me for a second, but kind of migrating out of the public school system as they go into higher grade levels. One thing that we face here in the city that could contribute to that is the fact that there is no continuum there. They will have to go into a different city in order to go into the middle school. And then there's only one high school. That was just something I've been thinking about.

Speaker 3:

But as it pertains to the caste system, I would agree that I'm not sure that the caste system exists in Brookhaven, but there is definitely a wealth issue that is in the city. And in thinking about it, and I'm glad that the presentation was shared tonight about Linwood Park, I am a fifth generation resident of Linwood Park. So I've seen the transition from when my grandparents were here, and how gentrification happened to them. And a community of people were displaced based on wealth and their ability to stay here or to not stay here.

Speaker 3:

The increase in property taxes with going from, I'll call them bungalow style homes, to then having your neighbor in a half million dollar house, you can just imagine what happened to the property taxes. And many of them lost their homes due to that. So I think that wealth is definitely, if wealth would be part of the caste system then yes, it definitely exists in Brookhaven. We don't have a large, were not known for having affordable housing in the city. And I think that's a big issue right now. So yeah again, if wealth is part of the caste system then yes I think it does exist, but if it's not then maybe it doesn't exist in Brookhaven.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, just kind of going back from what Kim talked about, her introduction into these questions, talks about how this shows up across systems in society. And she mentioned housing, which you touched on, employment, I would say education as well, to your story Kate, and then the wealth gap between race or ethnic groups as well. So I think that's at least kind of a leading indicator there. Yeah. Okay, who else?

Speaker 6:

So I think that there is a racial caste system. So if I think about a caste system as, the way I learned about the caste system in India was that it was, color was attached to it, so those who were lighter were in a higher class or caste, and then those who were darker were in a lower caste. And then there was some place in the middle. So if I'm using that same definition and then applying racial to it, so I'm looking at the question, is there a racial caste system? And then I'm thinking about my position at St. Martin's Episcopal school, our school was founded in '59.

Speaker 6:

And so it was founded in response to integration. We just celebrated 60 years, I think last year. And so coming to understand and come to grips with the rationale for forming our school, and hearing about the changes over time in the community, we have reason to believe that there was something that was going on. There was some kind of phenomenon that is going on. And Brookhaven just like other cities in Atlanta is not divorced from that. And so I'm trying to pull it together and piece together myself using this language that Isabel Wilkerson gives us.

Speaker 6:

But I am sitting at the table at St. Martins at the admissions desks, and being a part of so many decisions that are made for our school was six, right in the center of Brookhaven. We get kids from Ashwood Park, and Montgomery, and they want to apply to come here. And as I'm also left, particularly in this period of COVID when our applications are increasing, I have lots of feelings around what's happening to our public schools. What's happening when all of our kids leave? And I didn't think Charlene about having a middle school. It completely missed me that there was no middle school in Brookhaven. And so that means that the kids have to leave Brookhaven, apply for private or independent education, and then deal with the consequences that come with that choice. And so I think that in doing, I'm making all of these decisions and even understanding who can be a part of those decisions is very caste like. It's very caste like.

Speaker 6:

Our financial aid budget is abysmal. And so that means that students that are coming to St Martin's are paying a great deal of money, and that means something right? That tells me something.

Iksa:

You go to Brookhaven, you got to, I think it's district four, you go along a different highway. When you look at the population there it's mostly Hispanic, and it also correlates with other indicators like poverty, and income, and affordable housing. That 30%, you paying more than 30% of your income in housing. I think again there's some kind of system that, Hispanics considered themselves, Hispanic is an ethnicity not a race, but really it's how do you separate the race from the ethnicity?

Iksa:

It's a question that you get on the census, they ask you first are you of Hispanic origin, and then they ask you what's your race. And then when you give your race, there's no choice for Hispanic, you're either white or black, or Asian. So I find the concept of race can is a very American thing, but again my comment was when you go to Buford highway, there's a strong correlation between the race of people who live there and their economic opportunities, so there is a strong correlation. Again, I know that Kate and Tiffany feel that it's a caste system and yeah, I can totally see that.

