

City of Cambridge

CIVIC UNITY

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Councillor Marjorie C. Decker, Chair
Councillor Kathleen L. Born
Councillor Kenneth E. Reeves*

In City Council May 14, 2001

The Civic Unity Committee conducted a public meeting on Friday, April 20, 2001 at 12:15 p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber.

The purpose of the meeting was to receive information from City agencies dealing with conflict resolution and mediation services offered and the methodology used to resolve the conflicts.

Present at the meeting were Councillor Decker, Chair of the Committee; Councillor Reeves; Cathy Hoffman, Director, Peace Commission; Nancy Ryan, Executive Director, Women's Commission; Quoc Tran, Director, Human Rights Commission; Mercedes Evans, Member, Human Rights Commission; Ron Watson, Commissioner of Police; Malvina Monteiro, Executive Secretary, Police Review & Advisory Board; Duane Brown, Affirmative Action Officer; Jill Herold, Assistant City Manager of Human Services; Clo Delgado, Department of Human Services; Mary Wong, Executive Director, Kids' Council; John Silva, School Department; Susan Marine, Violence Prevention Coordinator, Public Health Department; and Donna P. Lopez, Deputy City Clerk.

Also present at the meeting were Peter Shapiro and Don Meglio, Just-A-Start; Laura Chasin, Public Conversation Project, Watertown; Gail Packer, Executive Director, Community Dispute Settlement Center; Jack Wofford, Community Dispute Settlement Center; Judy Sammons, Community Dispute Settlement Center (CDSC); Reverend Vernon E. Carter, All Saints Lutheran Church; and Jack Walker, Facilitator and Mediator.

Councillor Decker opened the meeting and stated the purpose. She stated that she would like a report from all the agencies present about what services they provide to the residents of the city. Several meetings have been held to discuss the issue of civic unity. One aspect that came from the meetings, she said, was the issue of conflict resolution and mediation. She stated that she wanted to bring together city employees and residents who will come to these agencies to resolve conflicts. It is important to know what resources are out in the community. She informed the attendees that there are specific questions that will need to be answered about services, gaps in services and outreach and the ideal program and what it would look like. It was also the goal of the committee to support current work and help explore new methods of promoting this work.

Councillor Reeves stated that the legal system seems to work for people who can afford it. He stated that he has concerns about societal issues and he was interested to hear about issues that have been resolved.

The agencies explained the services they provide to the community.

Ms. Laura Chasin, Public Conversation Project located in Watertown, stated that she works with families, the homeless and issues of sexuality. These issues may not be a policy settlement and people need to deal with these issues.

Mr. Duane Brown, Affirmative Action Officer, stated that his focus is on employment discrimination and harassment issues for the City of Cambridge.

Ms. Nancy Ryan, Executive Director, Women's Commission, spoke about a circle of justice approach that would make the domestic violence problem a community problem rather than an individual problem.

Mr. Peter Shapiro, Just-A-Start, stated that he runs a program called "Mediation for Results." He deals with landlord-tenant disputes. Training is provided to handle conflicts early.

Mr. Quoc Tran, Director, Human Rights Commission, stated that he was in charge of enforcing the Human Rights Ordinance and Fair Housing. The enforcement program deals with expediting conflicts on fair housing.

Mr. John Silva, CRLS, stated that he has been involved with mediation for fifteen years. He stated that thousands of students have been trained in mediation. He stated that he would like to see the high school student services strengthened in the community to work at the youth centers. In 1986 he coordinated the Mediation Program at the high school. A middle school program is being revitalized, he said.

Ms. Susan Marine, Violence Prevention Coordinator, Cambridge Public Health Department, stated that she thinks her program is ready to look at different models on conflict resolution.

Mr. Jack Walker, Cambridge resident, stated that he was a full-time facilitator/mediator.

Ms. Gail Packer, Executive Director, CDSC, 872 Massachusetts Avenue, stated that her program was a twenty year old program. The program handles a broad range of services such as separation, traditional/non-traditional family matters and landlord/tenant conflicts. She stated that the biggest problem is to get the word out. The program has a slide fee scale. Mediation is provided by a panel of sixty volunteers, she said.

Ms. Judy Sammons, CDSC, stated that she deals with issues such as condo, roommate disputes and personal disputes. A grant was received from the Police Department, she said. The Community Dispute Settlement Center does the training to train the mediators.

Reverend Vernon E. Carter, also known as Little Arrow, stated that he was an African American with Native American ancestry. He asked why this meeting is taking place and what benefit is it to him to be involved in this meeting. Councillor Decker stated that this is the first meeting to see what services are out in the community and how do people find out about the agencies who provide these services.

Ms. Mary Wong, Executive Director, Kids' Council, stated that the mission of the Kids' Council is to identify the needs and gaps of children and families in conflict and respond to the needs.

Ms. Malvina Monteiro, Executive Secretary of the Police Review & Advisory Board, stated that the board investigates complaints between citizens against police officers. Emotions she said, run high between both the complainant and the police officers when they appear before the board. She told of a situation where a Haitian man was shopping in Bread & Circus and he felt that he was being discriminated against by a police officer. The man filed a complaint. The

board held a hearing. The police officer apologized. The Board mediated the situation and the complaint was dropped. Two hearings have been held in October and December on the issue of racial profiling in the city. Another hearing is scheduled in June. There is a racial profiling focus grant at the High School, she said.

