

2018-1-18

**Engagement and Communication Working Group #6**

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**Working Group Attendees:**

Debbie Bonilla, Justin Crane, Elaine DeRosa, Cathy Zusy

**Staff Present:**

Stuart Dash, Melissa Peters, Gary Chan

**Working Group Members Absent:**

Ben Peterson, Eryn Johnson, Jeenal Sawla, Justin Kang, Phyllis Bretholtz, Sarah Kennedy, Tara Greco, Zuleka Queen-Postell

1 member of the public

**Meeting Overview**

The objective of the meeting is to get feedback on draft goals, strategies, and actions for the community wellbeing focus area. Staff provided presentation of process, and facilitated discussion of review of goals, strategies, and actions.

**Draft Goals:**

- Are we missing economic inequality as a piece, if racial justice is called out specifically?
  - Reflected in Access to Opportunity section
  - Also addressed by the Economy Working Group
- Are actions by the non-profits community listed?
  - Focus is on things the City can do, but certainly can recognize that City can partner with or support non-profits

**Access to Opportunity:**

- There could be more emphasis on transportation. We talk about transportation assistance for people with disabilities, but can be broader than that. What about people that do not have access to a car? Public transit could be a focus. For instance, it could be challenging to engage/participate if it is difficult to get to where meetings/events are held. Also consider making it easier for local people to start a business, and improving access to workforce education or college education.
  - Quality of transportation connections is important to consider
- Consider more bus stops with shelters and benches
- It can be challenging for linguistic minorities to participate
  - Addressing language disparities would help with addressing discrimination
- Engagement around affordable housing. You hear that people are “for affordable housing, but...”—for example, if it directly near them, affects parking, etc. If it really is a priority, here is a need for compromise. As far as well-being and inclusiveness, being a neighbor shouldn’t give you veto power. As a community, we say we’re inclusive, but it doesn’t always play out that way.

- There is no explicit mention about newcomers to Cambridge, especially for immigrants and non-English speakers. Sometimes there is a need for other services to support.
- Need to look at guidelines and standards as they relate to Cambridge—e.g., income levels
- Literature says 30-80% AMI is who we're losing; some of higher levels, but 100% stable; shouldn't create false hope e.g., for subsidies—public funds are limited
- O-8 Council uses a Racial Equity Lens and keeps questions on card to remember to assess racial consequences of policies.
- People are in their neighborhood silos. Schools can do some to help alleviate that, but is hard to do. For instance, youth centers generally draw from local community. YMCA and Boy Scouts can do that, a lot of it through programming—e.g., outdoor events. But perhaps that is something best done by a non-profit, rather than the City.
- Are the actions specific for youth, or young adults too?
  - We have heard some feedback from focus groups about a drop-off in accessing programming after teenage years
- Scouts program does a good job of provide opportunities for youth all the way through adult mentoring
- Youth centers could open up to older people, e.g., 18, 19. 19+, people are going to college, and if they are lucky they survive one year, for various reasons (e.g., can't afford to continue). We can have programs like coding boot camp, which can also lead to job opportunities. We have access to tech industry here, and can be taking advantage of that, and have that at youth centers. This can provide opportunities for kids so they don't have to go to four-year college, and they could also be mentors to youth.
- "Secret sauce" to Scouts program is the mentoring

**Sense of Belonging:**

- Amazed at commitment to City putting parks wherever they can. Don't personally spend as much time in parks, but can walk for 10 minutes and come across many.
- Lafayette Square seems well used, sometimes see bands there. Seems to draw crowd, small enough can feel well used. Nearby University Park, on other hand, seems fine for people who work there but does not seem to be used as much.
- Movie nights at Danahy Park are usually good, theater group has done a play out there as well. What about having kids doing something there, such as a play or performance?
- Sennott Park is good at inviting nearby schools to have activities
- Scheduling alongside other "draws" tends to help—for example, programming an event before people go to pool at Magazine Beach
- Knucklebones is a group that creates environments for play, freeform play which makes it approachable to people, both young and old. Could be something like that.
- Like Lawn on D. Like the grass, the light at night, the installations, and that you can just bring dinner and relax. It has activities and games like ping-pong and dancing (e.g., salsa dancing class).
- Some places in Boston have regular dancing event every Friday night
- Part of reason Lafayette Square works so well is that there are places to go (e.g., cafes) all around