Iksa:

But maybe it's more than just race. Maybe it's color of your skin, I don't know. I think it's about more than race.

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Iksa:

We tend to see a lot of things through the lens of race, but I think in countries racism definitely exists and it's a factor, but I don't think you're as lumped together or as identified by race as in the U.S. The U.S is all about marking you as, what's your race, the census everywhere you go. You apply to anything, what's your race? What's your... But there some kind of system of [crosstalk 00:15:35] hierarchy, call it a caste system or not, but there's definitely some kind of hierarchy that's very strongly correlated to the color of your skin. Whether it's race, or ethnicity, or country of origin, there definitely is.

David:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 3:

And unfortunately depending on the answer to that question, that determines how a person is treated. So we can look at someone and make assumptions about the race, and then we ask the question. And that either confirms or affirms our assumptions or creates a whole different conversation, which they in takes us into the house analogy, and are we going to deal with this 400 year old house and pull back the layers and continue to address it, or are we going to ignore it and hope it goes away and put a rug over the stain and cover it up. And now deal with it.

David:

Right.

Speaker 6:

I love that metaphor. I really love that metaphor, because we can say also what happens when you don't deal with the foundation that's rotting beneath? And I think that's the charge that we have is how do we address this foundation? Understanding that Linwood Park was a thriving black community in the 1920s and it's no longer that, it needs to be discussed, right? That's part of the reckoning that oftentimes we don't have an opportunity to do, well let me rephrase, not necessarily the opportunity to do, but do it. I think the opportunity is always there to, to reckon with our past, but...

Speaker 1:

Courage to do it, maybe.

Speaker 6:

Yeah, the courage to do it. The announcement of the social justice commission came, I think almost in the same week as a designation of Linwood Parks historic designation, I'm probably saying that wrong. But I found that to be, I was like, look at this, look at this important work that's in front of us and how exciting is to bring justice back. You know what I mean? Because I was not aware of that. I work at this school and we were not aware. And so it's so important for the school to also understand in any institution that serves people from Brookhaven to understand where we were, and then also how do we interrupt some of these systems? Because we can do it, I think we can do it. But as first reckoning and understanding where are we've been, and then if we're going to continue to build programs or schools or businesses on top of ground that we haven't even acknowledged where it comes from, it's problematic.

Speaker 6:

Across the street from our school is the PC golf club. And my head of school asked me one day, I mean we kind of knew the history, but I went over to the Atlanta History Center to dig up some history of on the Atlanta golf club. And I was aghast, it's literally a former plantation, across the street from our school. And we have people that are members of the golf club. And again, there's a marker right next to it on Ashwood Dunwoody road, and it's at the corner and it can easily be missed. And I've driven past it like a million times. And it just so happened that I happened to be stopped. And I looked up, I was like this is a historic marker that's indicating the land that I am on at that moment.

Speaker 6:

And I can tell you that I would say 99% of the employees and the parents have no idea about the history of Brookhaven, and no idea what happened literally a Stone's throw from our school. And it's a privilege, it's an unearned privilege that we have to be that ignorant. And I think that when you begin to pull the shades back, or the carpets back, then we have to contend with the feelings that we have when that action happens. And I think that is also an important endeavor. Right?

Speaker 3:

And I think that this is answering the second part of what we're to focus on during this breakout, what will the commission's charge be? We've got to keep talking about it. And I think I mentioned in our first meeting, my statement was we have to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. And that's really where we are. And as it pertains to employment, if I'm not mistaken but don't quote me on this. I believe some of the residents in the Park actually worked, if you will, at the country club over by your school, St. Martins, as well as the one over by SunTrust. I can't think of the name of the one over there, but several of them, they work there cause they could walk there from here. So that's a lot of rich history in Brookhaven.

