

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Business Advisory Committee November 2021 Meeting Summary

Attendance

Members **Present** (9) Jason Doo, Vicki Gray, Marcus Johnson-Smith, Jaswinder Kaur, Kimberly Massenburg, Nephtaliem McCrary, Allentza Michel, Erinn Pearson, Jennie Song, LaTonya Smith-Winston

Absent (1) Samuel Gebru, Angela Hoffman, Zina Thompson

City staff (5) David Corbie, Iram Farooq, Jonathan Lee, Pardis Saffari (CDD)

Others 1 member of the public

Welcome & Introductions

David Corbie (DC) opened the virtual meeting at 4:00 PM by welcoming members of the BIPOC Business Advisory Committee and staff. Committee members went around and introduced themselves, their business, where they would like to be if there weren't in Cambridge right now.

BIPOC Business Survey Update

Pardis Saffari (PS) gave an update on the BIPOC Business Survey. Thanked for all the feedback. The survey is translated into seven different languages. All Committee members received an email with the links to the survey and the social media tools to promote the survey, and to say thanks to those who have shared the survey. City staff have also sent it out to business associations, community groups, and is sending out an Economic Development Division (EDD) newsletter on the survey today. Survey is open until December 10, 2021. PS reminded folks to please take the survey if you haven't already. Will report out how many people took the survey and the preliminary results at the next meeting. Will report out official results at the January meeting.

Meeting Presentation: City of Cambridge Business Programs

PS gave an overview of the City's programs and Small Business COVID-19 relief programs and projects. The goal of the presentation was to discuss with the Committee what the City currently offers and our efforts to date around the pandemic response.

PS and DC opened the floor for group discussion, asking the Committee if they were aware of all the programs the City offers, and what types of outreach they would recommend.

Committee feedback:

- Very appreciative of the programs and staff help before, during, and after the pandemic. An idea for additional program marketing is to connect with retail businesses and provide materials like

tent cards to showcase programs that are offered by the City. This would help with the information be more broadly showcased to all visitors of businesses.

- Do we know how long these programs have existed? Do we take assessments of business owners before they start a program with the City? Is there a way to get the program impact numbers prior to the pandemic? It would be good to see flagship programs numbers before COVID-19. Are we considering revamping programs or creating new ones? As a born-and-raised Cambridge resident, have never heard about some of these programs before today, so I want to think about different ways to reach residents. Are there ways to connect larger companies to BIPOC small businesses, especially sharing the Diversity Directory? How are these program numbers comparing to the number of actual businesses in Cambridge (about 7,000)?
- Running a small business is very difficult and can be hard to get opportunities, read all the emails, and take advantage of programs. Many stores need upgrading but do not even realize there are these opportunities. It would be helpful if someone visited all the businesses in person, made an assessment, and provided program recommendations. This could be a physical ambassador. May be more impactful than just an email or having information available online. Additionally, there should be a way to increase the number of women of color owned businesses in Cambridge. We should be connecting them to open brick-and-mortar businesses – connect them to empty storefronts and provide them more opportunities to kick-start businesses.
- I just finished Storefront Improvement & Retail Interior Programs and had a good experience. Can maybe provide a plaque that says “Brought to you by ____ program” to display for participants. I also went through the Envision Cambridge report, and researched some of the business associations prior to the meeting. Many of the business associations do not have people of color in leadership or on boards. In Harvard Square, none of the top tax paying landlords provided rent relief. Maybe we should put pressure on landlords – who have the empty storefronts, pay cheaper association fees, get full rent – to help out business owners. Can we also provide program information to landlords and have them hand it to new tenants?
- Another idea for salon owners looking to start up – a new concept called salon suites – may be something worth us working on. In regards to outreach - how can we get women to take the classes and workshops? How often do small business owners visit each other and notice / talk about city programs? There should be networking programs where businesses that have participated in programs can share their experiences with new businesses and then connect them to city staff.
- Really appreciate the support from Committee members supporting women and people of color owned businesses looking to open their own brick and mortar location. I like the idea of creating networking events and spaces where business owners can talk to other business owners to talk about these programs and other items.
- Going to each business to introduce the programs is great but, a massive undertaking- in my experience- a mass outreach to a wide audience focusing them towards 3-5 town-hall meeting dates, in which a consistent message is shared works just as effectively as a 1 on 1 conversation. This could be step 1, leading to step 2- where a business owner sets up an appointment for a specific assessment of their business (revitalization or other). Can we maybe add video testimonials from business owners on the programs/assistance they have participated? Might be another way to market/make visible the work the office does. Also, there are towns around

us that are doing pop-ups to showcase small business that don't have storefronts to help these vendors to be seen. Offering something like this with the resources the City provides for business development, grants, & access to consults would be a major assistance to the small business owner community.

DC and PS closed Committee feedback. Next meeting (December 6) Cliff Cook from CDD will be joining to give information on Cambridge demographics. Staff also will provide answers to the questions brought up during the presentation feedback.

Next meeting will go until 5:30PM to ensure more time for conversation.

Public comment

None.

Meeting adjourned at 5:25 PM