

**Cambridge Council on Children, Youth and Families
Minutes from the Meeting of 26 April 2012**

at Cambridge Public Library, 449 Broadway, Cambridge from 6:00pm to 8:00pm

Present: Mayor Henrietta Davis (chair), Tina Alu, Charlotte Avant, Betty Bardige, Ramsey Beckett, Andrea Collymore, Jessica Daniels, Louis DePasquale, Marc McGovern, Neal Michaels, Ellen Semonoff, Patrick Wardell, Jeff Young

Guests: Executive Director Nancy Tauber, Ayana Aubourg, Teddy Chery, Ashley Correia, Lori Likis, John Lindamood, Luc De Marrais, Fred Fantini, Lee Gianetti, Claude Jacob, Daniel Jean-Louis, Esther Jules, Allentza Michel, Daniel Ruben, Zach Spitz, Meron Teklehaimanot, Jason Vasquez-Li

Absent: Sally Benbasset, Shubham Dhital, Susan Flannery, Robert Haas, Robert Healy, Barbara Kibler, Mervan Osborne, Denise Simmons, Humbi Song, Steve Swanger.

A. Call to Order

Meeting Called to Order at 6:00pm by Mayor Henrietta Davis

Mayor Henrietta Davis introduces herself as the new Chair of the Council and the new Mayor of Cambridge. **Mayor Davis** directs the council to the next agenda item, due to time constraints.

B. Welcoming the new Executive Director

Mayor Henrietta Davis introduces Nancy Tauber, the new Executive Director of the Council.

Nancy Tauber tells the Council she is glad to be in her new position, and continues:

I want to focus on community and family engagement, and develop an achievable action plan on that. When I was on the Council as a representative of the School Committee, we had many meetings about community engagement. In the documents you received, you'll see a handout I created, synthesizing what we learned about community engagement. I hope it will serve as a springboard to continue this work as we move forward. There are more than 6000 students in Cambridge public schools, and community engagement is a challenging task.

C. Community Engagement and the Innovation Agenda, with Superintendent Jeff Young

Nancy Tauber says that Jeff Young has agreed to spend some time talking with the Council about community engagement.

Mayor Henrietta Davis adds that Jeff will also be speaking about the innovation agenda, and she invites him to speak.

Jeff Young, the Superintendent of Cambridge Public Schools, thanks Nancy and Mayor Davis, jokingly asks if the announcements which will be made after he leaves are about him, and continues:

Earlier today I was at the 263 Gallery at the corner of Brookline and Putnam; it was hosting art from students of the Morse School. Students and parents were gathered at the gallery, talking about the art. I met a mother who reminded me we had met last year, at an event at the Margaret Fuller House. She has two children, one in fifth grade and one, Adrian, in second grade. Last year she missed the art show, and didn't realize until her fifth grader told her that he was hurt by this. She told me that she decided then to never miss another one of her children's events. Adrian, her second-grader, was beaming. Family engagement makes a difference in a very real, everyday way, and sometimes we forget that its hard to do. Some parents become over-engaged, and some become under-engaged.

I'm glad Nancy is taking over at the Council, and I have a gift for her. We hope that with Nancy we'll be able to focus on the enormous challenges ahead of us with the Innovation Agenda. We've been focused on the academic program, and making sure that at every school every student has the opportunity for an excellent education, but we know that's only part of the story. Each of those kids goes home somewhere. Some of the parents can help their kids, and some cannot, and it's not because they love their children any less. Our goal is to reach out to all kids, knowing that excellence comes in partnership with families. This gift for Nancy, unfortunately it's something to read.

Jeff presents Nancy with a copy of "Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnership".

Mayor Davis says she is not surprised by the choice.

Nancy mentions that after meeting with Jeff previously, she had placed this book on reserve at the library.

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Jeff says it was written by a colleague of his, Anne T. Henderson. He continues:

I know I can't do it all, and Marc from the School Committee knows he can't do it all, but having Nancy on this team will give us the engine we need.

Going along with this engine is the vision, and for this we have Mayor Davis. There are communities which have historically and chronically been underrepresented in the schools. We plan to change that as we go forward.

I welcome you, Nancy, and I look forward to working closely with you, and I hope the strong relationship we have with Ellen Semonoff and the Department of Human Services will continue to flower.

