



Councilmember Ben Bartlett
City of Berkeley, District 3

CONSENT CALENDAR
February 13, 2018

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmembers Ben Bartlett, Cheryl Davila, and Kate Harrison
Subject: Referral to the Peace & Justice Commission: Examine Internet Communications Platforms Servicing Berkeley

RECOMMENDATION

Referral to the Peace & Justice Commission to examine the internet communications platforms servicing Berkeley to assess whether they are propagating or promoting racism and/or discrimination.

BACKGROUND

In Berkeley, we have a zero tolerance policy for racism and discrimination.

Many internet communications platforms have faced criticism for propagating or promoting racism and/or discrimination.

Facebook has recently come under fire for allowing “housing advertisements that screened out minorities despite a federal prohibition on housing discrimination”¹ as well as for “allowing advertisers to direct ads to users who searched for or expressed an interest in racist sentiments and hate speech.”²

Nextdoor has also faced criticism for allowing racial profiling on their platform. An East Bay Express expose published in October 2015 described racial profiling on Nextdoor in the following terms: “Residents frequently post unsubstantiated ‘suspicious activity’ warnings that result in calls to the police on Black citizens who have done nothing wrong.”³

A number of internet communications platforms have allowed hate speech to intensify without taking any action, such as in the comments sections of news articles.

¹ White, Jeremy. “Facebook Allowed Racist Housing That Excluded Minorities.” Independent.Co.Uk. <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/facebook-housing-adverts-racism-minorities-excluded-a8068236.html> (accessed January 10, 2018)

² Maheshwari, Sapna & Stevenson, Alexandra. “Google and Facebook Face Criticism for Ads Targeting Racist Sentiments.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/15/business/facebook-advertising-anti-semitism.html> (accessed January 10, 2018)

³ Levin, Sam. “Racial Profiling Via Nextdoor.com.” EastBayExpress.com <https://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/racial-profiling-via-nextdoorcom> (accessed January 9, 2018)

Some of these services have taken steps to address racism and discrimination on their platforms, including by making efforts to moderate communications. Nextdoor has been proactive at taking steps to combat racial profiling. They have worked with local activists as well as developed an algorithm to identify and prevent the posting of racially coded terms.

In line with these values, the Berkeley City Council refers the Peace and Justice Commission to examine the internet communications platforms servicing Berkeley. The Peace and Justice Commission should report back to the City Council with an assessment on whether any platforms are propagating or promoting racism and/or discrimination in our City. The City Council shall then take appropriate legislative action.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff time.

CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Ben Bartlett, (510) 981-7130