



Cambridge Human Services Commission
Meeting Minutes
October 9, 2014
5:30 – 7:30pm
Citywide Senior Center
806 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Commissioners present: Dr. Ayse Atasoylu, Christine Elow, Christopher R. Hall, Kati LaBraico, Khari Milner, Rev. Lorraine Thornhill

Regrets: Lori Likis, Nan Stone, Katharine Emilie Thomas

DHSP staff: Janice Alger, Shelly Chevalier, Mike Payack (recorder)

Presenters: Eryn Johnson, Executive Director, Community Art Center; Maria Schaedler-Luera, Community Programs Manager, Community Art Center

After a round of introductions, Mike Payack thanked the Community Art Center's Eryn Johnson and Maria Schaedler-Luera for joining the Human Services Commission and provided a brief introduction. Eryn Johnson is the Community Art Center's Executive Director. Maria Schaedler-Luera is the Community Art Center's Community Programs Coordinator.

Eryn described the Community Art Center as a youth development-based community organization. Eryn shared the Community Art Center's mission statement: "The Community Art Center is a neighborhood institution committed to our mission to cultivate an engaged community of youth whose powerful artistic voices transform their lives, their neighborhoods, and their worlds." The Community Art Center has two programs: the School Age Child Care Program (which serves children ages 5 through 12) and the Teen Media Program. The Community Art Center hosts, and the Teen Media Program curates, the Do It Your Damn Self (DIYDS) National Youth Video and Film Festival, the longest-running youth-curated film festival in the country. The Community Art Center is open all but fourteen weekdays per calendar year.

Eryn stated that three years ago, the Community Art Center developed a strategic plan. Staff gathered information for their strategic plan by interviewing families of participants. A common theme in the responses was an awareness of changes in The Port/Area 4 neighborhood, where the Community Art Center is located. One teen stated, "I feel like an outlier in my own neighborhood." There was also a sense among residents of wanting to be involved with some of the exciting things happening in the Kendall Square technology sector, but not having access. The Community Art Center asked the question: "How can art help?" This spurred the creation of the *This is Where We Live, Work and Create* initiative.

Eryn said the goal of the Community Art Center's *This is Where We Live, Work and Create* initiative is to use public art and community arts events to express local identity and create opportunities for interactions between residents and incoming corporate employees who spend their days in and around The Port/Area 4. The initiative aims to present and preserve the history of the neighborhood and its

residents. Eryn also mentioned that there is a history of collaboration between Area 4 residents and community organizations and corporations. For example, the Community Art Center's Teen Media Program arose from a collaboration with Polaroid.

Eryn said that DHSP, along with the Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) and corporate sponsors, recently chose to support the Port Stories Public Art Project (a project within the *This is Where We Live, Work and Create* initiative). This was an exciting moment for the Community Art Center because, up until this point, their public art projects were funded solely by corporate sponsors. Having the support of DHSP and CHA allows the Community Art Center more freedom to tell the story of Newtowne Court, Washington Elms, The Port, and the people who live there.

Maria said the first big project of the *This is Where We Live, Work and Create* initiative was the Novartis Mural, on Massachusetts Avenue near the corner of Albany Street. Younger children and teens both worked on this year-long project. The mural was divided into four sections. A different visiting artist guided youth-participants in completing each section of the mural. The final piece of the mural was added in the summer of 2014 with participants of the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program.

In 2013, Alexandria Real Estate funded two murals: the Tech Square Mural and the "In Our DNA" Mural. Technology Square is the block bordered by Main Street, Portland Street, Broadway, and Galileo Galilei Boulevard. The Tech Square Mural was designed by the Youth Advisory Board, a leadership group of 9-12 year-olds, with support from a visiting artist. The Youth Advisory Board visited a science lab in Tech Square and incorporated things they observed there into the mural, along with self-portraits, and a poem of their choosing. At an opening celebration for the mural, the youth-artists read their artist statement and sat on an artists' panel to answer questions from attendees.

The "In Our DNA" Mural represents the first time the Community Art Center created a digital mural. The mural is located in Rogers Street Park, near the corner of Rogers Street and Third Street in East Cambridge. The Community Art Center held community workshops at East End House and Margaret Fuller House to teach youth-artists how to manipulate digital photos using computer software such as Photoshop and Illustrator. The title "In Our DNA" encouraged the youth-artists to think about what makes up Cambridge and The Port. The mural includes Cambridge landscapes such as MIT buildings, Newtowne Variety, and Izzy's. In the mural, Izzy's and Newtowne Variety are depicted as the same size as MIT buildings, representing their relative importance to the artists. Digitally-manipulated portraits of members of the community (including Vice-Mayor Dennis Benzan) and the youth-artists themselves are also included in the mural. The youth-artists also depicted their aspirations in the mural. The Community Art Center recently held a celebration of the mural, with support from the Cambridge Police Department, the Cambridge Fire Department, and various members of the community. The youth-artists again read their artist statement and sat on an artists' panel to answer questions from attendees.