Mayor Davis asks Jeff to briefly touch on the Innovation Agenda before he leaves.

Jeff obliges:

Some people in the room are aware of the specific changes. We're going from a system of 11 K-8 schools and one K-6 school which lead into CRLS to one of 12 K-5 schools feeding into four 6-8 middle schools, with 200-250 students per campus. This will be small enough to maintain intimacy, yet large enough to maintain a robust academic and social environment. Regarding why we focus on engagement, in the short term and medium term, we need to make sure parents know what to expect in the fall. Long term, we need to engage families as ongoing partners in their children's educations.

Mayor Davis asks if there are any other questions for Jeff.

Betty Bardige, a funder representative from the Mailman Foundation, mentions, regarding community engagement, that there's been talk of working on the linkage from preschool to kindergarten. She worries that engagement tends to tail off as children get older unless there's an event or an emergency.

Jeff responds that it's natural for engagement to tail off as kids get older and are looking to gain independence and spread their wings.

Betty clarifies that she's wondering more about younger, elementary school-age kids.

Jeff asks Ellen to chime in.

Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager for Human Services, describes a program from the previous evening, in which Kindergarten teachers and Preschool teachers spent the evening together and discussed how they approach kids and what the Kindergarten teachers are looking for when students arrive in Kindergarten. She adds that while such a thing may seem obvious, it is important to take the effort to build those connections, and that the Preschool teachers were quite happy with the event.

Mayor Davis thanks Jeff for his time and his words, and reminds him of the next Council meeting.

D. Introductions

Mayor Henrietta Davis pivots back to introductions. She adds:

I'm happy to be here. Being mayor is usually a two-year term, so I only have 20 months left. I'm hoping to have a term in which I can know what I got done. I also want to thank Lee Gianetti (*for whom the Council applauds*). He held everything in place and has been terrific.

Mayor Davis asks those present to introduce themselves, which they do. Among the introductions:

Mayor Davis states that she's been on the City Council for 16 years, and served on the School Committee for eight years before that. Getting to go back to chair the School Committee, she says, is fun. She adds that she's joined tonight by Marc McGovern of the School Committee, and that Vice Mayor Denise Simmons and Mervan Osborne of the School Committee will be rounding out the delegation of elected officials to the Council.

Nancy Tauber thanks Lee again. She adds that while the mayor is in her position for two years, she hopes to be here for longer, and she plans to meet with each member of the Council by September to discuss ideas and get feedback about what's been working and what's not been working. She also would like to meet with the Executive Committee before the next meeting of the Council to come up with a draft of an action plan to focus on community engagement.

Patrick Wardell introduces himself as the new Chief Executive of the Cambridge Health Alliance, and expresses his hope to be able to meet people around the community to further the Alliance's work.

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Marc McGovern introduces himself as a representative of the School Committee, and apologizes for having to leave to attend the same function for which Jeff Young has just left.

Mayor Davis welcomes Fred Fantini, vice-chair of the School Committee, as a guest of the Council.

Teddy Chery, who works in Mayor Davis's office, mentions that he'll be holding meetings specifically targeted at immigrant communities in various languages.

Lori Likis introduces herself as the parent of a former Youth Involvement Subcommittee member, a member of Cambridge's Human Services Commission, and Chief Planning Officer of the Cambridge Public Schools.

Ellen Semonoff states how pleased she is that the Council, the one body in the city that brings together leadership from the city, the schools, the community, and the youth, is embarking on an opportunity to together take on a project and a plan to actually do something and collectively engage in planning and advocacy that can affect the children and families of Cambridge.

E. Review and Adoption of the Minutes

Marc McGovern checks if his leaving will deprive the Council of a quorum. It will not.

Mayor Henrietta Davis mentions she'd entertain a motion to approve the minutes from the Council's meeting of 16 February 2012.

Nancy Tauber offers that, in the future, she doesn't need to print out the minutes if the Council is ok with reading the emailed version beforehand. There is no objection to this.

Action Taken: Neal Michaels moves the adoption of the minutes from the Council's meeting of 16 February 2012. Without objection, the motion carries and the minutes are adopted.

F. Family and Community Engagement in the Upper Schools

Mayor Henrietta Davis asks Lori Likis if she is aware that she will be leading the coming brainstorming session.

