

## **Cedar Falls Racial Equity Task Force Meeting**

Wednesday, July 14, 2021 – 4:00-5:30 PM

Cedar Falls Public Safety in person and via Video Conference

*To protect against the spread of COVID-19, this meeting was also offered via video conference.*

**Task Force Members Present:** Frank Darrah (Task Force Chair); Kelly Dunn (Task Force Vice Chair); Melissa Heston; Andy Pattee; Felicia Smith-Nalls; Lisa Sesterhenn; Will Frost; Paul Lee; Eashaan Vajpeyi; Wilfred “Mickye” Johnson

**Facilitators:** Omar Padilla; Aimee Viniard-Weideman

**City Staff/Elected Officials Present:** Craig Berte; Jennifer Rodenbeck; Toni Babcock; Katie Terhune; Ron Gaines; Kevin Rogers

**Absent:** LaTanya Graves

**Members of the public were also present both in person and via video conference.**

1. Call to Order:

Chair Darrah called the meeting to order at 4:01 PM.

2. Roll Call/Attendance:

City Liaison Babcock took roll call.

3. Approval of 06-23-21 Minutes:

Task Force Member Dunn moved the minutes be approved; seconded by Task Force Member Heston; approved unanimously.

4. Agenda Review:

Facilitator Viniard-Weideman spoke about updates from the Task Force Subcommittees and requested they present: who is in the group; how often the group has met; what the group has done and found; what support the group needs; plans to move ahead; and when the group can host a work session. She requested clear next steps for the subcommittees’ work; an overview of remaining meetings; and broad next steps for the Task Force.

5a-c. Subcommittee Updates: Public Safety, Education, and Housing

Vice Chair Dunn stated that she, Task Force Members Lee and Frost, and Chief Berte are the Public Safety subcommittee; the group has met once. She stated Chief Berte advised the subcommittee what Public Safety Services looks like now and what’s been done; what trainings are provided; and policies regarding equipment, accountability, hiring; and community engagement. She stated the data they want to obtain focuses on these areas: traffic stops by location and by demographic; arrest data; calls for service relative to area of town; population data. Chief Berte added obtaining comparisons with data from the Sheriff’s Department and the Waterloo Police Department. Vice Chair Dunn stated that Cedar Falls Public Safety has a good amount of training already with a focus on diversity and gaining diversity. She stated the subcommittee wants to

recommend trainings and/or recommended purchases for Public Safety. She stated that the data required will take time to obtain, review, and organize, and requested this subcommittee present in a latter Task Force meeting. Task Force Member Lee stated that citizens aren't informed about what Public Safety has been doing for the past 15-20 years of diversity and inclusion training. Vice Chair Dunn stated Public Safety needs to present this, and on other platforms in addition to Channel 15. Task Force Member Frost expressed surprise that the Public Safety members feel such a sense of responsibility towards diversity, equity, and inclusion (D.E.I.). Vice Chair Dunn stated that Task Force Member Frost is going to put together a survey for Public Safety staff to determine personal sense of responsibility towards equity, specifically. She stated that there was conversation around what kind of person should be hired [characteristics]. Task Force Member Heston questioned if trend lines can be found in arrest and stop data to show if the trainings completed have had an impact. Task Force Member Johnson agreed; he stated if the records don't show change, the training is not working and should be reevaluated. Task Force Member Sesterhenn questioned the wording for what kind of people [the City] should hire and to clarify; Task Force Member Heston agreed. Vice Chair Dunn expressed those who have the best intentions in doing the job and who care for equity and the community. Task Force Member Heston questioned the complaint/discipline/ consequence process when someone is hired and but issues arise; Task Force Member Smith-Nalls also questioned the complaint process through HR, specifically the back end. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman recommended any language used regarding hiring should be objective instead of subjective, I.E. concrete behaviors and skill sets versus characteristics. Task Force Member Frost commented on the restrictions under Iowa law regarding allowed trainings for public employees and compliance. Facilitator Padilla recommended a general review of the hiring process: what does it look like currently, what should it move towards; Vice Chair Dunn recommends also reviewing the firing process. Task Force Member Vajpeyi stated that education should occur about why certain practices are utilized; there has to be a baseline against which to judge acceptable behaviors. Task Force Member Johnson used the example of an officer showing their weapon: do they do it for everyone or just those who don't look like you; Task Force Member Smith-Nalls recommended measuring against "yourself": I.E., if average officers in the area draw their weapon twice a year but one is doing it exponentially more, what is the reason and towards whom is it happening? Task Force Member Vajpeyi questioned how data is tracked. There were no additional comments or questions from the Subcommittee or the Task Force.