Beginning this past summer, the Community Art Center has focused on the Port Stories Public Art Project. Sarah Boyer, the Cambridge Historical Commission's Oral History Project Coordinator, is currently working on an oral history of The Port called *We Are The Port*. The Community Art Center collaborated with Sarah for the first phase of the Port Stories Public Art Project to gather oral histories of the neighborhood. This phase of the project was initially called the Hear/Here Project.

The teens from the Community Art Center curated eight public arts events over the summer: four events in Newtowne Court/Washington Elms and four events in Kendall Square (held simultaneously with the Kendall Square farmers' market to take advantage of the large volume of people in the area at

that time). The Hear/Here Project events transformed public spaces into welcoming places through musical performances and an interactive public art installation: the Cordel. Cordel is a practice from northeastern Brazil where literature is “published” by hanging it on a clothesline in a communal area like a town square. Using this concept, the Hear/Here Project “published” the images and narratives collected by the youth and asked passers-by to contribute their stories with the help of a visiting artist. The Cordel travelled back and forth between events held in Newtowne Court/Washington Elms and Kendall Square.

After the tragic murder of Kensley David in July, the teens from the Community Art Center felt very strongly that they needed to say something meaningful about this tragedy. Along with changing the focus of the project, the teens decided to change the name of the Hear/Here Project to Change For Peace. They were no longer only focusing on the history of the community; they began incorporating messages of peace into the project.

The Change For Peace teens recently organized an art event completely on their own: A youth arts gallery. The teens charged admission in the form of donated clothes or food, which were, in turn, donated to non-profit organizations.

The next phase of the Port Stories Public Art Project is the creation of three murals, the first of which will be called Portraits of the Port. Portraits of the Port will be a 160-foot digital mural sponsored by MIT and located at 610 Main Street. Eryn and Maria invited the Commissioners to the kick-off event for this mural taking place on December 3, 2014 from 6:30 to 8:30 PM at the Community Art Center (119 Windsor Street). The event will feature food, storytelling, and improvisational theater. Attendees will also be asked to take portrait photos and contribute stories and thoughts on The Port, which may be used as source material for the mural. The Portraits of the Port mural will be on display for one year.

The final two murals, one in Newtowne Court and one in Tech Square, will be on display indefinitely. The Community Art Center created the Port Arts Council (PAC), which will help advise the murals. The PAC is made up of parents of youth who attend the Community Art Center, teens who attend the Community Art Center, community artists, Margaret Fuller House staff, parents of youth who attend Margaret Fuller House, Sarah Boyer, local business owners, and community members. The Cordel will be used as source material for these murals. The Community Art Center plans to unveil the Newtowne Court mural and Tech Square mural on the same day in order to encourage people to “cross the border” between Newtowne Court and Tech Square.

In response to a question, Eryn provided a brief history of the Community Art Center. The Community Art Center was started by parents in 1932. It was originally located in the basement of a Harvard building. The Community Art Center moved into Newtowne Court in 1938 (the year that Newtowne Court opened). It originally functioned as the Newtowne Court community center. Only children who lived in Newtowne Court were allowed to attend at first (even children who lived in Washington Elms were not allowed to attend). Now children from all over Cambridge are allowed to attend (about 90% of program participants live in Cambridge public housing). The Community Art Center is also open to children whose families have moved out of Cambridge due to the high cost of living.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Eryn invited the Commissioners to attend Creative Community Voices, a monthly hour-long tour of the Community Art Center. Maria will email the invitation to Mike Payack, who will, in turn, forward it to the members of the HSC.

Mike reminded the Commissioners that they have been invited to the Boards and Commissions Reception hosted by Mayor David Maher on Wednesday, November 5, 2014. Mike advised the Commissioners that they would be receiving a formal invitation from the Mayor's Office by mail.

Mike announced that Shawn Proctor, Father Facilitator for DHSP's Baby University, will be presenting at the next HSC meeting on Thursday, November 13. Historically, Baby U has had higher participation among Cambridge mothers than Cambridge fathers. Shawn's position was created, in part, to help increase participation in the program by Cambridge fathers. Mike stated that DHSP staff is hoping that, in addition to its normal function, the upcoming HSC meeting will also function as an information session for potential Baby U participants. Mike encouraged the Commissioners to invite potential Baby U participants to the upcoming HSC meeting. Mike reviewed the basic program requirements: participants must be Cambridge residents and have a child prenatal through age 3. For further information, potential participants can contact Betsy Abrams (Parenting Education Program Coordinator) or Shawn Proctor (Father Facilitator) directly, or attend the November HSC meeting.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Payack
Planner/Contracts Manager
DHSP/Planning & Development