

City of Cambridge Citizens Committee on Civic Unity Meeting

Tuesday, June 2, 2015, 5:30pm, Cambridge Citywide Senior Center

Summarized meeting notes

Committee members present: Renae Gray, Josie Patterson, Priscilla Lopes, Susie Flug, Fatimah Muhammad, Lewis Bryant, Melissa Gonzales, Kenny Likis, Jwahir Sundai, Betsy Bard, Danielle Boudrow, Eva Martin Blythe, Steven Lee

Staff present: Taha Jennings, Assistant to the City Manager; Brian Corr, Executive Director, Cambridge Peace Commission and Executive Secretary, Police Review & Advisory Board

Public present: Carole Perrault

Taha Jennings opened the meeting and stated that Kwame Dance had notified him that he has accepted a job in Washington D.C. and is no longer able to participate on the Committee. Taha also has extended an invitation to Councilor Simmons to present to the group about the history of the Civic Unity Committee and their efforts in Cambridge.

Susie Flug shared that she attended a cultural competency training conducted by the City's Community Engagement Team which was very good and corresponds to one of the areas of focus that the group has identified.

Taha offered thanks to Fatimah Muhammad for facilitating the visioning exercise that was conducted at the last meeting and stated that this meeting will provide an opportunity for the group to discuss the results of the exercise, look at the information gathered, and talk about next steps.

Fatimah also thanked Danielle Boudrow for her work on putting together the exercise. The exercise was a way to think about broad themes and then list some specific ideas, of which there were many. The challenge before the group right now is to look at the list, narrow it down to what is achievable with finite time, energy, and budget. She suggested that looking at outcomes and what the committee would like to have accomplished by a certain time might help to have a richer conversation about those outcomes.

Committee members appreciated the amount of work that went into creating the summary document, and asked a few clarifying questions. Lewis Bryant noted that it may not be the Committee's place to interact with the schools about the issues. Josie Patterson suggested that it might be better to start with a discussion of the mission statement draft, and then use that as a way to frame the vision discussion. Kenny Likis stated that it will be important to find a way to prioritize. Susie Flug discussed the work that has been done by a sub group on the mission statement. Taha noted that the original draft was broken down into a mission, goals, and strategies. Committee members discussed how to look at both the mission and the visioning.

Aspirational Visioning Results

The group discussed the proposed actions and projected outcomes from the top themes of the Aspirational Visioning Exercise:

Culture of Respect/Tolerance:

Target community:

Mutual respect among existing groups and newer communities coming into Cambridge.

Proposed action:

Providing opportunities for civic dialogue and fun/social activities that will encourage people to come out and interact with each other, perhaps the new Port Café is a model; another is “Collard Greens and Kimchi” gatherings that Fatimah experienced, the other theme is to teach or educate people about respect.

Projected outcome:

Facilitating communication and interactions between/among people where it may not have previously existed.

Cultural Competency:**Target community:**

There are so many different people in Cambridge who are not connected or do not have much understanding of each other, and work needs to be done both broadly and in a targeted way. It should also have an educational tone and serve to enlighten people.

Proposed action:

Broad educational forums; creative ways to reach out and communicate with groups; create fun, welcoming opportunities for people to learn about and learn from each other.

Projected outcome:

More understanding of, and respect for, cultural differences, and increased opportunities for learning about each other.

A question was asked about the definition of cultural competency. Lewis noted that it can be seen as developing a comfort level across differences, because it has to address one’s own ignorance, prejudices, and misperceptions. Susie shared a definition she found online: a set of congruent policies and behaviors that allow people to interact productively with people from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. It was also noted that it can also be referred to as cultural proficiency, which is perhaps more attainable than competence. It was commented that the repeated references to youth mediation highlight that there are action items suggested that the committee can accomplish itself, and other items which are about having an influence on others to push them to implement those actions.

This committee could bring in people to present in an educational forum, e.g., people from the Historical Commission (Agassiz/Baldwin, Stories of the Port) the Peer Mediation Program at CRLS, a forum on how many of our high school graduates go on to graduate from college.

Lewis suggest that the first event should be youth oriented because people come out when their kids are involved. Kenny suggested that it could be multigenerational.

Public dialogue**Target community:**

Should engage the entire community; middle and high school students should receive special focus. Also have the ability to address important/emergent local and national events.

Proposed action:

Bringing people together for planned, structured dialogues and activities in safe spaces that allow people to speak honestly and be heard, including a series of sessions on important topics. Include training/facilitation from groups like VISIONS and Public Conversation Project.

Projected outcome:

Increased civic engagement, involvement, and communication.

It was noted that there seems to be a repeated theme in all of these things that young people may not have the access to municipal leaders that they need, and perhaps this committee can help to promote that. As we look at how to engage with young people, so much of it is electronic and social media, and how do we do that.

Racism:

Target community:

Focus on all people to take action to address/end racism, which impacts everyone. Include the intersection of race and class.

Proposed action:

Training, outreach, public dialogue and focus groups that build understanding. Sharing history and demographics and truth and reconciliation efforts.

Projected outcome:

Better understanding the City's history and current issues around the intersection of race and class. Provide effective forums for people to engage and communicate.

Someone noted that there is actually a lot of economic racism. A committee member commented that it would be valuable to have Cliff Cook from CDD come to do a presentation for the group. There is work to be done around the intersection of race and class in Cambridge. Gentrification and free and reduced lunch are proxies for class. We talk about racism all the time but not about class, and we need to address the intersection between race and class

There are people who have more interaction with people in the same class in San Francisco than with different classes in their own city. Community: sometimes the very thing they came to Cambridge for is the thing they destroy. Someone stated that this helps clarify what part of our mission is.

There was a suggestion to add "create opportunities for engagement/engaging people" to the mission statement.

Each committee member was asked to come to the July meeting with three ideas about an action that the committee could potentially undertake.

The next meeting was scheduled for **Tuesday, July 7, 5:30 to 7:30**, Citywide Senior Center.