

Cedar Falls Racial Equity Task Force Meeting

Wednesday, July 28, 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

Facilitators: Omar Padilla; Aimee Viniard-Weideman

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

Absent: LaTanya Graves; Andy Pattee; Felicia Smith-Nalls; Wilfred “Mickye” Johnson; Will Frost

Members of the public were also present via video conference.

1. Call to Order:

Chair Darrah called the meeting to order at 4:05 PM.

2. Roll Call/Attendance:

City Liaison Babcock took roll call.

3. Approval of 07-14-21 Minutes:

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

4. Agenda Review/Changes:

No agenda review or changes.

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

Task Force Member Heston stated the Housing subcommittee was unable to meet but had raised additional questions and gotten new data from the City. Task Force Member Sesterhenn spoke about the Black Hawk County Health Department’s Systems Mapping in relation to Housing, Public Safety, Education, and other areas; the Task Force will look more in depth at this at a later time. Task Force Member Vajpeyi questioned how the City can break down socio-economic barriers for equitable and diverse housing in the City; changing the attitude about different classes and races won’t happen if it’s cost prohibitive to live in the City; he stated one gets a better impression living near others than from the news or greater culture. He recommended increasing Section 8 housing options in the City and including criteria for all new site plans brought before the Planning and Zoning Commission or City Council to include a diversity and inclusion section for consideration. He recommended looking at splitting the grant funds currently used to convert rental properties into single-family homes with creating and renovating Section 8 housing. Task Force Member Heston stated the subcommittee has more recent data regarding income level disparity between Black and white residents as well as data about the percentage of rent-stressed (30-50% of income spent on rent) and rent-burdened (50% or more of income spent on rent) residents. She suggested expanding low and moderate income housing to promote home ownership as well as more affordable rental housing. She stated the subcommittee studied the Polk County One Economy plan. Task Force Member Vajpeyi stated a barrier to home ownership is the disparate amount of mortgage

denials to POC; he stated personal relationships will help, such as being neighbors. He stated Cedar Falls doesn't get more Section 8 vouchers out due to limited staff time and focus; could the City do more. Task Force Member Lee questioned if the use of grant money for rental house conversion can be restructured; who funds it and what are the limitations of the use? Task Force Member Vajpeyi stated it is City funding. Task Force Member Heston stated if the City looks for more grant funding that also requires a staff member to find, apply for, and administer them. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman questioned if the subcommittee has enough work for the next meeting; Task Force Member Heston stated yes.

Vice Chair Dunn stated the Public Safety subcommittee met once; she stated Chief Berte is working on gathering data, including what Cedar Falls is already doing. She stated they discussed hiring: wording of qualifications changed from subjective to objective; focus on post-high school education – currently require 60 hours, an AA degree but prefer a bachelor's degree or higher as this provides more time to mature and meet a more diverse populace past high school – Task Force Member Lee stated it shows the candidate exhibits time management, discipline, multi-tasking, and prioritizing skills. Vice Chair Dunn stated currently upon hire, officers are required to take a psychological exam followed with psychiatric visit if necessary, take a polygraph, and undergo a background check; Cedar Falls ensures minorities and females are on the hiring panel and diversity questions added; candidate responses are watched closely for red flags. She stated the subcommittee will recommend positive marketing of Public Safety's diversity training and actions in the community; Task Force Member Sesterhenn questioned if positive marketing recommendation strictly for Public Safety or other areas as well; Vice Chair Dunn confirmed in all areas; Task Force Member Lee stated to market to the community the Task Force needs to hear from inside the community. Chief Berte states most data will be available by the next subcommittee meeting. Task Force Member Vajpeyi questioned hiring with regard to use of marijuana; Chief Berte responded that since 2016 policy has been adjusted twice and outside factors such as moving from a state where it was legal are taken into consideration; he states the City, county, and Waterloo should have a consistent standard. Task Force Member Heston stated some Police Departments have a dedicated Social Worker on staff for calls with mental health or domestic violence issues. Chief Berte provided information on Elevate, a program new in fall of 2020 funded by a grant, providing social workers for calls across Black Hawk County; there could be up to a 30 minute response time. He stated Waterloo has social workers on staff through a grant and they ride along with officers. He stated Elevate is a great program; having on staff would be beneficial but must be weighed against cost. He stated officers are being trained in crisis intervention which gives Public Safety better response to mental health emergencies; Vice Chair Dunn recommended this training be in the marketing push; Task Force Member Heston commented on the impact of training and the need to ensure if its effective and if not, what can be done; Facilitator Padilla questioned if the data dive is at a point where the impact is backed by numbers. Task Force Member Vajpeyi returned to the hiring discussion; he stated a bachelor's degree is a good benchmark but if it's about time to mature and surround oneself with more diversity, then experience should also be considered as comparable, especially as degrees are costly. He requested an explanation of why the City's reasoning for funding one program over another and why the City claims to be "cash-strapped"; Task Force member Heston stated that Cedar Falls' property taxes are lower than Waterloo's but that the properties are valued higher.