Lori Likis responds that she is not, but that she'd be glad to do it.

Mayor Davis introduces the topic:

Every child in grades six, seven, and eight will be going to a new school (though not necessarily a new building). Some parents are right with us every step of the way, but many don't know what changes are coming or are fearful of the changes they do know about. Tim Groves, who recently retired as principal of the King Open School, saw that a number of parents of students from King Open saw the coming changes and reflexively pulled their kids out and sent them to charter schools. That's a concern for those of us who know the best place for these students in in Cambridge Public Schools, that parents would make that change just because they don't know what's happening. We're hoping this group can brainstorm ways to reach out on this.

Lori continues:

No school system has found the answer to bringing everyone to the table. There is no silver bullet. That being said, Cambridge has not been as successful as we need it to be on this front. Earlier, Jeff mentioned the goal of providing excellence for all students. We need to focus on that word "all". We need to bring all families with us and create an environment that is welcoming to all.

At the beginning of the Innovation Agenda, we held some community meetings. We tried holding them at locations that would be more welcoming. Few people came, and those who did were the same from one meeting to the next. One next step, and with Mayor Davis's interest and impact we hope to move forward on this, is to get out a family satisfaction survey. It's being designed right now. It will have questions about school planning, about communication, about technology use. The district is in the middle of creating a new technology plan, and this goes along with that effort.

Part of the Innovation Agenda has been looking at ways to use technology to help focus student learning. We're developing heterogeneous classrooms, in which we don't separate out students by ability but teach to many different levels in the same space. Technology will be a part of that. So we need to know what technology access is like outside of school. Do students have internet access at home? If not, do they have internet access at all, and if so, where do they get it? This survey is looking at things like that. The survey will be online and on paper, and

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we're translating it into four languages, but we need to find a way to reach parents who don't usually engage. We need to work with community leaders and community networks to get people to participate.

Also, to what Mayor Davis said about people's fear of the new upper schools, we'll be hosting curriculum nights around the end of May and we could use some help advertising that.

Mayor Davis adds:

Teddy and I and Lena James, who had been a Family Liaison at King Open School, went to a program at the Tobin School on Tuesday. We met the new upper school dean, Jamel Adkins-Sharif. He shares many of the concerns we've heard about today with only reaching the same small group of parents and having trouble reaching out to entire communities. Specifically, he's had trouble reaching out to Haitian parents, Somalian parents, and Ethiopian parents. We talked with Jardine Jerome, who works with the schools on outreach to the Haitian community, who informed us the best ways to reach out to those communities are with afternoon sessions and radio and television ads.

You all in this room are the best ways for us to reach out to families. What ideas do you have about the message we need to send to parents? What strategies do you have to make sure people feel as though they're being asked? What are your thoughts?

John Lindamood, of the Cambridge Housing Authority, responds that the Cambridge Housing Authority has experience on outreach for parental engagement, especially at the high school level. He says they are currently developing a survey that will include questions on access to technology, and they are hoping to get back some data in the next few months. He thinks it would be interesting to compare that data with that which the School Department gets.

Mayor Davis invites the students present to speak up, as they know more about students' lives. She asks if all of them have access to the internet, and if their parents would be able to get in touch with their school by computer.

One student responds that he has a computer at home, but his mom doesn't know how to use it.

Another student says that she has internet access at home, but some of her friends don't.

Ellen Semonoff talks about experiences in her department:

One of the documents you were handed tonight is a pamphlet from the Community Engagement Team, a group of part-time staff from different linguistic communities throughout the City which has been involved in door-to-door efforts. Among the things we've learned is to keep in mind the size of groups. Last year we had set up some meetings with Jeff and small groups of parents from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. What ended up happening is that the parents were all sitting around the table but none of them spoke. This goes to the larger point of needing to think about how we get information from families and how we get people to come to things. We need to think about how we make people feel comfortable. The Community Liaisons at the schools have experience in this, the Community Engagement Team has experience in this, and the Housing Authority has experience in this.

Mayor Davis suggests there be a pamphlet, like that of the Community Engagement Team, with the basics of the Innovation Agenda and whom to contact with questions. She suggests this pamphlet could be distributed to places where parents congregate.

