

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Business Advisory Committee March 2022 Meeting Summary

Attendance

Members	Present (8) Samuel Gebru, Marcus Johnson-Smith, Jaswinder Kaur, Kimberly Massenburg, Allentza Michel, Jennie Song, LaTonya Smith-Winston
	Absent (5) Jason Doo, Vicki Gray, Angela Hofmann, Erinn Pearson, Zina Thompson
City staff (4)	Iram Farooq, Jonathan Lee, Pardis Saffari, Marlees West (CDD)
Others	1 member of the public

Welcome & Introductions

Marlees West (MW) opened the virtual meeting at 4:00 PM by welcoming members of the BIPOC Business Advisory Committee and staff. Committee members went around and talked about how they came into the space today.

Meeting Presentation: BIPOC Business Survey Report and Recommendations

Pardis Saffari (PS) and Jonathan Lee (JL) presented the BIPOC Business Survey Results Report and Recommendations from the survey, interviews, and from the Committee.

PS, JL, and MW opened the floor for group discussion and questions.

Committee feedback and questions:

- As a BIPOC participant with multiple businesses in Cambridge, it's encouraging to be a part of the conversation, seeing that there is progress being made, and processes are becoming more equitable to help people like myself be successful in the city. This is all really encouraging.
- Clarification on who some of the slides:
 - who is the business with more than 100 employees?
 - Birth to 3rd grade childcare - is that something the City already provides? Yes, it is a collaboration between DHSP and CPSD, where Cambridge childcare companies can get technical and financial assistance as they grow as a business. The program also provides financial assistance to Cambridge families who need childcare.
- Co-ownership of buildings is very interesting recommendation as rents are high and rent is a huge barrier. How can we provide other opportunities like businesses sharing spaces such as pop-up restaurants in cafeterias?
- The slide on those who have used city services was interesting - same amount who had not participated or had participated in small business grant programs confirms assumption of knowledge gap. There's an abundance of services in Cambridge but there's not always clear what's out here.

- Business lease is also interesting – such as the Vacant Storefront Tax Incentive Program (in Taunton), some municipalities are experimenting with this, such as incentivize landlords to charge cheaper office/retail rents (Boston)
- For entrepreneurs who don't need a massive building, but need a small desk, can the city partner with co-working spaces to provide or support membership?
- Small Business Banking - whatever city can do to work with community banks servicing Cambridge, such as the City's own bank, Eastern Bank would be great
- Results were sobering but not surprising. As a business owner and black woman, I got pushed out of a space in Harvard Square because landlord wanted to switch up focus of tenants based on his idea of profitable (now in Central Square). Recommend that part of the ongoing conversation is about how tenants can negotiate with property owners, access space, and knowing where the spaces are.
- Knowing barriers that BIPOC folks face in getting capital can require different negotiating process, and people need to be made more aware of those barriers.
- Connect entrepreneurs and property owners around space acquisition and rental how to negotiate contracts and space leasing needs
- Like affordable housing, we should have some affordable commercial retail and office space
- Committee happy with the proposed timeline of June and asked that the next steps include information on which recommendations are short term (e.g. “low hanging fruit”) actions, long term actions, and which policies and programs require City Council or state involvement.

Other Committee Items

PS mentioned that the City is celebrating National Small Business Week in May and if the Committee has any ideas for events or activities. Ideas included:

- Event around the importance of getting your business certified and how to go about it. Could be a “lunch and learn” – so its networking and accomplishing something. Invite the state and other larger institutions.
- Black Cannabis Business Panel
- Small Business Passport Program
- Small business maps (Maps are already done on a yearly basis)

MW and PS closed Committee feedback.

Public comment

None.

Meeting adjourned at 5:15 PM.