

Cedar Falls Racial Equity Task Force Meeting

Wednesday, September 8, 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; Felicia Smith-Nalls; Lisa Sesterhenn; Will Frost; Wilfred “Mickye” Johnson; Paul Lee

Facilitators: Aimee Vinaird-Weideman; Omar Padilla

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

Members of the public were also present via video conference.

Absent: Eashaan Vajpeyi; Andy Pattee; LaTanya Graves

1. Call to Order:

Chair Darrah called the meeting to order at 4:12 PM.

2. Roll Call/Attendance:

City Staff Terhune took roll call.

3. Agenda Review/Changes:

Facilitator Viniard-Weideman reviewed the agenda with the Task Force. The Task Force originally anticipated a presentation by the Public Safety subcommittee but that was rescheduled to the following meeting to allow the report work draft team to review some items with the full Task Force before continuing.

4. Approval of 08-25-21 Minutes:

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

5. Review Demographic Census Data for Final Report

Facilitator Viniard-Weideman provided Task Force Members with two handout-outs for Census data and one on Black Hawk County community equity trends as options to review and consider as data sources for the report and requested members offer any other available sources; options to move forward with data right now are either to be included in the report or recommended to continue to research moving forward; she opened for discussion.

Task Force Member Heston requested income data for Cedar Falls broken down by race; she stated it is present in the data provided for the County; the challenge is what that means for Cedar Falls, or Waterloo. She stated the Housing subcommittee had some information available to them but questioned if more current data is

available. Task Force Member Heston asked Task Force Member Sesterhenn if the income data for the Housing subcommittee was specific to Cedar Falls or Black Hawk County; Task Force Member Sesterhenn responded “county”; she stated it should be an easy find, the data is either available or not. Task Force Member Johnson stated the Census bureau can sometimes tabulate specific information requested.

Task Force Member Johnson stated the data dive should focus on Cedar Falls. Task Force Member Sesterhenn asked about comparisons with Black Hawk County; Task Force Member Johnson responded that looking at Black Hawk County, the minority population is reflected for the County but the major minority population is Waterloo and Cedar Falls. Task Force Member Heston stated a strength is that the racial diversity has increased in Cedar Falls in the last 10 years without a concentrated effort to work on diversity; much of it comes from the group of two or more races; she stated the comparison to Waterloo is important because most of the population does live in Waterloo or Cedar Falls and it’s the discrepancies experienced in both places by African Americans and Latinos/Hispanics that have raised concerns, like the 24/7 report.

Task Force Member Johnson stated a data challenge is the number of college students; Task Force Member Heston recommended asking the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) for student enrollment data, specifically ethnicity, since 2010. Facilitator Padilla stated the data from the US Census came late; Iowa State filtered it to provide handouts to the Task Force; he stated it’s unclear where more granular data can be obtained. Task Force Member Johnson asked if the City has more data on population growth. Director of Finance and Business Operations Rodenbeck responded, nothing different than what’s provided here; the City Geographic Information Systems (GIS) personnel tried to narrow some things in the Census data as well but has no additional data to provide at this time though efforts will continue; she stated the most recent income data available separated by race is from 2015-2019. Task Force Member Frost asked if the school system has some of this information.

Task Force Member Smith-Nalls asked about [data on] poverty levels by race, age, and family structure for Cedar Falls; in what’s presented it is available for the County but not the City. Facilitators Viniard-Weideman and Padilla stated they will take the questions back and try to provide more detailed information and will work with Director Rodenbeck for additional City numbers. Task Force Member Johnson requested it be specifically noted in the report if data not available right now. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls stated if the data is skewed, it’s very telling; the Task Force’s job isn’t just the report but to indicate red flags for the next phase to consider; Task Force Member Heston stated the [home] sales data previously presented was extremely skewed; Task Force Member Smith-Nalls questioned if the number [on poverty levels] will be inverted; Task Force Member Sesterhenn stated she will check with the epidemiologist. Task Force Member Johnson questioned if the data is not available, why is it not available or collected; Task Force Member Sesterhenn stated that it may have to be suppressed under a certain number but will look.

Facilitator Padilla asked the Task Force how members picture the data being presented in the report to paint the initial picture of what the community looks like; how much specificity is necessary if analysis is not also provided. Task Force Member Heston stated part of the challenge is using a piece of data just about Cedar Falls to make a judgment that the City has a diversity issue; she stated context is important for understanding, such as comparisons to Waterloo and the state, to help others to understand where Cedar Falls sits on the issue of diversity and inclusion. She stated data is used to persuade, highlight, and illustrate; appendices can have huge amounts of data but what is included in the body has a specific purpose and right now without knowing what will be in the report it’s difficult to know what data needs to be in it. Task Force Member Heston stated right now, other than income discrepancies, the Task Force has not seen huge alarms going off showing a catastrophe that’s out of line with what might be expected from a community with a long-time history of trying to be exclusive which is documented by Housing data in some ways and the lack of diversity in hiring. If the goal is to make a report that more work needs to be done, what supports that and makes it a problem.

