

Cedar Falls Racial Equity Task Force Meeting

Wednesday, August 11, 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; Lisa Sesterhenn; Paul Lee; Eashaan Vajpeyi; Andy Pattee; Felicia Smith-Nalls; Will Frost; Wilfred “Micky” Johnson

Facilitators: Omar Padilla; Aimee Viniard-Weideman

City Staff/Elected Officials Present: Craig Berte; Ron Gaines; Katie Terhune; Lisa Roeding

Absent: LaTanya Graves

Members of the public were also present via video conference.

1. Call to Order:

Vice Chair Dunn called the meeting to order at 4:04 PM.

2. Roll Call/Attendance:

Vice Chair Dunn took roll call.

3. Approval of 07-28-21 Minutes:

Task Force Member Lee moved the minutes be approved; seconded by Task Force Member Johnson; approved unanimously.

4. Agenda Review/Changes:

Facilitator Viniard-Weideman reviewed the agenda; it was approved with no changes.

5a. Subcommittee Update: Housing Subcommittee Work Session

Task Force Member Heston referenced the Housing subcommittee handout and stated the subcommittee both updated previously presented data with 2019 numbers and obtained additional data, including income level by race. She presented income level by race; Task Force Member Johnson questioned if the disparity could be due to the high percentage of white versus other races. Task Force Member Heston presented information on percentage of homeowners and renters and average home sale data in Cedar Falls versus Waterloo; she stated that with averages, a few higher-dollar homes can skew the data; she stated that per Community Development staff, a home below \$150,000 in Cedar Falls would be appropriate for a moderate income family; she points out the disparity in the number of homes in Waterloo sold at \$150,000 or less versus Cedar Falls. Vice Chair Dunn commented that homes under \$150,000 aren't available; Task Force Member Heston questioned if it's because they aren't being sold or that they don't exist; Task Force Member Frost stated that Cedar Falls homes start at a higher asking price; Task Force Member Heston questioned if they were appraised at a higher value or it's due to demand; Task Force Member Frost responded both, they are appraised higher and as homes around it are sold at higher value, that also raises the price. Task Force Member Heston presented property tax data. She presented data on the ages of housing and access to housing by people of color (POC); she stated that houses built before 1970 are far more likely to have been built within the context of segregation through acts such as explicit covenants and property deeds, or through lending discrimination and/or access to Veteran's benefits.

Task Force Member Lee questioned if selling practices have affected this data; Task Force Member Heston responds that her take-away from this data is that discriminatory practices originally written into law, even once no longer legal, and are perpetuated through tradition. Task Force Member Lee questioned the gap between 1970 and 1980, what happened. Task Force Member Heston stated that laws regarding desegregation passed before 1970 were often ineffective, but legally by 1980 housing laws existed to negate housing discrimination. Task Force Member Johnson stated that banks can still redline loan applications regardless of ability to pay, and it's still done today. Task Force Member Heston reported Section 8 Housing Voucher data; Cedar Falls has the capacity to extend more vouchers but not the staff. Task Force Member Heston stated a concern about rent as a portion of income is that over 50% of renters pay over 30% of their income to rent, and 43% pay more than 35%; at 30% it becomes a hardship.

