

City of Cambridge Citizen's Committee on Civic Unity Meeting

Tuesday, July 7, 2015, 5:30 PM, Cambridge Citywide Senior Center

Summarized meeting notes

Committee members present: Josie Patterson, Chanta Bhan, Susie Flug, Fatimah Muhammad, Lewis Bryant, Melissa Castillo, Steven Lee

Staff present: Taha Jennings, Brian Corr

Taha noted that a webpage for the Committee has been created on the City website under the Boards and Commissions page. This can serve as a resource to post information about the committee including meeting agendas, notes, and materials.

It was mentioned that a demographic presentation from Cliff Cook from the Community Development Department could be helpful early in our process to help frame where things currently are in terms of race, ethnicity, class, etc.

The group was informed that Roxie Coicou has taken a new position as a pastor in Boston, and that she will need to step down from the Committee.

Taha proposed the possibility setting aside a portion of each meeting so people can share what else is going on in the City as well as current events that might be relevant or of interest.

Chanta Bhan reported that in her role as chair of the Human Rights Commission, she met with the leadership of the Cambridge Black Pastors Alliance around the issues of "Black Lives Matter," and that it can also be complicated. In the wake of Charleston (church shootings), the group should be thinking about this and perhaps working together on vigils and other activities.

Brian Corr shared that the Peace Commission often has a role in planning and conducting vigils and noted the liaison role between Police and chaplains.

Susie noted that the first Tuesday in September is the Tuesday before Labor Day, so that may be a day that people are still away. Susie also reminded the group that Kwame and Priscilla had been working on the structure of the Committee, and that with Kwame's moving to Washington, we want to make sure we remain mindful.

Josie and Taha discussed the importance of sharing current events and what is happening in Cambridge and other things that affect Cambridge, but also having a "prompt" general conversation in the wake of things like the Rachel Dolezal situation.

Suggested articles/documentaries that people might want to read/see:

Race: The Power of an Illusion

Ta-Nehsi Coates piece in The Atlantic on his son

The Scapegoat Complex by Sylvia Brinton-Perera (a Jungian psychoanalytical book)

Mission Statement:

The group discussed the draft mission statement from the subcommittee: Susie Flug, Steven Lee, and Josephine Patterson.

Susie Flug framed the work that has been done on the mission statement and the proposed additional goals, and strategies/action plans. The idea is that the actual mission statement would be short.

There was a discussion about how temporary or permanent the goals and strategies would be over time as the work evolves and the individuals on the committee change. People noted that going through the visioning process helped the group to reflect on the mission and offer helpful suggestions without people feeling bogged down in wordsmithing.

Generally, it seems likely that the goals would be more permanent and would be reviewed and possibly refreshed from time to time, while the strategies would become more a part of planning processes and might provide more of a menu of possibilities than a prescription. Adding a timeframe to the proposed strategies, especially the second-level bullet points, could be helpful in making those achievable and developing a roadmap to get there. As the committee develops proposals for specific activities, it may be useful to look back at the strategies to see if the proposed work fits into it that. Doing an impact analysis could also help prioritize activities or strategies, which Melissa Castillo has been involved in leading.

Structure and Governance:

The Committee discussed the need to clarify how decisions are made by the committee, and to look at models of consensus, voting, and other deliberation and decision-making models.

Committee members were asked to come to the next committee meeting with up to three proposed actions that the group could potentially undertake.