Task Force Member Pattee stated he, Chair Darrah, and Task Force Members Smith-Nalls, Graves, and Johnson made up the subcommittee; they have met once. Task Force Member Pattee referred to the slideshow for data presentation. He stated the Task Force discussed what's been done as a district; the district's next steps; the subcommittee's next steps. He presented data about student enrollment broken down by race and language(s) spoken. He spoke about the district's Equity Committee and presented the goal and action plan. He presented data about the frequency of hurtful comments by teachers by sex, sexual preference, and race. He presented information about Multicultural Individuals Revered Among Educators (M.I.R.A.E.) as a district goal for educator diversity. He presented data on each school's racial demographic, including students in the Talented and Gifted program (TAG) and those who have Individualized Education Plans (IEP); there was also data comparing Cedar Falls' 4 year graduation rates to the state's for the past three years by race, individuals with IEPs, and individuals who qualify for free and reduced lunch (FRL). Task Force Member Johnson clarified the data being requested will include TAG students and students in college prep courses for graduation data; minority versus majority; and assessment data. He questioned if students of color have the same choices and skills necessary at graduation as majority students; is this being tracked? He questioned why there is less diversity in teaching staff: because people of color aren't applying; is the culture a problem; other reasons? Task Force Member Smith-Nalls commented the schools are more diverse than the City population. She stated marketing and public relations (PR) are important to advise what the school district is doing, to provide a "fact over feeling" view; she recommended as an outcome to show what's really happening, focusing on strengths, then saying, this is what we need next. Task Force Member Johnson stated the group discussed promoting the diversity that Cedar Falls has through events as a possible recommendation. He stated students of color may not realize until they graduate and leave the area that issues they grew up with weren't acceptable and/or were discriminatory; he questioned how to let all students know what's acceptable and what's not. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls spoke to the difference between welcoming people into the current culture of Cedar Falls (assimilating) as opposed to welcoming individual cultures into Cedar Falls and learning about them (celebrating diversity) and

stated both are important levels of inclusion. Task Force Member Heston spoke to the negative comment data (in the slideshow), specifically the low report rate of students of color and the LGBTQIA community; she questioned is it because of a lack of “seeing” the students – do teachers/staff engage less for fear of misspeaking and/or trying to not “see” them as different; are they truly being recognized? She asked if there was any data about this. Task Force Members Smith-Nalls and Frost spoke about hindsight and accepting “more than [they] would now” due to not knowing differently, being the only environment known, until being out of the situation and the importance of tracking this data. Task Force Members Smith-Nalls and Pattee spoke about the past graduate data; it goes back 6 or 7 years and will continue to be collected. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls stated there are other groups “going through it”; while the focus now may be more on racial equity, recommendations for the next phase can include more other groups. Task Force Member Vajpeyi questioned why the school district is more diverse than the general population; he stated in terms of negative experience, it doesn’t come as much from teachers and staff, it’s more from peers and parents, and is more difficult to monitor in the wider community. Task Force Member Heston stated this conversation reflects a need for better education regarding language and micro-aggressions. Task Force Member Frost stated a need to be aware of what legally can be taught while being compliant with regulations. Task Force Member Johnson agreed with members Heston and Vajpeyi about being recognized by teachers and comments by peers and community; he also agreed with members Smith-Nalls and Frost about accepting things without knowing differently until being removed from the situation.

