

Cambridge LGBTQ+ Commission
March Meeting Minutes
March 25, 2021
(on Zoom)

Commissioners in Attendance: Bill Barnert; Susan Bernstein; Bob Bordone; Soltan Bryce; Jessica Daniels; Noelani Gabriel; John Gintell (co-chair); Kate Grams; Katy Harrison; Linden Huhmann; Steven Lee; Gregory MacDonough; Lauryn McNair; Nefyn Meissner (co-chair); Rachel Oppenheimer; Lesley Phillips; Warner Santiago; Aren Stone

Commission Staff in Attendance: Amelia Joselow

Commissioners Absent: Cameron Van Fossen

Commissioners on Leave: Noelani Kamelamela

Guests in Attendance: Ronit Barkai (Transition House); Julie Kahn Schaye (Transition House); Mary Kowalczyk (Public Health Department);

Approve Minutes from January and February Meetings Approved.

Approve / Modify Agenda Clarified when Transition House would present. Approved.

Invited Guests:

- **Mary Kowalczyk, Cambridge Public Health, Department** *report and brief discussion*
 - Cambridge Public Health Department is a Department of the City and also a part of the Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA). The Public Health Department have partnered with and consulted with us on one-off basis in the past--eager to create a more permanent relationship.
 - Mary works with the Substance Use Prevention Unity which focuses on substance use, particularly with youth.
 - Mary and the Dept are also recruiting a community representative from the Commission, etc., to be part of the work.
 - Programs and Events
 - Cambridge Health Assessment (annual)
 - assessment followed by a published report
 - produces Community Health Improvement Plan
 - Amelia has helped with the report plan this year; the Dept actively seeks community input, particularly from special populations
 - also focuses on mental health
 - Annual assessment of risk-taking and substance use in the high school/youth community (have consulted with the LGBTQ+ Commission on how to ask for sexual identity/gender information); health survey data has yielded grant money to survey local LGBTQ+ youth on mental health

issues--project was paused by the outbreak of the pandemic; recently applied for a grant for funding to work on substance use issues with youth

- Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA) is currently hiring a Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Possibility that they can partner with the Commission, even if on a more limited basis.
- **Ronit Barkai and Julie Kahn Schaye, Transition House**
 - Transition House is a domestic violence agency that started on a grass-roots basis in the 70s during the feminist movement. Two local survivors opened the first shelter in one of their apartments. Collaborative model. Currently runs a house in Cambridge and also manages other housing programs (transitional living program, long-term housing for survivors who are disabled, and a community program). They historically served survivors who fled from other areas to Cambridge. Now also serve more local residents. Broad definition of domestic violence, including folks exposed in the home and witnesses. Offer a broad set of options from counseling, help with restraining orders. More than the outdated model of “male beats female who flees to shelter.” Developing and broadening their work. Folks come in crises and stay for as long as they need. Shelter allows for up to a year of housing, transitional housing allows up to three years, etc. Variety of housing types, options.
 - Julie has been with Transition House for 15 years and is trained as a Social Worker. There has been a lot of change during the past 15 years. Now allow folks who identify as men. At the time it seemed radical but it didn't change anything in terms of services and impact. Did a lot of training with Network La Red and other LGBTQ+ organizations to train staff to look at DV beyond a limited binary. Currently working to expand their work to include people who perpetrate violence. This is cognizant of the fact that some of these folks have also been the victim of violence.
 - Transition House is eager to work with Amelia and the LGBTQ+ Commission to make connections and expand their work. Eager to move beyond the black-and-white/good-and-bad model, beyond a punitive model, towards a model that ends DV in a more creative, nuanced way. Currently in a two-year partnership with Network La Red to learn and grow.
 - Transition House currently serves nine households (has had to de-densify w/hotels), eight folks in long-term housing, and dozens with transitional housing. A few hundred people also engage with the community program.
 - Survivors are referred through a statewide hotline, TH's 24 hour hotline. Currently working sure to ensure that there is info available in businesses deemed essential (and therefore open) during the pandemic. TH also proactively networks to train other local organizations and care providers to broaden their reach. CPD also refers folks from their DV Unit. There is a huge lack of shelter space in the state. A lot of survivors are also reluctant to use a shelter if they do need it.
 - Partner with De Novo, which provides legal services to folks. Also partner with clinicians, etc. Also working with clinicians on a contract basis.

- There was a brief “silence” at the start of the pandemic, but calls and cases are rising again and with more nuance and complication given the financial and mental stress of the pandemic. Calls have gone from 30 minutes to 2-3 hours in some cases.
- (Network La Red is a survivor-initiated and survivor-led organization for LGBTQ+ survivors of DV).
- There are only 195 rooms in MA available. There are also 5000+ homeless families in the state, many who are impacted by DV.
- Contact Information
 - 1-877-785-2020 (SafeLink - state hotline)
 - 1-857-777-6724 (Community Program hotline)
 - 1-617-661-7203 (Transition House’s hotline)

Working Group Reports & Discussion

- Strategic Planning
 - Report from Mar 15 meeting
 - Steven shared notes from the Working Group meeting
 - Potential priorities for the coming year
 - Cambridge LGBTQ+ Community Space (aka Center)
 - Training (initial and on-going) of Public 1st Responders (police, university police/security, fire, EMT, health)
 - All Gender Bathrooms
 - Amelia shared that the Legal Department has to do the official research into this issue, particularly as it relates to plumbing codes.
 - Legal Department knows it’s on our list but is not currently acting on it.
 - Community Outreach Events
 - Social Media
 - Lauryn and Bob are joining the Communications Working Group to assist with social media and Communications. Soltan is eager to get involved to bridge events, etc., to Harvard students.
 - Newsletter can be more broadly shared via our social media accounts.
 - Possibility of using some budget for boosting posts, etc.
 - Internal Operations
 - Discussion of next steps – individual Commissioner interest
- Events planning
 - Porter Square Books – April 1, 7pm
 - Starlight Square
- City Forms

- Amelia with Scott Walker from the Community Development Department. He's compiling a resource for all folks in the City to use.
- Newsletter

Report from Amelia and Discussion All-gender bathrooms

- LGBTQ+ Community Center

Public Comment / Announcements

Next Meeting: Thursday, April 22, 2021