Lori likes this idea. She adds that the schools will be sending personalized letters home with each student, indicating which school that student will be attending next year, who will be leading that school, and other relevant information. In that letter, she says, they'll invite parents to participate in the curriculum events and in the survey.

Mayor Davis asks if the letter will be translated.

Lori offers that the letters may say something along the lines of, "If you need a translation, call this number" in various languages.

Teddy responds that, in his experience growing up as an immigrant, it's much easier to get information out by providing a translation than by asking people to call for a translation. He suggests that there are people in the Mayor's office with language expertise who might be able to help with this.

Lori thanks Teddy for this, but warns that sending out individualized letters is hard to do, and it's not clear the databases the schools currently have could support sending letters in individualized languages.

Mayor Davis suggests that it is possible, and seeks confirmation from Tina Alu.

Tina Alu, of Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee, Inc., says it should be possible, though cost would be a question. If outreach is the goal, she concludes, then it has to be done.

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Mayor Davis then suggests that it may not be necessary to match languages, but every language could be sent to every household.

Lori thanks everyone for their input. She says that the letter itself is outside of her area of responsibility, so she's not sure she's comfortable talking about specifics of that project. She asks for more general suggestions on family outreach from the Council, and specifically would love to hear more from the students present.

Claude Jacob, of the Department of Public Health, speaks from his experiences there that having front-line staff who families trust is a good way to connect. To the issue of the "digital divide", he dispels the notion that having a computer is the same thing as having good internet access and the ability to use it.

Claude continues on topic of family engagement, and says there are different avenues and different angles for getting to parents. He does not know what the schools would consider a critical mass of attendance for the meetings its been holding, he says, but he gets the sense that they have not gotten it yet. He mentions the various programs that Public Health will be putting on this summer, such as Area IV Pride Day, Fresh Pond Day, and Hoops 'n' Health, and offers that they could coordinate the messaging along with these programs.

Mayor Davis takes this opportunity to return focus to ideas the Council can help generate. She mentions that there are 1000 families who need to be reached as part of this effort, and she encourages more ideas like Claude's that can help reach those families.

Charlotte Avant, a community representative, thinks back to Ellen's comments about sparsely-attended meetings, and asks if there are community organizations, such as a Cambridge Haitian Organization or something similar, which could help with reaching out to specific communities.

Mayor Davis thinks that Ellen was in fact talking about working with such groups earlier. She invites Tina to share some of her experiences from the Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee.

Tina says that last night the CEOC held a financial education workshop, and they hold workshops like this often. She offers that if there are surveys or pamphlets, they could put a sign up at their food pantry inviting people to come upstairs and participate.

Lori says this is the kind of idea she's been looking for. She wants to hear who has what language skills and who has what access to which communities. She knows there are many issues on which community engagement is a struggle, not just for the schools, and looks forward to creating a network of people who can help with community engagement across issues.

Neal Michaels, of Massachusetts's Department of Social Services, returns to the letter home about next year's school changes. He accepts that the letter has to happen, but wants to think more about where parents will be congregating, such as hairdressers, laundromats, and farmers' markets.

Mayor Davis adds churches to this list. She also says that if she received a letter in multiple languages it would overwhelm her.

Ramsey Beckett, co-chair of the Youth Involvement Subcommittee, worries there's been no discussion of how this information gets to students. She points out that if the students get information, they can then pass it to their parents. She suggests that, since kids have to go to school but every parent is going to go to the laundromat, a school assembly, for example, could be an opportunity to spread information and dispel rumors about the Innovation Agenda.

Lori thinks this is an excellent point. She mentions that the Deputy Superintendent has been to every school and that the School Department is also thinking about how to reach students.

Claude agrees with Neal about non-traditional venues. He emphasizes thinking about where people naturally gather and meeting them there, rather than creating a venue and hoping they show up. He also agrees with Ramsey's point about using students. He shares that when he was growing up, he was the one reading the newspaper and communicating to his parents.

Mayor Davis lauds the Public Health department for the success they often have with outreach.

Claude expresses his belief that Health is a natural partner on these efforts due its tie-ins with the schools. He points out that a third of Health's staff works in the schools all day, and he reiterates the value of having trusted sources of information already out in the community. Also, to Mayor Davis's concern of overwhelming parents with too much information, he agrees that this is a danger, as the Health Department learned during the H1N1 outbreak.

