



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

We have struggled to find words to express the outrage, frustration, sadness, and grief we feel right now, as well as ways to channel those emotions constructively.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the many deep and structural inequities in our society into focus, revealing higher rates of infection and death among people of color, as well as greater economic displacement. Against the backdrop of the pandemic and its disparate impacts, the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and so many others before them, further highlight the systemic racism that has long threatened to tear our country apart.

As Calvin Gladney, the CEO of Smart Growth America so beautifully stated in a recent message about this tragic moment:

***Everyone** deserves to live in a community that is healthy, equitable and resilient... Yet these past few weeks have painfully illuminated once again that this vision is out of reach for millions of Americans, for reasons that go beyond ongoing police violence. Decisions we have intentionally made about land use, transportation, and the built environment for decades have produced a system that is inherently unequal; where black and brown Americans are more likely to be struck and killed while walking, are less likely to own a home, are more likely to suffer from transportation-related air pollution that increases their chances of death from COVID-19, and—as we've seen again—are often targeted by the police in public spaces that are supposed to be for everyone.*

Here at RMLUI, we bear witness to the devastation wrought in communities of color and have asked ourselves how we can confront the racism that underlies our history of land use planning and access to property ownership in America and in this region. What can we do to better understand the roles that land use law and policy have had in creating barriers to opportunity, promoting segregation, and in contributing to the health and economic disparities experienced by people of color? How can we help make sure that, as we come out of this pandemic and start to rebuild our communities, we are building

towards a more equitable, inclusive, and just society that takes account of our racist land use history and seeks to remediate the vast harm it has produced? In this cause, there is much we need to learn, understand, and share.

Because the role of RMLUI has always been to convene thought leaders, to facilitate conversations, and to educate professionals, that's where we'll begin.

In the coming weeks, we will convene a series of conversations (via Zoom) to explore our land use agenda here at RMLUI, taking into account what we are learning about our policies as they relate both to containing a pandemic and promoting a socially just and sustainable community. These conversations are intended to be opportunities for the entire RMLUI community—land use professionals, community leaders, academic partners, and students—to come together in thoughtful dialogue about the problems we're facing, how they were created, and how we can improve our land use systems and decision-making processes to better address the inequities in our society.

The details of this series are just beginning to come together, but if you're interested in participating, please keep a close eye on your email. We hope you'll join us in self-reflection and conversation. But more important, we hope you'll commit to doing whatever you can to confront the inequities in our communities and to work to ensure that every American can live in a place that is healthy, equitable, and resilient.

We look forward to joining together in this work.

Best,
Susan and Lisa