

Remarks of William W. Ginsberg  
 President and CEO of The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven  
 at

The Foundation's Annual Celebration of its Donors  
 Woodbridge, Connecticut  
 November 13, 2019

Thank you so much, Khalilah. Thank you for your wisdom, your commitment, your deep understanding of our community and of the wider world, and for your leadership. It is a privilege to work with and for you.

Good afternoon to you all. Welcome to The Community Foundation's annual celebration of our donors. This luncheon is a very special occasion for us each year. Today, we celebrate you and the hundreds – indeed thousands – of donors whose generosity, foresight and commitment to our community continues to build The Foundation so as to benefit the people of Greater New Haven. Today we celebrate the ways in which you all enable philanthropy to be a force for good in our community, both by meeting the current needs of the day and by building the endowment with gifts designed to benefit the community not only in our own time, but for all time.

The story of community philanthropy in Greater New Haven is a distinguished one and a proud one. It is one that continues to shine out of all proportion to the size of our community. It is your story, and it is your story that we celebrate here today.

Thank you all for being here. Your presence today means so much to us, as do the day-to-day relationships that we are so privileged to have with so many here in this room. Community is all about connections, and The Foundation's connections to the people here today run deep. Every one of you in this room honors us with your presence, whether our connection is a new one or whether you have been down this road with us, this road of building a stronger community through philanthropy, for many years.

I do want to say a heartfelt thank you to our hosts today: Scott Cohen and the Jewish Community Center, Lisa Stanger and our partner in philanthropy, the Jewish Foundation of Greater New Haven, and Judy Alperin and the Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven.

In the most fundamental of ways, The Foundation and the Jewish Federation stand for the same thing: *community*. Our institutions stand together for the core idea that people with shared values, a shared past and a sense of a common destiny can – by working together and pledging themselves to make that future as bright as it can be – accomplish important things. For the almost two decades that I have been at The Community Foundation, I have looked to the Federation and to the Jewish community broadly as models for how to build community, how to sustain it, and how to turn it into a force for good.

Although she couldn't be here with us today, I also want to acknowledge Judy Alperin for her powerful and effective leadership of The Federation in these challenging times. Even without the complexities caused by the devastating fire at the JCC two years ago, the work of Federation is always challenging, but never more so than in these divisive and dangerous times. Judy's strength and courage have been indispensable to Federation. We are proud to have provided support this year for safety and security enhancements at the JCC.

In this age of widening inequality and deep division, we at The Community Foundation are looking anew at how we can help to sustain the sense of community in Greater New Haven and use it productively to create a common agenda for our common future. As we have pondered this question ourselves, and as we have posed it to our community, one idea keeps pushing its way to the front of our thinking: *opportunity*.

The Foundation believes that for Greater New Haven to move forward together, for us to transcend our differences, be they racial, religious, ethnic or simply defined by the towns and neighborhoods in which we live, our community needs to create more opportunity for more of our residents.

The challenges are formidable. We are feeling the ill effects of a generation of anemic economic growth in Connecticut. We see the legacy of this all around us in chronic State budget deficits that are deeply threatening to our capacity to meet the needs of our people. We see that legacy in a state that is losing talented young people – our future – to other places. And we see that legacy in a loss of confidence that Connecticut's future can be as bright as its past.

It is clear that if we are to create social progress and greater opportunity for more of our residents, we need to grow more robustly

At the same time, the assets that we have to meet these challenges are formidable as well, particularly I believe here in our community of Greater New Haven. Healthcare and health innovation are creating a new economy here and our health and education institutions attract investment, talent and attention from all over the globe. Other sectors promise economic opportunity as well: digital technology and advanced manufacturing, to name two. And our central city – New Haven – is clearly leading the way for Connecticut as a magnet for talented, urban-oriented young people.

It is also clear to us at The Foundation that if we are to take full advantage of these assets, we need to commit ourselves as a community to create growth that is broadly inclusive, that creates benefits for people at all levels along the socio-economic spectrum and in all towns and neighborhoods in our region.

This vision of a future of opportunity for Greater New Haven is what is driving our thinking at The Community Foundation today. It is what has been driving our work to create a new strategic plan for the 2020-2024 period, a plan that is now nearing completion.

In late September, The Foundation convened our community around this vision. It was an extraordinary day. A remarkably diverse group of local residents came together to talk about how we can capitalize on our assets more effectively to create growth, and how we can ensure that that growth creates opportunity for people and in neighborhoods that have been historically marginalized.

Please turn your attention to this short [highlight video](#) from that remarkable day.

