Cambridge Peace Commission

A Department of the City of Cambridge, Massachusetts

Minutes of the Peace Commission Meeting • February 16, 2022

Commission Members Present: Co-Chair Elka Kuhlman, Co-Chair Larry Kim, Kaleb Abebe, Annie Brown, Sarah DeMott, Kaza Fraley, Yasmine Hung, David Seeman, Bonnie Talbert

City Staff Present: Administrative Coordinator Ayan Barre, CPD Deputy Superintendent Fred Cabral, Executive Director Brian Corr

Call to Order: Co-Chair Kuhlman called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Approval of Minutes: On a motion from Commission Member Seeman, seconded by Commission Member Hung, the minutes of the January 19, 2022 meeting were approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Checking In
● People shared brief reports about their lives and how they were doing.

Purpose & Mission and Reflections
● Commission members reviewed the "About the Peace Commission" document describing the Commission's mission and vision, and then shared the reflections and takeaways regarding that and what work and activities that stuck out for them. Specific items mentioned include: Meet Your Neighbor Day and other ways to connect with new people; ways to have structured conversations with room for differing perspectives that allow people hear what others have to say and see their perspective, and lifting up shared values and connecting across perceived separations; places that help people to be more positive in the face of a world that seems to be growing more mean-spirited; and giving people space to reflect on their stories and regain a little bit of agency; and thinking about how to mark everything that has happened in the last two years.
● Exec. Dir. Corr answered questions about potential overlaps with other boards and commissions, the historical roots of the commission in nuclear disarmament, and the connections with sister cities.
● Commission members discussed how the pandemic has changed how people see existential threats, how to raise those issues in ways which are helpful and not alienating, and how to meaningfully connect with others when everyone needs that connection, but everyone is also exhausted in general.
● Commission members discussed how "story circles" – a specific type of community-building circle coming out of restorative practices – can be used to build community and connections.

Executive Director's Report
● Exec. Dir. Corr reported that it is a busy time for him with the fiscal year 2023 budget process beginning, as well as because he is serving as a member of a staff committee developing a permanent remote work policy for the City of Cambridge.

- He also described how there is a need for people to come together and reconnect after two years of living through the pandemic and being separated from other people, and that so many people are really struggling. He noted that the Peace Commission could play a role in the community to address this by creating spaces (events, gatherings, or activities) specifically to help people reconnect and to be a catalyst for healing in this city.

Update on Peace Commission Retreat Planning
- Commission members discussed how Commission retreats have been a place to develop "who we are," get to know one another, and build a sense of community together – usually during a whole day and in person. In light of the ongoing pandemic, people discussed holding the retreat sessions during the Commission's regular meeting time over the coming months.
- Commission members discussed the need to use retreat time to go deeper and get to know the skill sets that are represented by the Commission members, while recognizing the challenges of doing that remotely on Zoom, and discussed how to create that kind of space virtually in a way that fosters connection and brainstorming.

Adjournment
The meeting adjourned at 7:42 PM on a motion from Commission Member Abebe, seconded by Commission Member Hung, approved by unanimous vote.

The next meeting of the Peace Commission is scheduled for 6:00 p.m., Wednesday, April 13, 2022 via Zoom.