

# Mayor Junie White urges residents to make their voices heard peacefully, commits City leaders to listen

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## Mayor promotes peaceful response to 'genuine injustice'



In times of profound crisis and conflict, it is essential for true and trusted community leaders to help. To listen. To acknowledge and gain understanding about why their community is in pain. And, through empathy and love, to help bring people together and work to build a better and more just community.

We are living through one of those times, and that is why I'm sharing this message today.

I and my fellow City Council members are united in our love for this community and every person in it. At the same time, this isn't about one elected official making a speech and offering a solution — this is a time for every elected official, business leader, religious leader, neighborhood leader, law enforcement leader to do their part to show the world the Spartanburg we know and love.

I believe those efforts begin with empathy. And empathy starts with listening. We must listen to each other, but especially to our friends and neighbors and fellow citizens who are in pain and who are questioning whether or not their lives are valued. They are justifiably questioning whether or not they and their children have even the most basic freedoms our country promises.

The protests and conflicts we are seeing throughout our country — the protests we've seen in our own city — didn't just materialize out of thin air. These protests were ignited by genuine injustice. People of color have been marginalized, penalized and victimized throughout our country's history — it is a shameful history and it continues today. While there are credible reports of bad actors seeking to take advantage of the moment to create more chaos and destruction, the inexcusable actions of a few do not rob the many of the truth they share with us.

We acknowledge that truth. And we condemn the history that underpins it.

To my fellow Spartanburg residents who are hurting, we hear you. Your voice matters, and we encourage you to peacefully make it heard. For our part, we will work today and going forward to promote ways to encourage this dialog and ways for our city police department and community leaders to join with you. We

will continue and deepen our commitment to having the infrastructure of accountability, training, and the community policing policies that we know lead to a safer, kinder, and more equitable city.

We will listen with the intent to hear rather than with the reflex to argue. We will comfort rather than confront. We will join arms rather than take them up.

Spartanburg is not a perfect community, not by any stretch. We have worked very hard in recent years to address our legacy of intergenerational poverty, a legacy that is most visible in the black community and which can be traced to decades of shameful practices and decisions, from segregation and Jim Crow to economic disinvestment and everyday marginalization and discrimination. Much of the work we have done has been citizen-led and you can see what starts to happen when empathy, opportunity and empowerment intersect in the hands of people in the traditionally underserved neighborhoods of our community where that work is focused.

Those efforts started with one simple act: our community leaders listened. They gave voice to the people who live here. They gave the power to shape our community to the people who are the community.

That is what I am asking for today: For people to find ways to peacefully make their voices heard. And for the leaders of this community to listen. That is how we begin to move forward and ensure a safe Spartanburg today, and a more just Spartanburg tomorrow.