At the convening, we talked about opportunity from many different angles – from the perspectives of business development, social programs and institutional change. The convening also told the opportunity story in human terms. In the spoken word performance that concluded the video you just saw, local poet Aaron Jafferis and his colleagues spoke to both the human potential that could be unlocked if we can achieve greater growth and greater inclusion in our community, and to the human toll that comes from systemic exclusion. Their words underscored how our social progress depends both on social supports – a core part of what The Foundation has always done and will continue to do – and on providing more of our residents with the dignity and the independence that comes from work.

As you saw in the video, our September 25 convening touched on several of the important strategies that will need to be at the center of how we as a community can meet the opportunity challenge going forward:

We need to focus on wealth-building through inclusive entrepreneurship by investing in and building an ecosystem of support for minority-owned and women-owned businesses.

Secondly, we need to strengthen partnerships between local educational systems and training institutions on the one hand and employers in growth sectors of the local economy on the other.

Third, as you heard our Chair Khalilah Brown-Dean say on the video, we will need sustained engagement with people who have felt marginalized and excluded from the economic mainstream. Sustained engagement to build trust that economic growth will produce opportunity for all. Sustained engagement that celebrates all those who have come here from around the country and around the world seeking and finding opportunity, and that acknowledges that even with our longstanding tradition of welcoming newcomers seeking a better life, deep and persistent racial and ethnic disparities – in health and education outcomes and in wealth and economic opportunity – remain today.

And fourth, we will need to find new ways to bring together the community's traditional advocates for economic progress with the advocates for social progress. This point was highlighted at the convening by our keynote speaker, Tawanna Black. Tawanna is founder and CEO of the Center for Economic Inclusion in Minneapolis/St. Paul, which has moved the challenge of economic inclusion to the center of that community's civic agenda.

Advancing opportunity in ways that ameliorate rather than exacerbating our disparities will be at the center of our new strategic plan. The plan will move The Foundation more deeply into each of the strategic approaches to meeting the opportunity challenge that I just listed. It will build upon many of The Foundation's longstanding partnerships, ongoing commitments and recent innovations, and it will also see us pursuing new partnerships. Already we are working with other community foundations around Connecticut and across the country that are who are working to build opportunity in their communities.

My hope is that when the strategic plan is completed early in 2020, those who know us best – including you all – will see our new strategic plan not as a sharp break from where The Foundation

has been in recent years but rather as a set of strategies that focus our relationships, our knowledge, and our assets on the opportunity challenge.

We know that creating a future of opportunity in Greater New Haven is a big and far-reaching vision, and we know that it is far beyond the capacity of The Foundation to carry out alone. To be realized, this vision will need to be broadly embraced. In the coming years, The Foundation intends to push and, as appropriate, we intend to lead, but we do not see ourselves as *the* leader. We see ourselves as a listener, a collaborator, and a supporter too.

As we have been reaching out to and listening to individuals and institutions across our community, the reactions we are getting to our new strategic directions are very encouraging. I believe that our community recognizes that we need to do things differently if we are to bring people together rather than continue to allow ourselves to be driven apart, that we are in a time when people increasingly see that our community has the assets and the commitment to set own positive new course. The people I have been talking to respond enthusiastically to this vision of Greater New Haven as a community of opportunity that promises a brighter future to next generation.

Just as we will need others to embrace the vision that I have outlined, so too will others need to step forward to invest in it. I am pleased to say that we are already seeing very encouraging signs from funders and donors. We are talking to national foundations. And as another example among several, as The Foundation has moved more into mission-related investing over the last several years and defined investment in early-stage minority-owned and women-owned business as part of our inclusive growth strategy, several of our donors have joined us with new gifts to support these investments. If you wish to learn more about this element of our strategy, please pick up a copy of my article from the current edition of *New Haven Biz*, which you will find at the registration table.

Certainly, undertaking new strategies and priorities will mean changes in how we work and how we allocate our resources, both financial and staff time. Indeed, we will shortly be announcing a redesign of our grantmaking process designed to make it more responsive to the needs of local nonprofit organizations. But nothing I have said this afternoon should suggest to any of you that The Foundation's traditional roles raising endowment, managing charitable assets and supporting the nonprofit sector as the community's largest grantmaker will not be continuing under our new strategic plan.

On October 24, The Foundation completed our 2019 responsive grantmaking, making almost \$3 million in new one-year and multi-year grants to 43 nonprofit organizations in our community. Included in this docket was a \$125,000 grant to the Boys & Girls Club of New Haven timed perfectly so that it could keep its doors open and continue to provide much-needed after-school programs for hundreds of New Haven families. As is the case every year, while our October grants get the lion's share of attention from the local nonprofit sector and from the community broadly, they are only a fraction of The Foundation's overall grantmaking from both our discretionary and non-discretionary funds. My expectation is that altogether The Foundation will provide almost \$27 million in grants and distributions to nonprofits in 2019.

