

INCLUSIVITY TASK FORCE MEETING

February 15, 2023

Minutes

Chair: None Present

Secretary: Catherine Plessner

Staff Contact: Alyssa Mitchell

Attendees: Alexa Golemo (Staff), Lissa Jones-Lofgren (Consultant), Craig Skone, Marsha Berry, Art Punyko, Regina Purins, Kensey Lipstreuer, Athena Adkins

I. Introductions

There were no new attendees.

II. Brainstorming Session

1. Use the Mac-Grove Inclusion Rubric to review January committee meetings

The Transportation Meeting had a robust discussion about how we can do better to identify equity issues like snow shoveling. The Housing and Land Use Meeting's agenda was a discussion about the University of St. Thomas' Proposed Arena on the South Campus. Effort was made to use the Rubric to invite a variety of constituents: neighbors, landlords, students, realtors, restaurant and store owners and workers, parents, alumni, anyone and everyone we could think of to attend the meeting. There may have been a few who came because they were asked.

2. Discuss ideas for transitioning ITF's and MGCC's work after last meeting with Lissa Jones- Lofgren (Equity consultant and culture coach) in March 2023

District Councils are advisory bodies, with significant influence, but for the most part we inform the City about what we think we would like to happen. It's rare for a government entity honestly and authentically be able to engage a constituency all the way through to empower. It's a different kind of a rubric. Ask "Why?" you want to engage people. If I'm going to spend my time, get specific with me. If I think informing is great I can say "Yes". But, if what I really want is decision-making power, then I need to find my sphere of influence somewhere else.

What happens when a community doesn't seem to want to engage? It's important not to assume that is why people don't come. Find out what issues your City Council Members are working on in your community and see if people are aligned or interested in engaging that way. Maybe it's the time of day. Maybe it's the opportunity or invitation to meet. Maybe it's people who get off work at 5:00 and at 6:30 it's a lot. Maybe it's people who don't have time to volunteer and they have to find other ways. Maybe there are people who don't want to get engaged and that's fine. You need to interrogate deeply what's

happening but, more importantly, find the issues that you care about that other people care about. You will find a small group of committed people who are going to get together and start telling other people. That's why it's good to use education as an opportunity to engage people. Sometimes we just don't know what we don't know. We don't know that there's lead in our neighborhood or that people are hauling trash at night or that we have covenants on our homes. Find the things people are working on and rallying around and that's how you can provide visibility for your work. In the future they see you potentially as a solution partner or as a thought partner or a friend and that can perhaps increase the attendance.

The fundamental question is: Are we still, in our current configuration, in the way we're funded, in the way we're set up, relevant and impactful in the way that was initially intended. It was Hamline Professor, Jim Scheibel who came up for the vision for the District Councils when he was Mayor of St. Paul from 1990-94. His whole idea was that the little democracy, not by party or partisan but the actual affecting of democracy, would be most impactful if it came from the people. And if it came from a local level, through the Local government, through the County government, through the State government and eventually to the Federal government, we would realize a government *By the people, For the People*. The only way that it could authentically happen was if the people who elected the people to govern were in charge of what was being governed and how it was being governed. That's why he thought the District Councils would be able to be the way. What he didn't know at the time was that this idea of advisory is a constrictor that makes it very difficult to do anything more than try to influence from the outside by trying to hit a tennis ball against the wall hope it comes back right. So that was the goal. The question is, is in this current time and context, in the current configuration, with the current realities, is this still right?

Athena sees ITF Committee members' great curiosity, questions and the hunger to try to figure out that relevant question. One thing to remember is that systems are exquisitely designed to give the results that we get, not always intentionally. Whatever results that we're getting, if you don't like them we have to go back into the system. Over the past couple years we have attempted to back and work to interrogate those systems and think about what the results are. There are a variety of tools we can use to help our work. The whole point is just to get in there and do something. If no one is coming to Community Building Meetings, the first thing to think of is: What's the practice and the policy? What is it? What are the assumptions and the values that are embedded in how we practice that? We assume people have access to internet. We assume that they can join us in the evening. What are the differences in how people are experiencing the experience if you don't have internet or if you don't work at night, or whatever it is? Think about who's being privileged or who's super comfortable here. Universal Design is the idea that you think about who has the least amount of access to what it is that you want to do and then you build access for them, you automatically provide access to everybody else. Curb cuts that were designed for handicapped are an example something that makes life easier for many able-bodied people. Does the way Universal Design is practiced at MGCC align with our Mission and Values? Is there a rub there? Then we go and do our research and gather data. Ask people. ITF has been working really hard and there are some ways to think about this and some questions to ask that work.

Diversity building is a practice. We can practice by always be thinking about who's not included. It's also a practice, like when you start anything new, you don't just get up and are successful right away. We learn something each time we make an effort. That's why we need each other as a committee and community so we can support and nurture each other to keep moving forward. Some people can feel stuck. It's helpful to look at the outreach that has been done, Happy Hours, Landlord Outreach, etc. and identify what else can to be explored with the energy in the group. Concerted effort is focused on ways to have MGCC events inclusive, welcoming and accessible. A recent example is inviting Habitat For Humanity and other non-profit organizations to make the Home Improvement Fair appeal to the greater community beyond middle class homeowners. There's nothing wrong with examining whether a what we're doing is still relevant. Could we be more impactful, have less stress, if we move a committee into its next evolution. Don't assume that we haven't done anything and using what we've done in a new time and context may be helpful. We build with each contact that leads to another contact, and another contact. Inviting one person you could be inviting a whole constituency. Document what you've done so the next time you can look at it. We are trying to get people who don't look like our tribe. It's hard to ask people to come in with our language, our customs and our culture and feel comfortable being there. We need to figure out how to make more space. This is a community body of work. The idea of getting to a beloved community is the responsibility of everyone in the community regardless of their housing status, regardless of their job status. Everyone who interacts here, has a responsibility here.

Integrating community out reach with support for local businesses could be a win/win. We look forward to continuing to enhance our collaboration with other District Councils. We took a moment to celebrate how far ITF has come the since the first meeting 5 years ago at Catherine Plessner's dining room table.

II. Adjourned

Respectfully Submitted
Catherine Plessner