

City of Cambridge Citizen's Committee on Civic Unity Meeting

Tuesday, September 6, 2016, 5:30 PM, Cambridge Citywide Senior Center

Summarized meeting notes

Committee members present:

Susie Flug (chair), Melissa Castillo (vice-chair), Chanta Bhan, Betsy Bard, Danielle Boudrow, Renae Gray, Steven Lee, Kenny Likis, Eva Martin Blythe, Josie Patterson

Staff present: Brian Corr, Taha Jennings

Group Updates Relevant to Civic Unity

Melissa opened the meeting by inviting people to share updates and resources related to civic unity. Taha mentioned that the City has just released an RFP for vendors to conduct Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) cultural competency training for city staff. Committee members were encouraged to help spread the word. Betsy noted there is some movement towards a new way of describing "cultural competence" as "cultural humility," to avoid prematurely or inaccurately determining that one is culturally competent. Danielle mentioned the organization Class Action's new toolkit "Activists, Class, Cultures" available on their website. Another resource mentioned was Anna Deavere Smith's new play, "Notes from the Field: Doing Time in Education", which is being performed at the American Repertory Theater.

Decision-making Process and Methods for the Committee

Melissa gave an overview of how groups can make decisions, including consensus, voting, and "executive order" – and the balance between speed of making decisions and commitment/"buy in" to the decision. The committee discussed various aspects of decision-making, needs for inclusion, and for the group to be involved.

One aspect of decision-making discussed was how to respond to opportunities, requests, or events that happen in between meetings. Some committee members noted the importance to be able to have input on any decision effecting the group, and the opportunity to say "no" until an item can be discussed with the larger group. The committee also discussed the possibility of asking for feedback through email from members for time sensitive matters. The group generally agreed that it is appropriate to hold off on making a decision about any item that can wait until the next meeting. If an item is more time sensitive it may make sense to check in with members via email. The importance of acknowledging receipt of emails was also mentioned.

The discussion then focused on how the committee should make decisions during the meetings. The discussion included definitions of consensus and voting, the power of consensus when it is working, and the desire to ensure that all voices are always able to be heard. Someone pointed out that there is often some confusion about what consensus actually is. It was further noted that consensus is more of a process rather than an outcome, where the group actively tries to get to the same place. One idea was to look at a "5-point consensus system." Other points were that it's important to be clear about what kind of decision is being used (consensus vs. vote), and how good facilitation is an important way to include everyone into discussions.

Updates on Upcoming Events/Projects

Group Feedback on GoodReads

The group briefly discussed GoodReads, and someone noted that it is not as useful to look up resources besides books. It was also pointed out, however, that the focus should begin with books.

Update from Combatting Racism Working Group on CET Video Request

Representatives from The Community Engagement Team (CET) expressed interest in working with the Civic Unity Committee to purchase “Race: The Power of an Illusion” video (<http://newsreel.org/video/race-the-power-of-an-illusion>) from California Newsreel for public viewing. It was noted that the video can be found on You Tube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7_YHur3G9g), and it was thought that several copies are available through the Harvard University Library. Several members of the Committee felt that the video was classic on the topic and that even after several years was very powerful, and packaged very well. It was agreed that the working group should continue to discuss what might be accomplished through an event and report back to the Committee.

Committee Working Groups

Susie reviewed proposed items to keep in mind as the working groups begin their work, which were slightly amended to allow more flexibility in timing:

- How the committee mission statement and proposed strategies are reflected in the work;
- Being aware of whether the work reflects the role of the committee and is the best way for the committee to make a difference;
- Reporting back to the larger group for review of work and plans;
- Researching other key players and resources;
- Having a meeting (in-person or virtual) before the November (if not October) meeting of the full committee;
- Developing 1 to 3 proposed goals, events, activities, and/or resources that the group will focus on over the next 6 months, to be shared and reviewed in the October or November meeting;

Working group membership as of September

- 1) Events and resources for/to connect old and new Cantabrigians: Susie (convener), Danielle, Josie
- 2) An event/events on “How do I ‘combat’ racism”: Danielle (convener), Kenny, Melissa, Renae, Betsy
- 3) An event/events on topics related to housing: Eva (convener), Melissa, Kenny, Priscilla, Betsy
- 4) Responding to and tracking incidents that foster or go against civic unity: Steven (convener), Chanta, Josie, Susie
- 5) Online space/community for sharing resources and connecting: Kenny (convener), Eva

Several members felt that the November meeting was an appropriate time for the working groups to report back to the Committee.

Recent Black Lives Matter Activities in Cambridge and Potential Next Steps

The Committee discussed the recent Black Lives Matter (BLM) Cambridge protest at City Hall in which 4 activists chained themselves to the entrance and were subsequently arrested. The discussion focused on how the Committee might be able to help the community have a conversation on the issues that were brought up during the demonstration. During the committee discussion it was recognized that it might be better in small groups with many different voices, and also that it might have to be something a few months down the road. The committee agreed that it was not best suited to organize and

facilitate this type of public conversation in the short term, but that the Combatting Racism Working Group should continue to look into the issue and explore possible responses, activities and or events.

Next Steps and Closing

The next meetings of the Committee will be Thursday, October 20th, Thursday, November 10th, and Thursday, December 8th.