

To all who have been peacefully protesting in recent days, to all who are outraged by the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Marcus Deon Smith, and so many others: I hear you.

I hear your anger, your pain, your frustration of justice denied for far too long. I hear you crying out for a new way, for changes in priorities and policies, in systems and structures.

I want those things too.

Critical conversations are underway in City government and in the Police Department. We are exploring substantive changes in policies and procedures based on discussions within and led by our community. The City Council and I want to build on progress made in past years and quickly begin new initiatives.

We funded Cure Violence, a resident-led initiative that treats violence like a public health issue instead of a police issue. This program is already having an impact. We will build on that good work.

We recognized the need to have mental health workers ready to respond to individuals experiencing a mental health or addiction-related crisis. The City created a program that “dually dispatches” police and mental health workers to a scene when 911 operators identify a call where they are needed. It’s a new program but already shows benefits to people and families in distress. Most of all, it reduces the amount of time police spend on scene and leaves the caller with certified mental health workers.

We were the first city in North Carolina to require police body cameras. City Council members and I have repeatedly gone to the North Carolina General Assembly to ask them to make body camera footage accessible to the public.

In early February, our newly-sworn-in Police Chief Brian James issued a directive to restrict officers from shooting at moving vehicles. This is one of the Action Items outlined in “8 Can’t Wait,” the “Police Use of Force Project,” and former President Obama’s Mayors Challenge.

I have accepted President Obama’s challenge. In the coming days I am committed to several key steps:

Step 1 is to thoroughly review our policies.

Step 2 is to engage the community.

Step 3 is to report back in 90 days.

Step 4 is to implement substantive reform.

The City Council and I are already working to make our City safe and prosperous for all people, regardless of the color of their skin. We are helping to build safe and affordable housing. Making it easier for people to buy their first home. Expanding the number of contracts the City awards to

women- and minority-owned businesses. Providing a \$15 an hour living wage for every City employee.

There is more hard work to do. I am committed to doing it.

In the meantime, I am grateful to the leadership of local activists and groups who are working to keep protests peaceful and as safe as possible for all. Peaceful protest is in the very DNA of our city. To be charged with the health, safety and well-being of a large and diverse community is an extremely challenging task. We promise that even as we seek to keep everyone safe, we will continue to honor your right to make your voices heard.

Please keep doing the work. I hear you.

Mayor Nancy Vaughan