Task Force Member Sesterhenn summarized the section of the handout "what we don't know". This includes: existing lending practices (not policies) leading to inequities; planning and zoning policies that encourage or require creation of affordable housing, single family and multi-unit, for low and moderate income; complaints of housing or lending discrimination in the past 5 years; utilization of the Iowa Finance Authority by the City or Cedar Falls residents; funding other than HUD the City commits to affordable housing initiatives; how the City can create understanding and buy-in to the importance of these initiatives; does other outside funding exist to support these initiatives; and the impact of students in terms of statistics. Task Force Member Johnson stated that as Cedar Falls is associated with the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) when looking at rental properties the Task Force must consider families in rentals versus students in rentals and how that affects the data; Task Force Member Heston stated that the data is representative of all rental property, not broken down by that; she stated that Cedar Falls has a policy that restricts the number of unrelated individuals in rental housing; City Administrator Gaines stated it is limit the number of people occupying the property, the caring capacity of the unit, and specifically parking and the number of cars; Task Force Member Heston commented on the difficulty a family might have paying the same rent on a property that could be split among students; what motivates someone to rent to families versus students. Task Force Member Johnson stated that students aren't eligible for Section 8 assistance; he requested to see data on student rentals. Task Force Member Vajpeyi commented the data won't be available because you don't know who's living in the properties in time for this report; Task Force Member Johnson stated if not available for this report but looking forward, and does the lack of family rentals discourage families from moving in to Cedar Falls. Task Force Member Sesterhenn stated that the Task Force can now express why the breakdown of family versus student rental information is important. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls stated the Community Development department for the City is important resource for rehabilitation assistance, possible down payment assistance, etc.; she stated there is more Section 8 available if the City pursued it. She stated the dialogue about renters needs to change because it's very negative, there is a stigma associated with renters and Section 8 renters bringing the City and neighborhoods down. Task Force Member Sesterhenn stated that falls under "what we don't know" about using funds for affordable housing as well as "what we're not doing" to prioritize affordable rental options on the hand-out. She outlined "what is being done": City offers a forgivable loan of up to \$10,000 for renovation of rental property to single family homes; and "what we are not doing": providing landlords with an equitable program to let them meet Section 8 housing requirements; equally prioritizing affordable rental options compared to home ownership options; considering environmental factors, the importance of safe and healthy housing; considering overall systemic factors that may prevent individuals/families from living in Cedar Falls.

Task Force Member Vajpeyi talked about potential recommendations: create educational programs and outreach for citizens and landlords to emphasize importance of healthy housing and de-stigmatize conversations about Section 8 renters and rentals; complete a Housing Needs Assessment; increase the availability of affordable housing through Section 8 expansion, incentive programs, consider changing zoning codes to allow a variety of housing types (dependent on developers' and community members' willingness), consider tax abatements, and initiatives to balance investments in market rate and low income; diversity and inclusion scoring on new site plans requiring board or Council approval including proximity to transportation, workplaces, and grocery options, and relative proposed rent; addition to City staff full time individual to liaise with the Human Rights Commission and support diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Task Force Member Vajpeyi challenged the language of the section regarding age of houses and likelihood of discriminatory practices and recommended broader statements; there was discussion about restricted covenants and the environment they created, specifically that Cedar Falls has a history of exclusion, and perpetuated even once no longer legally enforced; members requested additional data to back up this section. Task Force Member Johnson asked if Habitat for Humanity is working in Cedar Falls; Task Force Member Heston stated the cost of lots has prohibited Habitat activity but a new federal grant is reestablishing that relationship; Task Force Member Vajpeyi stated restrictions on new construction limit Habitat participation; City Administrator Gaines stated the City has a current contract for a Habitat house. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls recommended leaning into “City of the Future” where multi-economic and multi-structure neighborhoods are desired and selling the idea that way; Vice Chair Dunn stated this is the goal of the current Downtown Vision Plan; Task Force Member Smith-Nalls described it not as bringing in new people but as taking care of the people already here, those that are underserved; she recommended changing the dialogue about Habitat homes and associated stigma.

Facilitator Viniard-Weideman asked what the Housing subcommittee needs from the group and if the group has more questions or comments for the subcommittee. Task Force Member Johnson recommended marketing to the community as a better tomorrow for all citizens. Task Force Member Vajpeyi recommended expansion of de-stigmatizing to not just Section 8 and Habitat housing, but all forms of affordable housing; looking into creating a down-payment assistance program, is there current City infrastructure for this; and clean up language on current statistics. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls referenced the new full-time staff recommendation and stated spending part-time working as Section 8 is unrealistic because Section 8 staff must fully focus on that; she recommended they be focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, human rights, community engagement, etc.; Section 8 will fund a new full-time staff through the vouchers if pursued. She stated that right now the discussion is about racial equity but moving forward it should be about equity for all; Task Force Member Dunn stated a recommendation needs to be the Task Force continue past this initial report and become an Equity Task Force. Task Force Member Pattee spoke about an initiative for students to help build homes with Habitat and it would create a unique partnership; Chair Darrah stated this builds community spirit. Task Force Member Sesterhenn requested the Task Force revisit the headings for the formal report; Chair Darrah stated the Task Force needs to consider how to make the report to Council. Task Force Member Frost recommended engaging with UNI which is going through a strategic planning process to attract more diverse students and employees and this Task Force’s work ties into that.

