

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

Wednesday, September 22, 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; Paul Lee; LaTanya Graves

**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; Wilfred “Mickye” Johnson

1. Call to Order:

Chair Darrah called the meeting to order at 4:08 PM.

2. Roll Call/Attendance:

City Staff Terhune took roll call.

3. Agenda Review/Changes:

Chair Darrah reviewed the meeting agenda; there were no changes.

4. Approval of 09-08-21 Minutes:

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

5. Subcommittee Presentation: Policing

Task Force Member Lee stated that the time frame the Task Force was allotted did not allow for many additional areas that could be addressed although can be in the future; he stated that while the subcommittee’s official title is Public Safety, the main focus has been policing; he stated the subcommittee would present what they found, didn’t find, what the subcommittee has done and what they have not done.

Task Force Member Lee presented a handout citing Cedar Falls Police Department Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts over five areas: hiring/screening; training; policy/accountability; equipment; and community engagement.

Task Force Member Lee stated that hiring and screening processes include: a focus on the employee; hiring educated employees, including long-standing college credit and degree requirements; advertising employment opportunities in places with diversity, including schools offering policing certificates/degrees; representation by women and minorities on interview panels and events; process review by Civil Service Commission (CSC) in 2017 and 2021 including previous drug use guidelines, the review of driving record, drug use, arrest history, driver’s

license status upon testing instead of application, and use of objective data. A demographic breakdown of the current department was also included.

Task Force Member Lee stated that trainings include (and have been for): historical training; urban potential (35 years); undoing racism (25 years); crisis intervention (20 years) adding mental health CIT in 1999 (on-going); implicit bias training – the department partnered with Drake University in 2018, and spent half their training budget on it in 2019, prior to the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis; de-escalation training incorporated into all use of force and scenario training; current partnership with ELEVATE providing expanded mental health services to assist on calls for service. In 2020, legislation now requires increased de-escalation, DEI, and implicit bias training at Iowa Law Enforcement Academy, which this department has had in place for decades.

Task Force Member Lee stated policy and accountability practices include: formal complaint/internal investigation policy since mid-1980s; employee discipline is reviewed by outside legal firm; internal investigations are handled by outside law enforcement agency or law firm if a conflict of interest; on-going work with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and Mayor for a formalized process to file complaints with the HRC; on-going policy updates, and the policy manual reflects how the department operates and is reviewed by City legal staff; the department has had policies on racial profiling, use of force, de-escalation, and chokeholds for over 30 years. Task Force Member Heston questioned what the racial profiling policies are; Task Force Member Frost stated the information he would present shortly may answer this further. Task Force Member Lee stated the Black Hawk County Consolidated Dispatch Center began recording disposition codes (a set of identifiers for sex, approximate age, and race/ethnicity) 20 years ago and new effort is being made to expand them.

Task Force Member Lee stated the department has had car cameras since 1993 and body cameras since 2009 and they've been upgraded 4 times with the entire system replaced in 2016; he stated all officers working patrol carry TASER, 2 44mm "less lethal" weapons are out each shift and all officers have training, baton, individual pepper spray, and each car has pepper spray and trainings occur on how and when to use these after de-escalation has been utilized.

Task Force Member Lee shared the department's efforts in community involvement: the department has had a School Resource Officer partnership with the Cedar Falls Community Schools since the mid-1990s and the program has structure and guidelines to avoid any "schools to prisons" practices and perceptions (not using the school to advantage of the department); department heads, chiefs and support staff have been members of several combined efforts dealing with DEI and racism over the past 30 years with the Waterloo Police Department, Black Hawk County Sheriff's Department, Iowa State Patrol, and UNI police.

Task Force Member Frost introduced the second handout with traffic stop data and what the subcommittee "knows" and "doesn't know".

Task Force Member Frost presented data on traffic stops from 2017 and 2018 broken down by "white", "black", and "other" as well as the number that led to arrests of both white and black individuals but acknowledged other indicators not available such as socio-economic status; he stated that just looking at the numbers does not suggest a problem; the subcommittee presented arrest data in whole numbers instead of percentages because the numbers were so low that alteration by one would make a significant change. Task Force Member Frost urged task force members to remember the numbers alone do not show the whole story; those are the gaps.

Task Force Member Frost stated what the subcommittee doesn't know: the proximity of where most officers live versus where they patrol; how many traffic stops occur with Cedar Falls residents versus transient traffic; traffic stops from other departments as they relate to Cedar Falls; comprehensive data for citations, arrests, etc.; data for police call logs (details) to both dispatch and non-emergency; and data for officers drawing weapons.

Task Force Member stated what the subcommittee knows: more information/data is needed; most stops occur where there are more people present, such as commercial districts as opposed to residential; there are three

patrol zones and officers rotate among these; racial identification is at each officer's discretion, as it's not provided on a driver's license, and that officers are humans making their best guess effort (I.E. disposition codes). Task Force Member Heston questioned if race is germane to the situation; Chief Berte stated the disposition codes for traffic stops are only provided after the call is cleared.