Speaker 1:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 3:

And the Linwood Park residents contributed to a lot of that. And I just think that the, again what we as the commission should do or help to come out of this is to keep the dialogue going. We're not going to be able to solve all the world's ills, but now we'll just power and it puts the ball in people's courts to then do something with the information. But so many people, as you were saying Tiffany, had never heard the story about the country club over there, as well as about Linwood Park. Many people didn't know that this was the oldest black community in the Cap County until we just started talking about it. And then we started receiving, "but we don't want to go back 400 years and talk about that". So yeah, let's keep it moving forward.

Speaker 1:

Well, thank you Charlene for helping us segue into our next question. And I think if we're ending at 8:15, we've got about six minutes left. So I'd love if everybody could maybe share kind of their top couple of thoughts about how we ensure that the commission's recommendations acknowledge and address issues of, I'll say race slash ethnicity, and caste. How do we ensure the commission's recommendations acknowledge these things? Charlene said, we keep the dialogue going and bring out the history and make that more plain for people.

Kate:

Well, I'll say by educating.

Speaker 1:

Educating, can you, can you tell me more?

Kate:

Yeah. I think by educating people, because I think many people they don't know much about how the caste system, and how it what's happening how it affects them. They're like well as long as I'm good to people, I don't treat anyone unfairly, they don't feel they need to, like it will affect them. But I think racism affects everyone, it affects all not and white people. So I think by people knowing that, "Hey, I can ask questions and learn more about the area I live in", then can make more better informed decisions.

David:

I'd say one of the things that we can do, that we must do, is connect our recommendations to the data. Cities have been doing this in what they don't feel is in the best interest of the city. So you got to connect it to the data. You got to say, like in the article we got, when you cut the curbs and the sidewalk to make it more accessible, everybody wins. When you build a middle school, or you address this issue or that issue, here's all the other areas that will be affected the citizens of Brookhaven, the business owners...

David:

The other thing that I thought of about the first question was about the traffic patterns, Brookhaven swells during the day because more people come into work and then they leave and where are they coming from? And also there was a pattern of a bunch of people in Brookhaven who'd go downtown to work. So we didn't have a chance to get into that data. But I was wondering, what are those jobs? What are the jobs that people are coming into Brookhaven for those, white collar jobs, what are the jobs that they're going downtown for, et cetera. Because that would be a caste system as well in terms of tax revenue, and business revenue, and all that kind of stuff, traffic patterns. So connected to the data, so that you can actually show what the win-win is.

Speaker 1:

Right, right.

Speaker 6:

And I'd like to add, I'm thinking about personalities, and I'm trying to find a way to say that this commission's work isn't tied to personalities or appeasing. It's really tied to education, it's tied to data, it's tied to facts. And sometimes things are not addressed or acknowledged because we don't want to hurt somebody's feelings. We don't want to create that emotion in people. So I hope that's part of what the commission will push through to do, because there's a way to have the conversation without intentionally offending someone. That doesn't mean that someone might not be offended, but I just wanted to add that to my...

Speaker 1:

That's good. That's good to be bold. Like you said, to be comfortable with discomfort. In our last couple of minutes I want to make sure that if Commissioner Kim or Commissioner Harrell, since you haven't had a chance to share so far, if there's something that you wanted to offer up in terms of the commission's recommendations.

Speaker 7:

I agree with what everyone has been saying, particularly with keeping the conversation going, and being comfortable with being uncomfortable. In many ways [inaudible 00:27:29] for just society in general. So just finding different ways to [inaudible 00:27:37] in the community, to engage support in terms of continuing the conversation. So we look at it from different perspectives [inaudible 00:27:37] aspects. So we keep the conversation about [inaudible 00:27:44]. And then maybe just quickly coming up with an outline that we can follow internally, different aspects, does social justice lens in the meetings about different decisions that are made [inaudible 00:27:53]. And I see that the [inaudible 00:27:53]. So I'll just end it there, but just coming up with an outline of [inaudible 00:28:25] topics just to keep it in mind, not miss anything.

Speaker 1:

Yeah [crosstalk 00:28:47]. I like the language you use, the social justice lens on all the issues. I think that's really important. Commissioner Harrell. Would you like to give us your thoughts?