- Would hope to see the River become that place in the next decade. The only places along the river now are the boat clubs, but there are opportunities for other things like cafes as well
- There used to be a grant program for block parties. It seems like it is a good investment, good “bang for your buck.” Somerville has funding for artist events/festivals. Some seed money can go a long way. Encouraging community members to organize something for themselves can be effective.
- Part of our challenge is that there are so many students here that aren’t here for a long time. People don’t always engage when they’re passing through
  - Part of the value of events as discussed is pulling in “everyone within earshot,” so people, e.g., on their way to or from somewhere can stumble across it
- Events such as campfires, or e.g., WaterFire in Providence
  - E.g., MIT event called Chain Reaction
  - Dance classes
  - Scavenger hunt. Could also have city passport event, that requires engagement with people (e.g. meet person X from business Y).
  - Low barrier to access events – are you inviting everyone in? Does it look like it’s for you?
  - Having artists from different countries, installing in public space
- Family engagement is important. Also, how to engage others, e.g., people of color, at events
- If you want to attract broad audiences, engaging with schools and summer camps helps
  - Can work with School Department and Family Liaisons to spread the word
- There is a need for free or low-cost meeting rooms/spaces. For instance, Central Square library always seems to be booked. Sometimes boards can meet at homes, but other times, there is a need to meet at a neutral place.

**Racial Justice:**

- Alluding to recent video produced by students, how do we get more direct voice around issues/instances of discrimination?
- There are challenges for people recently released from prison in finding employment
- For public building projects, contractors have to track minority-owned/women-owned businesses—but are there requirements?
- Need more public dialogue around this. Should there be a strategy about public conversation in Cambridge?
  - Mayor’s Office looking to engage with this
- Part of challenge is being in a metro area that is so predominantly white, and where perceptions and press about area may make it feel less inviting
- Are there opportunities to engage with institutions?
  - Can be good in that they bring in additional diversity to engage—but that alone can’t solve these issues
- Cambridge Police do good job of engaging, but people don’t always go to the Police
  - Police do a great job with Community Policing, but there are instances where just a bit more may be needed—for instance, after evening events, youth still need to get home on their own

**Civic Engagement:**

- City needs to be more proactive about diversity on Boards and Commissions
- We also need to remember there's lots of reasons people may not be able to participate, but also about how we talk about it, since that also sends signals, even if unintentional
- Neighborhood groups are sometimes hard to participate in, especially for newcomers
  - Civic engagement, especially young people, has increased in the last year or so
- We need interpretation at meetings, for people with linguistic challenges to participate
- Transportation to meetings is also a factor to think about

**Health and Wellness:**

- Community dancing would help with active living
- Should consider not just healthy eating/living, but a big part of this is also access to healthcare. People choose healthy food when they can get to it.
- Schools are critical to this. Wish there were cooking classes at schools
- There is a program through schools called Let's Cook and Move. Parents and kids do activity, then cook together. Lots of helpful information for parents and children.
- What about mindfulness?
  - How about low barrier to entry events—e.g., yoga in the park?
- Art and self-expression?

**Learning and Play:**

- Reinforce supporting early childhood education, universal preschool
- City has Junior Kindergarten, but if your child is born between April and August, they are not eligible
  - City has Birth to Grade 3 Partnership

**Art and Culture:**

- Wish there was more about centers for the community. We need community centers where people can meet, gather, cook together, etc. Maybe church buildings can become those spaces, or a new community space
- Pairing of artists and vacancies (and carrying insurance) is good idea, since bureaucracy and coordination is a challenge