

2024 Annual Report

2024 marks the third year since the release of the historic Commission on Racial and Structural Equity report. The RASE Commission Report is a plan that works across disciplines to establish equity, justice, and inclusivity by creating new policies, practices, and procedures that works to decrease disparities and improve equity for our residents.

This report was not meant to sit on a shelf - but rather be a blueprint that informs how Rochester/Monroe County administrations govern and guide the way organizations and businesses provide services. Since 2022, the Urban League of Rochester has served as a steward of the recommendations and an accountability partner for the City of Rochester and the County of Monroe. These entities have been making strides to implement the over 200 recommendations.

This annual report will provide an update on the work of the County, City, and Community as it relates to advancing the recommendations.

History

2020 was a tumultuous year as the country struggled through dueling crises – the COVID 19 pandemic and the civil unrest in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. In response to calls for systemic and institutional change by then Governor Andrew Cuomo and the community at large, then Mayor Lovely Warren and County Executive Adam Bello established the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity, known as RASE, in June of 2020.

From its inception, the Commission was meant to be a community-led and community-involved initiative. Thirteen of the original 21 RASE Commissioners were selected by a panel of community members and eight (8) were selected by the Mayor and County Executive. The Commissioners were led by three co-chairs who worked in collaboration with four senior staff members from Monroe County and the City of Rochester.

For six (6) months, the Commission worked with more than 200 dedicated community volunteers to examine existing, and develop new, policies and legislation to overcome systemic and institutional inequities and racism in Rochester and Monroe County.

The commissioners were charged to:

- 1- inventory and assess current local laws and policies that either promoted or were intended to eliminate institutional and structural biases, racism and inequities in the City of Rochester and Monroe County;
- 2- provide recommendations to enhance current local laws and policies to increase their effectiveness, and/or “sunset” local laws and policies that are ineffective or no longer applicable;
- 3- provide recommendations on any new local laws and policies to address identified gaps.

The RASE Commission organized its work by understanding laws and policies, collecting and analyzing data, and engaging with community members in their neighborhoods with the aim of determining how structural racism could be dismantled. They worked across nine sectors that impact the daily lives of all Monroe County residents:

- Business Development
- Criminal Justice
- Education
- Job Creation
- Healthcare
- Housing
- Human & Social Services
- Mental Health and Addiction Services
- Policing

Community engagement was, and remains, a high priority for the Commission. The Commissioners conducted virtual town hall meetings, surveys and interviews of community members impacted by the focus areas, and tours of affected communities to speak with residents and business owners.

The Commission also recognized that their work went beyond the scope and authority of city and county government. They determined that some of the identified problems and solutions were under the auspices and control of the private and not-for-profit sectors; local governments including suburban towns, villages, and school districts; and the state and federal governments. Their goal was to engage community leaders and other officials in discussions that would lead to the necessary changes needed to make Rochester equitable.

In March of 2021, the Commissioners delivered more than 200 recommendations to the Mayor and County Executive with the understanding that their work would not go in vain. At the release of the report, the Commission called for the establishment of an organization that would monitor the implementation of the recommendations and provide an annual reporting to the community on the status of each recommendation.

In 2022, The Urban League of Rochester was selected as the successor organization to continue to monitor the implementation of the recommendations, organize community engagement, and hold the city and county accountable for traction and transparency. The Urban League, holding true to the Commission's intent to maintain active community involvement, established two community-led bodies to assist in the monitoring and implementation of the recommendations.

The Powerbrokers, a group of 80 community and business leaders, meet on a periodic basis to aid in the furtherance of city/county recommendations that can be undertaken by community-based organizations and businesses.

Community Advancing Recommendation Teams (CARTs) are community-led groups established by the Urban League of Rochester (ULR) to work specifically on recommendations from the RASE Commission's report. CARTs exist under the umbrella of the RASE Partnership established between the City of Rochester, County of Monroe, Rochester City School District, and Urban League of Rochester and function under the authority of the ULR. CARTs allow access for community members to participate in a collaborative process to build consensus toward recommendation implementation.

2024 has been a year of progress:

Over the last three years since the report was delivered to the mayor and county executive, staff have been working to implement as many recommendations as possible.

In direct response to the recommendation stating, "to close the digital divide facing many families of color in the City of Rochester, the City must enact high quality broadband to every home in the city," Monroe County Executive Adam Bello signed a \$4.2 million contract with Community Broadband Networks. The new service will give more than 6,000 households high-speed service throughout ZIP codes 14604, 14605, 14608, 14611, 14613, 14614 and 14621 in Rochester. These target ZIP codes were identified by the African American Health Coalition as needing special attention due to high concentration of African-Americans in particular and people of color in general.