Police Commissioner Ron Watson stated that the Police Department responds to most complaints in the city. He asked how does the Police Department identify the agencies in the community to resolve conflict.

Ms. Jill Herold, Assistant City Manager for Human Services, stated that she came to the meeting to listen and learn. She stated that the Human Services staff has been engaged in the diversification of the Community Dispute Settlement Center. She stated that there is a need for a system-wide collaborative internal culture.

Councillor Decker stated that it was a challenge to bring the agencies together to learn from each other.

Ms. Cathy Hoffman, Director of the Peace Commission, stated that her mentor is Martin Luther King. She stated that there was a presence of racism, discrimination and disenfranchisement. She thought that hearing from agencies that do not act in an adversarial way would be a good start. The realities of violence, she said, are alive and well in the city and in society.

Councillor Reeves outlined a situation that happened in Boston to a black man who got on a bus and the bus driver, a white male, closed the door before the man was fully aboard the bus. The man's arm got caught in the door. The man asked to see the bus driver's supervisor. The MBTA supervisor, a white male, got a white police officer who was going to arrest the victim. He asked who would one call to resolve this type of dispute. Mr. Quoc Tran stated that the Human Rights Commission could intervene and try to resolve this conflict. Mr. Brown also outlined a similar situation. He stated that the first reaction in situations is to get angry. When calm returns, so does reason and then appropriate steps to resolve the conflict can take place, he said.

Councillor Decker stated that there is conflict in public and private space. It is sometimes difficult to know where to go for resolution.

Ms. Packer stated that there are societal justice issue and interpersonal issues. People come to the Community Dispute Settlement Center voluntary. CDSC helps people to reach closure. Neutrality needs to be established, she said. Enforcement would not happen at CDSC.

Mr. Shapiro suggested talking about coordination of the services available.

Ms. Monteiro stated that she was interested in coordination and where she could send people in the community to solve trauma and emotional problems; to heal the emotional side. The grant from the Police Department is focused around the issues that the police officer comes in contact with.

Police Commissioner Watson stated that the Police Department receives calls from third parties to resolve conflict between other individuals. The Boston police officer was wrong in the situation outlined by Councillor Reeves. Victims in these circumstances then file complaints with

the Police Review & Advisory Board. The public agency is viewed as the culprit when it was trying to resolve the conflict. Conflict, he said, happens when the police department intercedes.

Mr. Silva stated that problems can escalate at the High School due to a lack of respect or defamation of character. The School Department, he said, tries to intercede to resolve the conflict. The MBTA needs to deal with these complaints because the MBTA has a responsibility to have riders feel safe.

Councillor Reeves stated that if people cannot resolve their disputes, more physical means are employed.

Mr. Meglio stated that there are two choices to resolve conflict: litigation or mediation. If the issue is too substantive, one must move the issue away from adversarial to collaborative. He stated that the city leaders set the pace. He suggested that each agency should list what services they provide. He stated that the agencies should work from the bottom up and the city leaders work from the top down in an effort to alter the dynamics of conversation so that it becomes center stage.

Ms. Ryan stated that in the circle justice approach, the nature of the harm is discussed. She spoke about incidents of sexual harassment in the city. Women, she said, come to her office to tell how they feel diminished. Violence is reduced if harm is reduced if misunderstanding is reduced, she said. In circle justice, most people are perpetrators and victims and the community is held responsible for making changes. The dimensions are not personal, she said. In an adversarial role, people try to defend themselves. The court system, she said, puts victims outside the system.

Mr. Wofford stated an institutional change is needed. It is a challenge to build sensitivity. Institutional justice and change dimensions should not be ignored, he said. The City Council needs to be aware of its own domain and agencies need to build collaboration.

Ms. Chaisson stated that there are three frames: conflict resolution, organizational and healing.

Commissioner Watson stated that people who are harmed can only go to a regulatory agency. People are harmed because of graffiti. When young people are caught the only recourse is the criminal justice system and there is no process to rectify this community process.

Mr. Shapiro urged the city to get the agencies to use an adversarial role and to get more people to talk confidentially. He also urged collaboration of the agencies.

Mr. Wofford stated that it is hard to be collaborative in an external role.

Councillor Reeves stated that the city leaders can model something to trickle down. He urged the agencies to become involved with the neighborhood groups. He stated that the court system works for those who can afford to pay. You need money to use the justice system, he said. He stated that he can feel rage at different levels.

Councillor Decker stated that City Councillors sometimes play the role of mediators and often are working with people to help find resolutions to conflict. She stated that the City Council does not have the tools to be an expert on everything. It is important that City Councillors know what resources are available. A copy of this report will be sent to the

attendees, she said. A planning forum meeting will be held as a follow-up to this meeting. She informed all the agencies that she will keep asking for their input that will have a long-lasting effect in the community.

Ms. Hoffman made the following suggestion for an action plan:

- Market what services exist in a public way;
- Writing ideas down;
- Mixes on healing and prevention work;
- Ombudsperson linked to circle justice program; and
- Institutional change to make process change.

Councillor Reeves suggested an "out of the box office" at City Hall.

Ms. Packer suggested a community multi-door.

In conclusion, Councillor Decker thanked all attendees.

The meeting adjourned at 2:05 p.m.

For the Committee,

Marjorie Decker

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Chair

My de

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For the Committee,



Councillor Marjorie Decker
Chair



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Committee Report #1

Committee Report from Councillor
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Report Accepted

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