Speaker 8:

I agree with what everyone has been saying. I don't live in Brookhaven, I work for the police department, but David is correct. He's correct about the data about it being in the best interest of the city, as far as what the city is going to move on. And then just the open dialogue of conversation, I think is very important as well. Like someone said, it's going to be uncomfortable, but we have to be comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Speaker 1:

That's right. Perfect timing.

Speaker 6:

Time goes so fast.

Speaker 3:

We need 10 more minutes.

Speaker 10:

What she said. Where did Kathy go? Kathy? Where'd you go?

Speaker 9:

Here I am.

Speaker 10:

Oh, we voted when you were away [crosstalk 00:30:03]. All right, commissioner Wells...

Speaker 9:

It's like, we're waiting for a few more folks to come back in. And we will, after we do our report outs we do have some time to open it up to the full commission around feedback.

Speaker 11:

Everybody's back. Yes. Okay. Thank you. Well, as Leslie indicated, and as we discussed it at the top, we're going to ask each recorder to share the highlights of their discussion for two minutes. And then fortunately, we should have some time here for any other points that are good for the whole tonight. So I was in group one, so I at least know who the recorder was there. And so we'll start with group one and that was Karen, [inaudible 00:31:12].

Karen:

Okay. So bear with me, everybody. So the first question, do we think Brookhaven has a racial caste system? I think we were all in unanimous agreement. It exists everywhere. Linwood Park is a great example of that. The arc data we looked at last week talked about the wealth gap between white and black Americans and the Atlanta regional commission on average, if an average white person has a hundred wealth units than an average black family would have 10. It shows up in housing, and transportation in schools, voting experiences... Just very different study, we talked about what's going on in Texas, and concerns about what that was effective and happened here in Brookhaven and especially our more vulnerable communities and how they'd be negatively affected. And how these issues, even though they're outside of our control, they're like a domino effect. And especially people in vulnerable areas, they're not necessarily aware of all these issues, and they're just focused on the basics. So that's a huge need, just the need for awareness.

Karen:

And then we had the sense that we really wanted to set a goal of having the same quality of life for everybody. And so we get to the second part, we talked about the importance of reviewing documents that are used by various commissions, or boards, or planning agencies of the city to make sure that there's no implicit bias in those documents that which shaped decisions. To check how we may be perhaps defining economic development differently for our more vulnerable communities. And to look at that through a lens of racial equality for all. We wanted to have a special sensitivity for the vulnerable neighborhoods

Karen:

We talked, probably running out of time, we talked about the importance of getting input from citizens about what their expectations were, and spend a lot of time on getting the message, especially to the impoverished communities, to not rely on them to get their input to us. They may not have access to wifi. They may be struggling through with jobs. And so we need to identify people in our community to represent them. Maybe this is leader's or clergy that are well-known and respected. And then those messengers needed to be empowered to have a voice with the city so that their input really matters. What did I miss?

Speaker 9:

Perfect. That was perfect. Thank you. Got you got it. All a group two. Who was a recorder for group two?

Speaker 13:

That was us, and Connie was our reporter.

Speaker 9:

Great. Yes, thank you Connie. Thank you.

Connie:

Yeah, for the first question, our group agreed that there was a resounding yes, that there an incredible cast system, as Karen said across the world. But specific to Brookhaven, yes. We probably spent a little more time, as much as we could have on any of the components of a caste system. We spent a little more time on housing and education in particular. We talked a little bit about the way that you go from South to North Brookhaven and the differences there, but in spite of income and wealth or what have you, we also just talked about equality or lack thereof, and access.

Connie:

We spent a little bit of time talking about policing and even in the court system and how, again, probably regardless of color or race that there are inequities there. Tom shared, I believe you said 75% of traffic violations in the city of Brookhaven are dished out to Hispanics. You think about it, if you just took that analogy to the world and I don't want us to get stuck politically, but we know Barack Obama could not have gotten away with the same things that Trump's gotten away with. That's a part of the caste system. We talked about the fact that often diversity is invited and inclusion-