In alignment with the RASE Commission's Mental Health recommendation to "Initiate the process of shifting and embedding currently funded mental health services into trusted community-accessible sites" (pg. 197 digital, 183 printed), the City of Rochester is launching the Crisis Intervention Services (CIS) mobile-response vehicle. The mobile-response vehicle will allow staff members from the city's Department of Recreation and Human Services to respond directly to crime scenes to provide crisis care and support to victims and their family members. The RASE Report recommends creating and fully funding community alternatives to police, including trained community responders and crisis intervention specialists. The introduction of this mobile-response vehicle allows for trained professionals and community-based crisis intervention counselors to respond directly to families who are thrust into the sudden confusion and emotional trauma of losing a loved one to violence.

The report advocates for a collaborative Livable Communities model that ensures comprehensive support for older adults and promotes the creation of diverse advisory boards. In direct response to the RASE recommendation to "support and Invest in Livable Communities for Older Adults Initiative" (pg. 156 printed, pg. 170 digital), Rochester was recently named the best city in the U.S. for aging in place by This Old House. In their 2024 Report, This Old House emphasizes Rochester's strengths in affordability, access to healthcare, and overall quality of life. In 2019, the City of Rochester and Monroe County joined the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. These success stories demonstrate how Rochester is moving

the RASE recommendations forward, setting an example for creating equitable, inclusive communities where all older adults can age with dignity and independence.

CART Work:

The CARTs are each focused on an individual sector and are tasked with increasing equity within their respective field. Each CART meets regularly to review RASE Report recommendations, discuss strategies for implementation, and foster partnerships among the County, City, and Community to achieve equity.

Business Development: The Business Development/Job Creation CART worked in partnership with GRABBA, the Greater Rochester Area Black Business Alliance to survey MWBE's needs for matchmaking and networking opportunities.

Education: The Education CART advocated for alternatives to standardized testing by writing a position letter sent to key stakeholders, including Regents, Commissioners, Superintendents, and community organizations.

Criminal Justice & Policing: The Criminal Justice and Policing CART explored violence-reduction programs in other cities and states, developing new initiatives, including a comprehensive plan tailored for Rochester.

Healthcare: The Healthcare CART is collaborating with Legislator Albert Blankley to propose a referral for a Standing Health Committee in the Monroe County Legislature. Legislator Blankley will engage with President Roman and strategize on building a coalition of support for the referral.

Housing: The Housing CART influenced the City's Zoning Alignment Project (ZAP) by advocating for less restrictive policies on multi-family housing, greater inclusion of ADUs and transitional housing, simplified processes for developers, and increased affordable housing options for households earning <50% and <65% AMI. Additionally, they organized stakeholders for \$40M in state V-RIP funding to renovate small rental units and prepared for collaborative efforts with surrounding Towns.

Mental Health, Human Services, Juvenile Justice: Many of the Mental Health, Human Services, and Juvenile Justice recommendations will be under consideration by the Department of Human Services' Citizens Advisory Council (CAC). Facilitators of the Mental Health and Human Services CARTs have been invited to participate in the CAC as community members and CART representatives.

Older Adults: The Older Adults CART advanced the Age-Friendly Livable Communities for Older Adults initiative, highlighted by a recent report from *This Old House* naming Rochester as the best city to age in the U.S. Evidence shows a 73% adoption rate across the plan's 86 action items, many of which align closely with 10 of the 11 RASE Older Adult recommendations. The

Older Adults CART has since merged with the Human Services CART to form the Human Services Older Adults CART.

ADDITIONS:

While the RASE Report did not focus specifically on the Veteran population, the Monroe County Department of Diversity Equity and Inclusion established the Minority Veterans Outreach Initiative. In partnership with the Veterans Services Agency, WDKX, and New Creations Unisex Barbershop hosted events to educate Black and Hispanic disabled veterans on benefits that they may not be aware of. Through these events they have met with dozens of veterans who were not receiving all the benefits they were entitled to. This initiative speaks to the essence of the RASE report as it identifies an often overlooked or invisible population to ensure they are getting a hand-up toward equity. ways that may be eligible for additional financial benefits.

CHALLENGES:

Challenges continue to exist in implementing the recommendations as all recommendations are not under local governmental or community control, and they require changes in legislation and policy from the state or federal government. While the city, county, and community partners and staff continue to advocate, changes will be slower to come that desired.

FUTURE:

2025 marks 5 years since the establishment of the RASE Commission. We will have a full accounting of our community's progress to discuss at the March Annual Community Update.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attached is the PowerPoint presentation delivered to the community outlining key accomplishments for the year.