

City of Cambridge Citizen's Committee on Civic Unity Meeting
Tuesday, December 1, 2015, 5:30 PM, Cambridge Citywide Senior Center
Summarized meeting notes

Committee members present:

Betsy Bard, Chanta Bhan, Danielle Boudrow, Susie Flug, Steven Lee, Kenny Likis, Priscilla Lopes, Josie Patterson

Staff present: Taha Jennings, Brian Corr

Updates and Current Events

A committee member shared some thoughts about their experience with the City's Human Rights Commission. Specifically that there are cases that seem to involve implicit bias or microaggressions, but do not fall under the criteria of discrimination that they use, and it might be interesting for this committee to explore those instances or weigh in on the broader idea.

Another member related an instance of an employee feeling that they were treated unfairly (discriminated against) in one of the schools, and that it might be interesting to think about ways to encourage constructive dialogue rather than let gossip dominate communication. It was noted that there has also been a lot of pushback against the idea of microaggressions and arguments that people are too sensitive. This could be a place where positive education could take place, including the idea that people get to determine for themselves whether or not they are offended.

A member mentioned a featured piece on public radio on the Cambridge Police and their Safety Net program. Also that efforts such as that are different from what we hear about especially in light of recent events in the news involving police. A program in Gloucester was mentioned in which people are able to come in with drug problems and the police there are committed to get them into treatment.

Committee Actions and Plans for Moving Forward

Staff present gave an update on the Committee process and progress, as well as the various things that people have expressed interest in. A write up of two potential initiatives was shared, and staff reiterated the support of the City.

The Committee discussed some ideas in more detail:

Introducing the Committee and mission to staff, other boards and commissions, and the wider community. The Committee agreed that this is an important step to help to spread the word about the Committee and provide chances to collaborate and get to know other boards, commissions, departments, and organizations, but also ensure that the Committee doesn't duplicate existing efforts.

The idea of a physical place where people can feel safe and that their voices are respected is important. The Committee should learn about what is going on and see if that kind of space exists, and if it doesn't, the Committee could think about how to create that opportunity in Cambridge. This could be a resource for everyone, including college students in the city.

A committee member shared information about an investigative theater project which involved 80 to 100 interviews and some focus groups. For the last three years the project involved investigating the CRLS motto: opportunity, diversity, and respect. This is the third year and is focused on opportunity.

The production has a diverse ensemble of 19 to 25 year-olds who perform the pieces, and with this last play, a lot came up around Kendall Sq. and development, and questions about whether opportunities are equal. There were also even comparisons to LeBron James and people getting pushback for taking advantage of opportunities. It was suggested that perhaps the Civic Unity Committee could support a public performance, perhaps at the library. Some of the monologues are currently posted on the Central Square Theater. It was thought that this might be a good example of how to leverage something that is already underway.

One action suggested was to share the information that the committee members have among each other, and help build awareness of the things going on in the community. A committee member noted the challenges they face helping young people understand that to be successful, it's ok to not give into peer pressure and about the need to be their own people, e.g., respect, hats off, pants up.

Another project idea was for community historical tours, to highlight the local history. Or a scavenger hunt that connects with the local schools, with prizes (find the oldest house, go to a store in West Cambridge, talk to a store owner in East Cambridge, etc.) and this could get people, not just kids, from all over the city to participate. Staff suggested a broader demographic event that would include some historical context as well.

The Community Engagement Team (CET) was mentioned as a resource that could educate the Committee about what different groups in the community are doing, and needing. Specifically, how to better connect with communities that are not necessarily online. How to get information to people across different infrastructure could play a really important role and also serve to be very unifying. It might be useful for the Committee to come up with recommendations for different types of communication. Civic Unity Committee members could also go to the events that CET sponsors or attends to learn more about them.

There was an idea shared to have a citywide book reading recommendation.

Another suggestion was to create a map, possibly through a contest, without any words, similar to something that was done at the MIT Museum.

There was a suggestion to do something to recognize the 50th anniversary of Loving v. Virginia, in 2017.

It was also pointed out that it will be important to think about both actions as well as recommendations, and the committee's role in reporting back and advising the City, which is part of its mandate.

Next Steps

Brian Corr stated that Cliff Cook will be giving a demographics presentation to the Peace Commission on Wednesday, January 20 at 6PM at 51 Inman St., 2nd Floor

The committee members present volunteered to explore the some of the proposed actions a little deeper:

- Sponsor a citywide performance of the play *Opportunity*, and find a way to have a structured conversation or discussions afterwards.
- Move forward on the idea do a demographic/history event.

- Presentations from the Community Engagement Team and Cambridge Police Department.
- Create an “elevator speech” from the mission statement – and maybe a visual?
- Reading list and/or a more general resource list for the website of programs, mediations, calendar – and then a program that has people across the community to read them together.

Next two meetings are scheduled for January 5th 2016, and February 2nd 2016.