Chair Darrah stated that the Education subcommittee met once; they are still going through lots of data and don't have any additional report or findings at this time. There were no additional questions or comments.

6-7. Consideration of Action Items – Next Steps

Facilitator Viniard-Weideman referenced a tentative future meeting schedule including one meeting per subcommittee (three meetings) to present information and recommendations and one to review and consensus full report and recommendations; that would be the last scheduled Task Force meeting. She suggested two additional meetings: one for community engagement and feedback and one to review the community feedback, amend report with feedback as appropriate, and Council presentation. Task Force Member Lee stated it looked like a good outline; he recommended giving a tentative update to Council. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman stated the Task Force could vote to agree on the community engagement meeting to hold the date; discussion will

return to voting. Task Force Member Vajpeyi questioned if the community meeting would be for all three topics in one night; Facilitator Viniard-Weideman suggested a general overview of the report to be presented with the understanding that this is just the beginning of the process and requests for additional community input. She questioned how deep the Task Force wants the report and referenced a tentative report outline provided to members; she suggested the report be thought provoking and contain recommendations for City Council and staff; keep in mind time frame limitations to complete. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman suggested the Task Force look at the process; could some existing boards and commissions take on some of the work moving forward; keep timeline in mind; and consider a public meeting before presenting to Council. Task Force Member Heston expressed concern with the lack of public attendance for current Task Force meetings, as it had a lot of interest originally; she questioned if it is because of the lack of opportunity for public engagement. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman referenced a worksheet for the subcommittees' use; she recommended using the "don't know" and "not doing" categories to capture questions the Task Force has but can't answer by the report due date and using those for future recommendations. Task Force Member Vajpeyi suggested the focus of the community engagement meeting could be: what doesn't the City know and do; and what *should* the City know and do. He recommended three separate meeting dates and times, one for each subcommittee focus, and suggested more outside viewpoints be sought than inside; Task Force Member Lee agreed with three separate events; he challenged that first the City must look inward before outward. Chair Darrah suggested presenting to the Council first and receiving sanction from the City before holding a community engagement event; there was debate by several members about lack of community members present at many meetings and how to market the meetings to raise attendance. Task Force Member Sesterhenn suggested a joint work session with City Council. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman stated the current recommendations as she understood them: for the City to move forward with this project past this Task Force and recommendations under each topic of Housing, Education, and Public Safety. She stressed the timeline: where is energy best spent; what work is yet to be done; should a public engagement meeting be held prior to Council presentation; and is there time to do the public engagement meeting well? Task Force Member Lee spoke to continuation of Task Force Work and questioned if continuation would hold more importance under the Human Rights Commission (HRC) or as a Task Force of Council or the Mayor. Task Force Member Sesterhenn stated the project is bigger than the three focus topics; segregation, us versus them, and knowing your neighbors are part of systems practice, and tie into the three topics. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman suggested the Task Force's next meeting focus is to make a decision about holding a public engagement meeting; Task Force Members Lee and Dunn stated only if it can be done well, and three separate meetings are necessary but if there's not enough time it can be a recommendation for later. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman asked Task Force Member Sesterhenn to share Black Hawk County Systems Mapping information; Task Force Member Sesterhenn agreed. Task Force Member Heston suggested each subcommittee complete the "Know/Don't Know" worksheet for the next meeting; Facilitator Viniard-Weideman will provide copies to each group and offered facilitator presence at subcommittee meetings. Facilitator Padilla stated this format for the next meeting will push back the subcommittee presentation meetings. Task Force Members Vajpeyi and Lee spoke about the lack of public engagement through this process; it's normal for interest to wane but once the report comes out those interested will get involved; Facilitator Padilla encouraged remaining positive and motivated to obtain Council and community support; he stated the Task Force needs to give itself credit for the work done already. Chair Darrah states the need to get Council and City staff support, and by extension HRC support. Vice Chair Dunn suggested a recommendation that the City hire a full time Human Rights staff person. Task Force Member Heston asked Chair Darrah if he recommended holding public engagement meeting prior to presenting to Council; he responded no, to temper expectations, and stated the public engagement meeting could influence Council decision. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman presented the three options for public engagement meeting heard so far: all three topic subcommittees present separately; a general presentation of the work started for feedback to present to Council; or recommendation of a public engagement meeting after Council presentation. Task Force Member Lee stated there is an upcoming Council and Mayoral election; the Task Force needs to make sure its work is extended past this change; consider this when planning a public engagement meeting. Task Force Member Vajpeyi stated the HRC will continue the work of this Task Force.

8. Next Meeting Date:

The next meeting of the Cedar Falls Racial Equity Task Force will be Wednesday, August 11, 2021 from 4:00 – 5:30 PM.

9. Adjournment:

Chair Darrah accepted a motion to adjourn. Task Force Lee so moved; Vice Chair Dunn seconded. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 5:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Katie Terhune, Administrative Assistant