Allentza Michel, advisor to the Youth Involvement Subcommittee, suggests that with her background both in youth engagement and as a Haitian-American, she has useful knowledge on this subject. She says that it's important to think about not only where the message is being delivered, but also who is delivering the message. As an example, she

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provides that if you were to go to a church and make a presentation, people may not listen. But if you were to have the pastor say something, people would listen. To the issue of translation, she notes that in the past, translations of informational materials have been of poor quality and have been nearly unintelligible.

Jason Vasquez-Li, a member of YIS, suggests hosting a dinner and spreading information at that dinner.

Mayor Davis points out jokingly there is enough food at tonight's meeting to feed the whole city. She agrees food is always a draw.

Another student suggests going to a park on a warm day and handing out flyers.

Andrea Collymore, a community representative, suggests using the word "mandatory", as that will increase response. She states that due to the time-sensitive nature of this particular information, it would be an appropriate word choice. For those who still don't respond, she offers, the Community Engagement Team could go door-to-door. Since the concern is the 1000 kids who aren't being reached, and not the whole system, she thinks this is feasible.

Nancy mentions that her son rarely tells her anything about what's going on at school, but after Carolyn Turk, Deputy Superintendent of Cambridge Public Schools, came to his school and explained what changes were coming with the Innovation Agenda, he told her about what he had heard and what he was excited about. She then points out that at a recent parent-teacher conference, the teacher did not have answers to some of the questions she was asking about the Innovation Agenda. She agrees with Ramsey's idea of using the students to get the message to their parents.

Lori steps in and apologizes for having led with such a specific example of family engagement, as her goal had been a broader discussion of the resources and strategies available in the wider community for reaching families. She continues:

There's a lot going on at the school—art events, athletic events, community dinners—that could be areas for increased outreach and engagement. I hear what you all are saying about diversity of media; a lot of that is in place. To the Innovation Agenda, with transformations like this, it's hard to know if you're communicating too much, or too little, or in the right media, or with the right people. Sometimes when we think the problem is communication, it's not. It could be a planning and design problem. It could be that people are asking questions to which we don't yet have answers. Right now the details of the Innovation Agenda are falling into place, and we're on the verge of people feeling less anxious and having more information as a product of where we are in the process.

People hear best from the people they know and trust; this isn't me. That's why I'm here, to talk to people in the community who lead community groups. We need help with this. We want help. We're asking for help. I'd love to get a high response on the survey to get us better answers. I also really appreciate the interaction with the students tonight. It's led me to a new question, because having internet access isn't the same as knowing how to use it.

Jessica Daniels, a community representative, tells of setting up parent-teacher conferences at the high school this year. She says the available times were split, and some were available for online sign-up, and some were available for offline sign-up. Those of us who sit in front of a computer all day can forget, she says, then when someone says they have internet access, it may mean they have internet access on Saturday afternoons.

Mayor Davis says she'll allow four more people to talk before moving to specific ideas to help the school system.

Claude is glad to hear about the context of the survey Lori was talking about, that there are 1000 families and students being impacted by this survey. He asks Lori if the survey is an online survey.

Lori responds that the survey will exist online and on paper. To give a sense of other methods of outreach being considered, she shares one idea from the Amigos School, that someone would stand in the hallways with a clipboard catching parents as they come into and out of the building.

Claude is pleased that there will be online and offline surveys, to avoid some respondent bias. He jokes that he's from Chicago, where the motto is to "vote early and vote often", so he's glad that respondent bias is being taken into account. He suggests also using waiting rooms at doctors' offices, as this is a place where people naturally congregate. He expresses some concern about the possibility of duplicate response, and wonders if the methodology has accounted for that.

Mayor Davis notes that this particular project is just as much outreach as it is survey, and scientific validity may not be the goal.

Lori assures, though, that the schools are going to want to be able to depend on the data collected by the survey.

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Neal says that thinking about the schools is only a start. If parents are engaged in their children's learning, then they can better engage with safety, with parks, and with other issues.

John asks how long the survey is.

Lori responds that it can't be too long, and that right now they're working on paring it back a little.

John agrees that it shouldn't be too long, especially if it will be conducted with casual interviews and in nontraditional places for outreach. He agrees that it's easy to pile on questions to a survey, and harder to pull back and make sure the important questions are being asked.