Task Force Member Heston stated she, Task Force Members Sesterhenn and Vajpeyi, and City staff Director of Finance and Business Operations Rodenbeck, Director of Community Development Sheetz, and City Administrator Gaines made up the housing subcommittee and they have met twice. She referred to their slideshow for data presentation. She stated the data reviewed is available census data (2012), rental and Section 8 housing data (2020), and real estate sales data (2020). She presented Cedar Falls’ racial demographic information; owner-occupied housing rates, their median value, and median income; comparisons between Cedar Falls and Waterloo home sale pricing data; Section 8 housing data including number of units, racial demographics, the wait list time and preferential applicants. She stated subcommittee challenges are: housing is a very broad topic impacted by multiple factors; and historic factors have impacted settlement between Waterloo and Cedar Falls – does the Task Force want to research the history or focus on the future? She stated the subcommittee’s key questions are: is housing a primary casual factor in racial distribution differences and if so what contemporary factors impact buyers and renters of color versus white counterparts; what data does the Task Force most want to see; and what does the Task Force want to present in the final report regarding housing? Task Force Member Vajpeyi stated that he feels the housing issue can be solved with money and that it shows a lot about what Cedar Falls cares about that the City is spending money to convert rental homes to single-family homes but not investing in rental and Section 8 housing; Section 8 has stringent maintenance requirements and landlords may be willing to comply but the cost is prohibitive; there is some Federal overlap to consider. Task Force Member Johnson questioned where the rental properties are located and where are the Section 8 properties located. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls stated Section 8 is associated [by the community] with the Black and brown population but the data presented doesn’t support that and the dialogue around it is “poor people”; she stated Cedar Falls rent is skewed due to the University and is only going to rise. Task Force Member Vajpeyi agreed that if the push continues to demolish or repurpose rental housing to single family homes, renters will be pushed to new apartments/construction and it will likely be over the Section 8 cap; he questioned if the rental prices can be capped or structures required to include so many lower-income renters for a predetermined number of years. Task Force Member Heston agreed; she referenced the data about the cost of houses sold in Cedar Falls and stated they’re “building out” so there are planning and zoning issues involved. She stated that enrollment at UNI is dropping so the number of employees will drop and it will affect housing, especially student rentals. She asked the Task Force if tracking historical information is critical or if the subcommittee should look at more contemporary issues; Task Force Member Sesterhenn stated the group hasn’t yet answered the question of the causal factor of housing: the sense of belonging that makes people want to come here. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls states that socio-economic status is tied so closely to race that Cedar Falls just prices people out; she stated she feels the biggest disparity in Cedar Falls isn’t race, it’s money. Task Force Member Vajpeyi stated that Cedar Falls is socio-economically gated due to pricing. Task

Force Member Frost agreed that this has been Cedar Falls momentum, grown not with diversity in mind but with economics in mind.

6-7. Consideration of Action Items – Next Steps

Facilitator Viniard-Weidemann stated that the Task Force will start with the Housing subcommittee at the next meeting as time was cut short; she confirmed that the subcommittees would meet at least once before the next Task Force meeting and had clear direction on work. Facilitator Padilla encouraged the Housing subcommittee to keep digging and coming up with questions even they remain unanswered. Chair Darrah encouraged the Task Force to consider what the Council can do in the recommendations. Task Force Member Pattee recommended focusing on the future and not the past; Task Force Member Heston acknowledged the answer to the question from the Housing presentation. Task Force Member Johnson requested the police report(s) with regard to location for both Housing and Public Safety. Director Rodenbeck recommended considering which tasks the subcommittees and Task Force can do and which need to be recommendations in the report for the next committee. Facilitator Viniard-Weidemann reviewed the timeline for remaining meetings for Task Force scope and recommendations for the report.

8. Next Meeting Date:

The next meeting of the Cedar Falls Racial Equity Task Force will be Wednesday, July 28, 2021 from 4:00 – 5:30 PM.

9. Adjournment:

Chair Darrah accepted a motion to adjourn. Task Force Member Lee moved; Vice Chair Dunn seconded. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 5:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Katie Terhune, Administrative Assistant