Vice Chair Dunn presented the subcommittee's recommendations, reiterating that this is the tip of the iceberg and things can grow from these recommendations. She stated the focus should be on de-escalation, peace-keeping, and humanization of the individual; be provided all tools and training necessary, and provide additional training and tools as needed. The subcommittee recommended continuation of the Task Force as its own commission to continue the equity conversation, both racial equity (including systemic issues) and equity for all. She stated positive marketing is a must, continuing what's being done (social media, Channel 15, etc.) but extending to other avenues and collaborating with existing organizations, extending funding and partnership. She stated the current complaint process can be initiated in person at Public Safety or City Hall; the subcommittee recommended a process for complaint submission available both in-person and electronically to be reviewed by the HRC as a neutral third party. She stated the subcommittee recommends the department should increase community policing (the more that officers are involved in the community the more they are seen as part of the community) and begin "immersion" policing. Task Force Member Frost explained the subcommittee was looking for "out of the norm" but with tremendous impact; they looked at the positive relations of the fire department with community historically, leading to the idea to have the officers on shift share housing during the shift in the patrol neighborhood to interact with community and humanize officers in the eyes of citizens as well as citizens in the eyes of the officers. Vice Chair Dunn stated the subcommittee recommends consideration of allowing officers to park patrol vehicles at personal residences (if fleet allows). Vice Chair Dunn stated implementing employee surveys is important; specifically in public safety honest feedback is necessary, especially from minority employees, both praising and criticizing the City of Cedar Falls as an employer in order for learning and growing. The subcommittee recommended actively recruiting and promoting minority officers, recruiting from the Cedar Valley area, promoting diversity within the department, and advertising open positions in geographic areas and institutions where minority races/ethnicities are more populous.

Task Force Member Heston questioned if there was consideration of public citizen review of employee processes; other cities have a commission that reviews complaints against police/public safety separate from internal review.

Task Force Member Heston asked if there was data that has been or could be compiled related specifically to police/youth interactions; she stated concern of rhetoric of Cedar Falls being overrun by gangs creating problems for both the community and public safety. Task Force Member Frost questioned if she meant any interaction; Task Force Member Heston stated not necessarily any interaction. She stated her approval of intentionally and deliberately increasing the trust of the youth of color and public safety officers, so their first thought isn't to run but that they know the officer/have more trust in the department. Chief Berte stated that data can be searched by disposition and call codes to get different data; Task Force Member Heston stated the intent to not overlook interaction with youth.

Task Force Member Graves stated that young people view officers as their parents and/or friends do; a negative encounter with officers as a young person can affect view of all officers. Task Force Member Frost stated that the data/numbers provided don't tell the whole story; he agreed with Task Force Member Graves that it's not always an individual's past experiences, but the effect of other's experiences influencing interactions; communities have learned groups have been dangerous to them and it transfers down; individuals have learned that a group of people are hazardous to a situation and that transfers down.

Task Force Member Smith-Nalls spoke about the inundation of images/videos on social media such as Facebook with regard to things such as the murder of George Floyd and that sites have algorithms that determine what each individual sees each day; she stated that we feed ourselves this and it can influence feeling over fact, and inform our fear(s) of the possibility of something happening such as being abducted or police brutality

regardless of any previous positive interactions. She stated that people are “feeding themselves” with social media every day and we don’t know what other people are being “fed”. She stated the interactions are important and shared one: a female officer who approached a young Black girl and the officer cried because the girl was scared, but she took the time to build a positive relationship.

Task Force Member Frost stated there is a socio-economic situation in Cedar Falls, and it could be the demographics are so different in Cedar Falls and it may create different issues than citizens in Waterloo are dealing with such as poverty and crime in those areas; there is room for growth and ways Cedar Falls can be a leader while being sensitive to the situation and part of the solution not the problem.

Vice Chair Dunn referenced a conversation of the subcommittee about diversity in policing, specifically that possibly people of color aren’t entering the field; we can look for that diversity but it may not be available. Task Force Member Lee referenced Task Force Member Grave’s comment about individual’s perceptions of policing based on their family’s or peers’ perceptions, and that a certain career might not be an option based on one’s family.

Task Force Member Smith-Nalls stated there are reasons people group together; she questioned if the diversity is supported in the area (hair care products, availability of ethnic foods, etc.); she stated it might not be that the area doesn’t want diversity, but maybe diversity doesn’t want to live there; the City needs to be able to support the diversity, and the diverse population has to want to be here. Task Force Member Heston expressed concern that people can’t find what they need or want in Cedar Falls but they can find it somewhere else, it maintains the separation and is problematic; how do we know if we’re being friendly and welcoming if we stay the same? She expressed she thinks it is good for which people to be part of an integrated community, and it’s good for rich people to understand what it’s like to be poor, and interact with poor people; to understand the breadth of human existence and that all have a place and value in the community. Task Force Member Lee stated it references the initial point that the environment should be welcoming and that he thinks the Task Force is saying the same thing, just in different words.

#### 6. Final Report Work Team Update and Discussion

Facilitator Viniard-Weidemann stated a draft will be available by Monday, including information from the three subcommittees: education, housing, and public safety/policing; and general recommendations. She stated the Task Force will also discuss with the Council presentation will look like.

#### 7-8. Consideration of Action Items and Next Steps

Facilitator Viniard-Weidemann stated the focus of the next meeting will be a work session for the draft report, specifically general recommendations and the opening statements about why the work is important. Facilitator Padilla and city staff have been working on general City data, and UNI data is being provided also.

#### 9. Next Meeting Date

The Task Force’s next meeting is September 29, 2021 at 4:00 PM.

#### 10. Adjournment:

Chair Darrah accepted a motion to adjourn. Task Force Member Lee motioned; Vice Chair Dunn seconded. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 5:16 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Katie Terhune, Administrative Assistant