Lori states this is why the schools hired outside help for this survey.

John says that the Housing Authority has been interested in the question of how many of their clients have internet access, and also about how many have computer skills. He states that the Housing Authority would be happy to help with these issues.

Fred Fantini, of the School Committee, shares some thoughts:

The bigger umbrella right now is "Welcoming Schools", having schools be welcoming places and seeing if that can increase grades. In many schools the outreach is one-to-one, with teachers going out to meet with their students' parents. At the recent conference of the National School Board Association, there was a lot of talk about "Welcoming Schools". Some schools have Student Leadership Teams which help with outreach and help the administration learn about their communities. There are no shortcuts to Welcoming Schools; it takes legwork. We could have Goodwill Student Ambassadors, and we could give them jackets. I like the idea of free food; we could get the churches to donate food, we could get restaurants to donate food, and we could have "celebrity" waiters. Another thing is smartphones and social media—they're great ways to engage students.

Altogether, this is one of the biggest endeavors our schools have undertaken. We have to do it well or it won't work at all. I'm glad we're reaching out to the broader community on this, because we need your help.

Lee Gianetti, who had been the interim Executive Director of the Council, says it's clear that the Council has an interest in talking about and doing something about family engagement. He thinks the Council can serve as a true coordinating council to produce something meaningful in this regard.

Mayor Davis adds to this, saying the Council should develop itself as a resource. She hopes that conversations in the future can focus more on what the Council can do together, rather than telling other people what to do.

Charlotte goes back to the idea of student ambassadors, saying that a concern that has come up in the past around such an idea is that it could require taking those students out of the classroom.

Andrea returns to the word "mandatory". She agrees that people don't like to hear it, but she believes that, given the time pressure on getting out information about the Innovation Agenda, it is necessary. She thinks back to when some schools were moved around 15 years ago, and her son was involved in some of the changes. She relates that she, who speaks English, wasn't sure what was going on, so she can imagine how difficult it was for those who didn't speak English. She also suggests holding a Council meeting at a school.

Mayor Davis thanks everyone for the lively discussion. She says there's plenty still to talk about, and plenty still to do. She appreciates getting to hear the students speak about what's going on at their houses and their friends' houses.

G. Public Commentary

Mayor Henrietta Davis asks if anyone feels they didn't have a chance to comment. No one does.

H. Updates and Announcements

Mayor Henrietta Davis asks for updates and announcements.

Ramsey Beckett announces the upcoming Walk for Hunger.

Allentza Michel congratulates the Youth Involvement Subcommittee generally, and Ramsey specifically, for their recent recognition by the Princeton Prize in Race Relations for their work with the achievement gap at the high school. The Council applauds this.

Mayor Davis shares that the City Council will be meeting with the Election Commission to discuss access to voting, and that they'll be sure to have representatives from YIS at the meeting.

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I. Next Steps

Mayor Henrietta Davis asks Nancy Tauber to go into the next steps for the Council.

Next Kids' Council Meeting: May 17, 2012

Nancy Tauber reminds the Council that the next meeting will be on May 17 at the Citywide Senior Center.

Mayor Davis adds that maybe it will be moved to a school, as per Andrea Collymore's suggestion.

Nancy says that between now and the next meeting, she'll be working with everyone on a draft action plan to focus on family engagement. She says the Innovation Agenda is important, but even beyond that there will always be a need to communicate with families. She hopes that by developing a structure for it, the community won't have to reinvent the wheel each time.

Mayor Davis shares her belief that with Nancy's help, such a structure can be developed. She thanks Nancy and Lori Likis.

Lori Likis thanks the Council for allowing her to join, and for their suggestions, interest, and enthusiasm. She expresses her hope that people will go forth and spread their enthusiasm and optimism.

Fred Fantini shares the acronym PACE, for Positive Action Creates Enthusiasm.

Mayor Davis thanks Daniel Ruben, the recordkeeper, and invites people, again, to eat more of the food.

Action taken: Mayor Henrietta Davis adjourns the meeting at 7:48pm.

Meeting Documents: 1) Agenda for this meeting; 2) Minutes from meeting of 16 February 2012, 3) Community Engagement Team outreach pamphlet