June 5, 2020

Dear Friends:

At the end of 2019, The Community Foundation adopted a new five-year strategic plan, including new vision and mission statements. In three words, the plan’s title summarizes its central idea: opportunity for all. In 2020, so much has changed, both from the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic in our community and from the many voices of people demanding greater racial equity and justice. The importance and the urgency of the strategies that we put in place last year have been magnified by the events of the last several months.

For philanthropy in Greater New Haven, as for business and government, COVID-19 is a crisis like no other. Social isolation is altering — perhaps permanently — how we connect with one another, while unemployment at Depression-era levels is redlining vulnerability in our society and stretching the public and private safety net beyond its breaking point. The path of recovery is highly uncertain, but one thing is clear: as a community, we are not going back to the way things were before COVID-19.

The devastating health and economic impacts of COVID-19 fall disproportionately on people of color, widening the racial and ethnic disparities that have increasingly come to define our society over the last two decades. No matter how measured — rates of hospitalization and death, access to testing and care, unemployment, undocumented immigrants ineligible for public support, businesses receiving Small Business Administration loans, or young people with the connectivity to truly learn through remote schooling — the COVID-19 data in our community tell a terrible tale of inequality defined by race, ethnicity, citizenship and zip code. These data tell us that our pre-COVID approaches to advancing racial equity have proven to be inadequate.

As we write this, longstanding racial inequities and injustices are boiling over into protest and violence in cities across America following the tragic murder of an African-American man by a white police officer in Minneapolis. Our country and America following the tragic murder of an African-American man by a white police officer in Minneapolis. Our country and the devastation that is so deeply embedded in our society.

At this time of daunting challenges, the stakes could not be higher. So much about the future of our community — whether we can become a cohesive whole, recover what has been lost, and move forward to a new time of greater opportunity — will depend on how we respond now.

The Foundation’s 2020-24 strategic plan is anchored in our enduring belief that if our community works together effectively, Greater New Haven can be a place of expanding opportunity for all in the coming decade.

Attracted by New Haven’s urban life style and amenities, people have been moving both to downtown and to the neighborhoods in recent years at a pace not seen in our lifetimes. Our region’s biomedical economy — including healthcare, pharmaceuticals, medical research and biotechnology — continues its strong growth and is well-positioned to create much-needed new jobs and to be a driver of Connecticut’s economic progress.

Our plan is all about how this growth can create opportunity for all. We are focusing on education and skill-building for jobs in the growth sectors of tomorrow. We are focusing on support for entrepreneurs, especially women and people of color, and on building a more equitable local system of entrepreneurial support. We are focusing on ensuring that growth does not result in housing displacement. We are committed to our traditional role of supporting the local nonprofit sector in providing people with the support and connections they need to build successful lives. And we are undertaking all of our work with a deepened commitment to greater equity as indispensable to progress, both for The Foundation in achieving our goals and for our community more broadly.

We believe that creating opportunity for all requires that local nonprofits, businesses, major institutions, donors, elected officials, neighborhood leaders and area residents work together in new ways toward shared goals and shared accountability. In doing our part, The Foundation will be listening more broadly to and collaborating more deeply with the people of Greater New Haven.

The Foundation is optimistic for other important reasons as well. The creativity, resilience and innovation shown by our nonprofit sector in responding to the challenges of COVID-19 constitute yet another chapter in its long, proud history of service. Facing some of their toughest challenges ever, our nonprofits continue to inspire.

Furthermore, our community’s generosity has been a bright beacon amidst the gloom of COVID-19. After receiving more than $35 million in new gifts and charitable transfers in 2019, one of the highest annual totals in The Foundation’s 92-year history, 2020 has continued to showcase our community’s deep sense of caring. The Great Give 2020 was by far our most successful ever, raising $3.6 million last month from more than 16,000 donors to benefit almost 400 local nonprofits. In addition, The Foundation’s COVID-19 Community Fund, established in partnership with United Way of Greater New Haven, raised approximately $2.7 million in six weeks in March and April.

With this support as well as additional Foundation funds, The Foundation will facilitate or directly provide more than $10 million to local nonprofits in the first three months of the COVID-19 crisis. In addition to these grants, The Foundation is also working with public and private partners to establish a $1.5 million loan fund for small minority-owned and women-owned businesses.

Rather than being deterred by COVID-19 or feeling helpless in the face of persistent inequity, The Foundation is pursuing with strengthened determination our vision of Greater New Haven as a community of opportunity for all. By working together, drawing on our deep reserves of resilience and generosity, building on our economic strengths, and making greater equity a defining element of our common vision, we believe that our community can make COVID-19 a departure point for reimagining the future of Greater New Haven.

Please join us in this vitally important work.