



Cambridge Peace Commission

A Department of the City of Cambridge, Massachusetts

Minutes of the Peace Commission Meeting • November 8, 2023

Commission Members Present: Co-Chair Elka Kuhlman, Kaleb Abebe, Annie Brown, Yasmine Hung, David Seeman, Bonnie Talbert

City Staff Present: Executive Director Brian Corr

Call to Order: Co-Chair Kuhlman called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.

Approval of Minutes: On a motion from Commission Member Seeman, seconded by Commission Member Talbert, the minutes of the October 18, 2023 meeting were approved unanimously.

Checking In

- People shared brief personal and professional updates from the last month.

Executive Director's Report

- Exec. Dir. Corr reported on a small interfaith gathering he organized at the request of clergy and lay leaders from a few Jewish, Muslim, and Christian congregations in Cambridge for mutual support, understanding, and community building in the context of Hamas's attack on Israelis and the Israeli army's ongoing military conflict with Hamas in Gaza. It was attended and hosted by Co-Chair Kim and facilitated by Exec. Dir. Corr, and was a positive and supportive space. Commission members discussed the nature of congenial conversations – allowing people to be seen and heard and connecting with the humanity in each other – and the challenges of doing so without creating more conflict and dividing people, rather than bringing them together and building community.
- Ex. Dir. Corr explained that he was working on planning for the 2024 Martin Luther King Day Commemoration & Remembrance, and that he was still working to identify a speaker.

Discussion: "A Model of Peace: Resource Sharing"

People came to the meeting prepared to share various ideas, concepts, organizations, and frameworks that could provide a "model of peace."

- Co-Chair Kuhlman spoke about The Parent's Circle, an Israeli/Palestinian group that brings people together and has a focus on how to have someone else hear your story.
- Exec. Dir Corr described the Public Conversations Project Dialogue (PCP is now called "Essential Partners") is a framework for preparation, ground rules, structures, sharing core beliefs, time management/time limits, and calls for credible conveners, careful advance planning, a comfortable setting, and a positively provoking question such as "What's at the heart of the matter for you?" to start the dialogue. He noted this was very much the spirit of the interfaith gathering he reported on.
- Commission Member Talbert described that the Smithsonian's Asian American Pacific Islander Museum has an exhibition on concepts and seeing how different people have approached them throughout history and in different cultures – allowing everyone to see different ways to understand an issue. There was a corner for Heart to Hearts: tables with

cards with words such as love, beauty, anger, etc., where one draws a card and talks with someone about what they feel/think about these concepts.

- Commission Member Brown stated that she has been looking for mediation training information she has received in the past, with guidance for things like setting ground rules, ensuring that someone tells their story and is heard. She mentioned Circle Forward as a useful training.
- Commission Member Abebe explained it was challenging, yet though of “what did peace mean growing up?” He was aware of elders who brokered peace between groups and people. The Habesha Networks are composed of Ethiopians and Eritreans. They work to connect people and deconstruct the barriers caused by decades of war and conflict between the two nations. Using things like a coffee hour they meet and talk, and while there is not one in the Boston area, the closest is in Washington, D.C.
- Commission Member Seeman: Discovered two or three groups similar to the one Elka spoke about, including Combatants for Peace and Standing Together – both groups that are serious about talking to each other.
- Co-Chair Kuhlman described a project started by a Harvard College as a way to educate people on the conflict with bias, but just information. Called the Hotline for Israel/Palestine (HIP), it is a student-led initiative dedicated to transparent, non-partisan, and dialogue-focused education around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – to help students ask questions without being labeled as anti-Semitic or Islamophobic.

Next Steps for “RACE: The Power of an Illusion”

There was not sufficient time to discuss this, but it will be on the agenda for the January 2024 meeting.

Next Steps

- Commission members will have a holiday gathering on December 20, instead of a meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:01 PM on a motion from Commission Member Talbert, seconded by Commission Member Brown, approved by unanimous vote.

The next meeting of the Peace Commission is scheduled for 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, January 17, 2024 at 51 Inman St., 2nd Floor.