5b-c. Subcommittee Updates: Education and Public Safety

The Education and Public Safety subcommittees will each have a work session at the next two meetings.

6-7. Consideration of Action Items – Next Steps

Facilitator Viniard-Weideman requested clarification and consensus on public engagement meeting prior to Council presentation. Task Force Member Lee stated it’s important and wanted but there isn’t time to do it well and advised the Task Force’s first recommendation to Council once the report is approved be to promote and hold public engagement meeting(s); Task Force Members Johnson, Dunn, and Sesterhenn agree; Task Force Member Lee suggested considering dates, venues, and agendas for meeting(s) prior to Council presentation to show commitment to public engagement. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman requested a check to determine those in favor of waiting for public engagement until after Council presentation; Task Force Members Darrah, Dunn, Pattee, Smith-Nalls, Sesterhenn, Johnson, Frost, and Lee were in favor and Task Force Members Heston and Vajpeyi were not in favor. Task Force Member Vajpeyi stated the decision is bad from a public relations standpoint; it will be seen that the Task Force sought very little to no community input and the result will be seen as a bureaucratic conference room product. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls stated it’s important to attract the appropriate audience which will require significant time investment to promote and engage; Task Force Member Johnson suggested that the Task Force request Council approve moving to community engagement as the next level of the Task Force’s work. Task Force Member Lee stated for clarification that instead of submitting to Council a report for next steps, the Task Force submit a request for more time to

engage the public before presenting recommendations; after further discussion it was determined that the Task Force not ask for a decision at the initial presentation but request additional time for public engagement and feedback as this is a place to start and move forward. Task Force Member Lee recommended the document bear the title "Discovery Points" so it's clear at the presentation is not the final report but the initial discovery and the Task Force needs the people at large involved and the group needs backing to move forward; Task Force Member Johnson agrees. Task Force Member Heston states not providing opportunity for public engagement is problematic, however if it's not done well it's not useful, but right now logistically it isn't feasible; Task Force Member Frost commented on the balance between bringing the public in too early versus too late and that upcoming elections may be a concern; Task Force Member Johnson agreed it would be ideal but there isn't time. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman recommended looking at it in phases: the Task Force is the first phase and public engagement can be the next phase; additional phases can be explored from there; Chair Darrah commented that other communities probably spent a year gathering community input and hypothesized that more input will equal more Council support. Task Force Member Pattee stated how the Task Force frames the report, and agrees with the titling of "Discovery"; this cannot be seen as a one-time committee, it must be on-going and evolve; Vice Chair Dunn states the Task Force must show the community this work is important. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman took a final consensus on deferring public engagement until after initial Council presentation to allow time for proper promotion and community involvement: in agreement were Task Force Members Darrah, Dunn, Pattee, Smith-Nalls, Sesterhenn, Frost, and Lee; not in agreement but supportive were Task Force Members Heston and Vajpeyi; not in agreement were none.

8. Next Meeting Date:

Facilitator Viniard-Weideman confirmed that the next meeting will be a work session with the Education subcommittee; the following week would be the Public Safety subcommittee. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman questioned how the Task Force wants to paint the picture of Cedar Falls and what data and sources will be used. Chair Darrah stated the Task Force will want to schedule a work session with Council about the presentation and recommendations/next step being presented. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman asked to clarify if the work session would be before or after the presentation; Chair Darrah, Vice Chair Dunn, and City Administrator Gaines will discuss the logistics of scheduling a work session and present options and processes. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman asked if the work groups could discuss the big-picture questions before next meeting; they agreed. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman asked about common data sources: the group responded most is census data and school district data as commonly accepted statistics as well as the City's compiled demographic data. Task Force Member Lee stated that it may not be appropriate to just compare data against Cedar Falls, specifically with request to things such as traffic stops (not only Cedar Falls residents are stopped within City limits) and posed this as a data issue; City Administrator Gaines and Director of Finance and Business Operations Jennifer Rodenbeck will help with this data. Task Force Member Sesterhenn requested that in the Discovery document it is explained the focus areas considered and how the Task Force chose the three current focus areas. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman recommended adding one or two more meetings between the last scheduled and presentation of recommendations/report.

9. Adjournment:

Vice Chair accepted a motion to adjourn. Task Force Lee so moved; Task Force Member Pattee seconded. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 5:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Katie Terhune, Administrative Assistant