

City of Cambridge Citizen's Committee on Civic Unity Meeting

Tuesday, January 5, 2016, 5:30 PM, Cambridge Citywide Senior Center

Summarized meeting notes

Committee members present:

Betsy Bard, Eva Martin Blythe, Danielle Boudrow, Susie Flug, Renae Gray, Steven Lee, Kenny Likis, Priscilla Lopes, Josie Patterson

Staff present: Taha Jennings, Brian Corr

Taha Jennings mentioned a recent conversation with a member of the City Employee's Committee on Diversity, which conducts events for City employees related to recognition and celebration of diversity in the workforce. Taha introduced the possibility of partnering with the Diversity Committee on a public event as part of Black History Month. That committee was in the process of planning a theater based event around the theme of the Black Lives Matter movement. Taha noted that they have a lot of experience doing public events and that it could be helpful for this committee to learn from them about putting something like that together. In turn the Civic Unity Committee could be helpful in terms of outreach to the broader community.

Committee members provided updates on some of the other potential activities and actions that had been discussed previously.

Reading and resource list

Kenny and Josie shared ideas about reading resources and websites, but also had some questions on how it might work. Particularly, are there developers in the City who could create a website? Can it be hosted outside of the City? Are there resources available to address maintenance costs?

They are exploring the idea of starting with some recommended readings, as well as providing an opportunity for Cambridge residents to recommend books, authors, and websites. It is also important to engage people and to avoid reinventing lists that other websites and places have already created. There was an idea to start with just a list without necessarily creating a website and develop it from there. Something like this is also consistent with the committee's mission and could be curated or edited as well. It was pointed out that it could be beneficial to have a list of local authors that could be highlighted. Other ideas related to this included:

- Combine a reading series and author visits with other related events.
- Provide a specific suggestion that gives people a chance to come together and talk about a specific book of the month/year and author (like Porter Square Books, local book clubs) and create a place for people to talk about it, perhaps even with the author.
- Something like the Voices from the Port community readings did, which could engage an audience that doesn't come to events that usually happen (e.g., Harvard-based events).
- We can think of this as an additional space for things directly related to Civic Unity that could amplify and support the other work of this committee.
- It could be helpful to start with one book that is recommended and give some specific reasons why it would be good.

- It could also be good to suggest a new one every two months, and then a member of this committee could host/moderate each month.
- Some of the books/authors mentioned:
 - Ta-Nehisi Coates
 - Jamala Rogers: author of *Ferguson is America: Roots of a Rebellion*
 - Claudia Rankin: *Citizen: An American Lyric* (about microaggressions)
 - The Warmth of Other Suns (but is a big book)

Josie and Kenny mentioned that they are thinking of some broader topics that could be considered, while also looking at how to make it finite so that it is interesting to the community and not too difficult, expansive, or unfocused. The Committee should refer back to the mission statement to address these issues. For the next meeting, it would be helpful to have a list of all the ideas written down and sort this out. Kenny and Josie will talk with the Cambridge Public Library about Cambridge Reads. Kenny will also look at how we could form local book clubs.

Messaging and outreach

Susie shared some ideas that she and Josie had developed regarding messaging and outreach. One suggestion was for a series of meet and greet type of events. It was pointed out however, that committee interest and participation would be required to make it successful. Also, that any kind of meet and greet will probably need some kind of additional anchor. There was some concern that without an event there was not really a way to bring people in. The committee discussed the pros and cons of doing outreach immediately versus have some tangible public accomplishments first. The benefits of doing outreach now include being able to share the history of the Civic Unity work in Cambridge and meeting people face to face. The benefit of doing that outreach after some successful initiatives would make it more tangible to people participating in outreach efforts. The committee had a deep discussion about this issue, and generally agreed that it would be positive to be able to talk about where the group came from, what it sees as important for bringing the community together, and sharing what has been done. One possibility mentioned was to partner with the YWCA Cambridge on the annual Stand Against Racism event in March or April.

Committee role

Committee members were reminded to, when feasible, try to get some time on the agendas of the other groups, boards and commissions that they are involved with to introduce and briefly describe the Civic Unity Committee. To help create a quick summary of what the Committee is about, sometimes referred to as an “elevator speech”, each person was asked to write a three-sentence statement about what the Civic Unity Committee means to them, in order to help get a better collective sense of what group members think. Someone pointed out that history is really meaningful and that the committee can serve an important role in fostering dialogue and providing a platform for the dialogue to happen through a variety of different events that reach across different populations. The mission statement can also be helpful to guide the committee’s work plan internally. There was a suggestion to form a communications subcommittee to think through this topic specifically. Susie volunteered to do a draft of a handout for review at the next meeting.

Demographic/ Historical Presentation

The Committee reviewed a draft summary of a potential demographic presentation for the community, and agreed that this would be an interesting and important conversation and event. It was suggested to start with a specific time frame to look at demographics, the impact of public policy (e.g., the end of

rent control) and how that affected who left, who stayed, and who came into Cambridge. It will also be important to get feedback from Cliff Cook and Charlie Sullivan on other important factors. The group was reminded that the Peace Commission was scheduled to host a presentation by Cliff Cook on Wednesday, January 20th, 2016.

Some additional events that might be opportunities for the Committee to cosponsor or collaborate on were shared with the group:

- The Underground Railway Theater performance of *Opportunity* at the Central Square Theater on the evening of Saturday, March 19th.
- The YWCA Cambridge 2016 Stand Against Racism
- City Employees' Committee on Diversity 2016 Black History Month event