For The Foundation to move in the new directions that I have described and to do our business in new and more effective ways requires a staff that embraces change. Over the last several years, our staff done exactly that, embracing every challenge we have thrown at them as an opportunity to do

more for our community. I am deeply proud of every member of the staff. While I cannot name them all at this moment, I do want to draw particular recognition to our leadership team: Drew Alden, Leon Bailey, Christina Ciociola, Angela Powers and of course Dotty Weston-Murphy, our doyenne of donor service as you all know as well as anyone. Their insights, their expertise and their contributions are part of everything I have said today as to what The Foundation is doing and where we are going. And I want to add a special shout-out to Leigh Higgins, without whom my work would be...well, I frankly can't imagine what it would be, but it certainly wouldn't be what it is and has been over the many years that we have worked together.

Over my many years at The Foundation, I have had the privilege of working for an extraordinary and ever-renewing assemblage of volunteer community leaders who have made the commitment to give of themselves as Foundation board members. I have learned so much from them. It is gratifying and heart-warming to see many of them here in this room today [thank those in attendance by name] - all community leaders, all treasured friends. Thank you all.

I do hope that none of these friends will take offense if I say that at no time over these last two decades have I worked with a stronger, wiser, more effective group of Board members than I do currently. Our new vision for what our community needs and where it is going is a reflection of the remarkably diverse set of life experiences and community perspectives around our Board table. Our Board members challenge one another and challenge staff. They question conventional wisdom and time-honored practice. And they do so all in a way that is remarkably respectful and constructive. Indeed, it is more than that – it is joyful; our Board finds joy in knowing that The Foundation does its best in honoring the community trust placed in our hands over the last 91 years when all those diverse perspectives are heard and honored and incorporated. Khalilah Brown-Dean and Nick Norcott as Chair and Vice-Chair have done so much to set that tone, but every member of the Board contributes to it. It is inspiring. So, at the risk of repeating what has already been said here, I thank Khalilah and Nick, Maysa Akbar Alicia Caraballo, Roxanne Coady, Kellyann Day, Joe Gordon, Carlton Highsmith, Terry Jones, Marcella Nunez-Smith and Greg Pepe.

I want to conclude on an historical note, as I am wont to do.

A couple of weeks ago when I was on vacation, I read a new book by Harvard historian Lizabeth Cohen entitled “Saving America’s Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age.” It is a fascinating tale, particularly for those of us fascinated by New Haven, for as many of you know, Ed Logue made his reputation as this country’s foremost practitioner of urban renewal in 1950s New Haven, before his career took him to Boston and New York State. It is a tale of many successes, but perhaps even more so of lessons learned through failure. Above all, it is a tale of big dreams - dreams of prosperous, modern, growing and racially and socio-economically integrated cities that would serve the needs and support the dreams of all of their residents.

As we in New Haven know all too well, those dreams were thwarted - by mistakes made yes, but most of all by the inescapable reality of Ed Logue’s time. The third quarter of the twentieth century was, as the book’s title states, the “suburban age.” People, growth, jobs, and opportunity were moving to the suburbs, and even the boldest efforts to counter that powerful tide were ultimately doomed to fail.

Today we are living in an urban age. In our community, this is a time when people and jobs are attracted to the city in ways not seen in almost a century. This is not at the expense of other towns

in the region, but rather it is a consequence of New Haven's assets. This is surely a time when we can envision a new age of opportunity in our region, an age when our central city need not be "saved" as in the 1950s but can be instead drive prosperity and opportunity for all residents across our region. So as we approach the third decade of the twenty-first century, we can dream this same dream as our predecessors did with perhaps an even sounder rationale for doing so, even if our vision is tempered by lessons learned, by the terrible divisions rending our nation and by the lack of resources from government that is so different from Ed Logue's time.

At The Foundation, there is great excitement as we commit ourselves to play our role in moving this vision closer to reality. As I have said, this is our vision and our plan for the next five years: to do our part in bringing our entire community together in new ways that will promote growth and that will ensure that growth will include and benefit all in our community.

As we walk down this path, we know that our future, like all we have done over the 91 years of The Foundation's history, depends on our relationships with others in our community, none more important than the donors whose commitment and generosity are what The Foundation is all about. You all stand at the center of all of our concentric circles. We are so grateful for your support, and we so look forward to continuing our work together in the future.

Thank you again.