Task Force Member Smith-Nalls stated you can compare against yourself; that’s where you see red flags. She stated proximity to employment, transportation, and practices of red-lining affected where people chose or were able to live; the context of origin is so different. To compare against itself, for instance, Cedar Falls has a

small percentage of Black residents but if 60% of stops are Black individuals, that's a red flag. She stated that compared to Waterloo, Cedar Falls will always seem equitable because there are more people; there can be a comfort comparing to Waterloo but should avoid promoting the "versus" narrative. The internal dialogue, such as how diverse the Cedar Falls schools are and that the residents may be unaware of it and/or how to support it; residents need to have a conversation about Cedar Falls because that's what the City can compare against. There are many reasons why people don't want to live in Cedar Falls, including past personal experience(s), dialogue; education and new dialogue will be the strength of the report. She stated it's easy to get lost in negative data focusing on "versus" and skate over some data because it's not as bad as the comparison; Waterloo's population is also around 30,000 higher. Task Force Member Heston agreed with comparing against yourself but stated that some data could say that over the past few years Cedar Falls has improved [enough] and if that's where the Task Force ends up she would be unhappy with that conclusion. Task Force Member Johnson supported the statements also but asked are there clusters of African American residents, are they around the university, as opposed to around the City, and if so that's a red flag because they aren't just living in the City, they're here for university; he reiterated the comparison of Black residents to Black stops by Public Safety as a potential red flag; he questioned the number of Black Cedar Falls graduates going on to college as a red flag; he stated the Task Force can do a comparison to Waterloo and the State but need to focus and dive down on Cedar Falls and analysis on is there a problem and what is it. Task Force Member Sesterhenn asked to clarify if the deep dive would be on the three current focus areas and more general data will include Waterloo, the County, and the State; Task Force Member Johnson responded affirmatively; the Task Force needs to be able to say this is our sister city, this is the state, for general data then dive deep into the reason the Task Force is dealing with these issues. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls recommended finding a comparable city size-wise that has a similar university; talking through the meetings, items have been identified as having skewed data, for example Section 8 vouchers; a city that looks like Cedar Falls would have benchmarks that look different [than Waterloo].

Chair Darrah stated that the number one recommendation is identifying more individuals to continue this conversation. Task Force Member Frost stated it is good to identify things the Task Force can obtain now but keep in mind that there will be some not easily quantifiable data; there are a lot of metrics that affect why someone would not live in this city; that may be the next iteration but now using the data we have now; Task Force Member Lee agrees.

6. Final Report Work Team Update and Discussion

Facilitator Viniard-Weideman stated the report work team needs additional information regarding the Task Force's general recommendations (not the three specific focus areas) to move forward including: continuation of the Task Force beyond the report in October; public engagement; why this work matters; and any other recommendations.

Facilitator Viniard-Weideman opened discussion for point one, continuation of the Task Force. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls stated her recommendation for continuation/creation of an equity task force (all forms of equity, not just race) and hiring a full-time equity employee (FTE) for the City. Chair Darrah stated it should start with the equity task force and work toward the FTE as Council will need continuation of the discussion to consider hiring someone. Vice Chair Dunn questioned if the Task Force could be more accessible both for members and the community. Task Force Member Johnson asked how Task Force Members who live in Cedar Falls feel about Waterloo citizens being on the Task Force, did they bring value; Task Force Member Heston stated she can't imagine the quality of conversation would have occurred without input from Waterloo; Chair Darrah agreed, the demographic makes a move towards the larger community, not being as separate; Task Force Member Johnson stated that is not how he felt. Task Force Member Lee echoed the value of citizens from Waterloo as part of this initial task force; he stated not knowing what Waterloo is doing in response to the 24/7 report and in moving forward could there be periodic points of conversation in response to the report and updates between the two City governments or appropriate representative(s). Task Force Member Smith-Nalls offered to write about the initiatives from Waterloo that have grown from the 24/7 report that are not necessarily City-based but are City-supported. Task Force Member Johnson stated the data needs to say what it

needs to say; this Task Force is the catalyst to build something greater to conduct the research. Task Force Member Sesterhenn stated she liked inviting Waterloo people to the Cedar Falls Task Force; she questioned when it will be time for a Cedar Valley [task force]. Chair Darrah asked Task Force Member Frost if there is a role for Grow Cedar Valley (GCV); Task Force Member Frost stated GCV is involved in a lot of initiatives such as 24/7 Black, One Cedar Valley, economic inclusion, etc., that conversation is being had; Task Force Member Smith-Nalls stated the makeup of One Cedar Valley has both mayors, Hawkeye Community College president, UNI president, Waterloo and Cedar Falls schools contacts, business leaders, and non-profit leaders; it addresses barriers to growth, economics, employment, and success and was started in response to the 24/7 report; it would be a good platform to network. Task Force Member Frost stated the Task Force does not want to duplicate services but is an opportunity for the Task Force to make sure Cedar Falls is part of the initiative and move the needle forward within the City. Chair Darrah asked if the Task Force is recommending designating a speaker/group to network with other organizations. Task Force Member Heston stated that it needs to be expressed that Cedar Falls is somewhat dependent on its proximity to Waterloo for some things such as federal funds for Community Development Block Grant and Section 8 vouchers. Facilitator Viniard-Weideman reflected on discussion as the Task Force's desire to recommend continuation of the Task Force but not in isolation, the group would network with other groups, and be intentional about efforts and initiatives; she reflected on discussion that some data will be specific to Cedar Falls and some will be in context of the Cedar Valley.

Facilitator Viniard-Weideman opened discussion on point two, public engagement. Vice Chair Dunn asked how the Task Force makes public engagement happen; how to connect with who needs to be contacted. Task Force Member Heston stated her fear that the Task Force may have already left some people feeling more cynical than they were about diversity, equity, and inclusion due to lack of significant public engagement already; she stated in public engagement moving forward the report may be seen as the Task Force possibly minimizing or downplaying issues; how does the Task Force remedy that at this point. Task Force Member Frost stated the Task Force needed time to grasp the concept for itself, before asking for input from the community to be sure what is being asked for; it's also important a concerted effort is made to get a good segment of the population, not just those with free time to attend; keep in mind proximity matters, and the events need to be held close to those the Task Force wants to engage with in multiple locations around the City. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls recommended an online input/form option, especially for those not comfortable with public speaking. Task Force Member Sesterhenn stated public engagement needs to be part of the greater plan; the Task Force needs to be intentional about the information being gathered and have a plan for that data's use. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls stated the Task Force needs to be "really prepared"; people will be very emotional, ready to talk about anything and everything; she pointed out the Task Force required facilitators to help discussion stay productive instead of circular; without a plan, conversations with the public will not go well; sessions will go very long, and dialogue can become dangerous because people can become emotional and non-directive in their comments, and the conversation becomes not about the issues but about what people involved are saying; she stressed that the previous decision to forgo a public engagement session was not because public opinion and time is not valued, it was because these are respected and valued; the Task Force wants information that is valuable and meaningful, and the Task Force needs a plan to do something with that information so it is not just grief-mining or telling a story. Task Force Member Johnson agreed public engagement requires a plan of action, what to do with the information. Chair Darrah agreed with Task Force Member Smith-Nalls' assessment of the Task Force's need for help with the meeting discussions; he stated the meetings have been open to the public for viewing but not input, and his hope that public input will be coming in the next phase.

Facilitator Viniard-Weideman opened discussion on point three, why this work matters. Vice Chair Dunn stated that feeling unsafe, unwanted, and un-included affects physical and mental health, ability to succeed, etc.; we live next to each other, play with each other, work with each other; the environment is much healthier when we thrive. Task Force Member Heston quoted Paul Wellstone: "We all do better when we all do better." She stated common mentality is that one can only thrive when doing better than others and other people aren't "my" problem; we are all connected even if we choose to think that other people and places aren't "my" problem. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls stated that part of healthy growth is assessment; initial assessment creates a baseline for tracking growth, a place to start. Task Force Member Sesterhenn stated systemic issues exist that can't be refuted; the plats with conditions existed in Cedar Falls within our parents' lifetime, how can it not be

something that matters. Task Force Member Frost stated we all grow up together or we all fall down together; as a community there is a workforce crisis, perception issues; systems of inequality and inequity are weapons of mass destruction; as a community, to be successful everyone has to be successful. Task Force Member Lee stated it is our responsibility to build a framework for the next generation to take forward, identify the pitfalls of our predecessors, and utilize the opportunity to fix what we can for the next generation; it's the Task Force's obligation to inform Cedar Falls, Waterloo, Black Hawk County, the metro service area, of the importance of and why the community should be engaged in the conversation. Task Force Member Smith-Nalls stated diversity will generate revenue, promote economic development, diversity in dollars, revenue from people driving through, etc.; making the Cedar Valley one will change the population, and invite bigger franchises. She stated that statistically the only reason Waterloo and Cedar Falls was on the [24/7 report] list was because it was done together, as one; Cedar Falls income data skewed the disparity significantly; she used the analogy of "one big shirt to get along" and stated the report put both cities as one and it's become a common view as the Cedar Valley, not Waterloo and Cedar Falls.

7-8. Consideration of Action Items and Next Steps

Facilitators Viniard-Weideman and Padilla stated they will send a follow-up email to Task Force Member requesting follow-up on questions presented at the meeting, ideas for data sources, and any quotes Task Force members would like to provide; potentially a Google form or document.

9. Next Meeting Date

The Task Force's next meeting is September 22, 2021 at 4:00 PM.

9. Adjournment:

Chair Darrah accepted a motion to adjourn. Vice Chair Dunn moved; Task Force Member Sesterhenn seconded. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 5:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Katie Terhune, Administrative Assistant