

CENTERING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

March 24, 2022
5:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

MEMBERS PRESENT: Corvie Thykkuttathil, Kalika Curry, Ken Wong, Kenny Pleasant, Monik Martinez, Randy Nuñez, Royce Yuen, Gloria Northcroft, Sapan Parekh

MEMBERS ABSENT: Amirah Haque, Gjanje Smith Mathus

STAFF PRESENT: Linda Whitehead, Justin Chan, Sara Boyle, Marcus Johnson

OTHERS PRESENT: Nathan McCommon, City Manager's Office

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

The meeting was called to order at 5:06 p.m. by Dr. Whitehead who presided.

1. INTRODUCTIONS & ICEBREAKER

The members were asked to introduce themselves and state one thing the others may not know about them.

Dr. Whitehead shared having been a majorette in high school

Kenny Pleasant shared being a Black man who cannot rap, play basketball or dance.

Randy Nuñez shared having become a father only a week ago.

Marcus Johnson, a new member of the team, stated ze used to be heavily involved in body building competitions.

Kalika Curry reported that all staff of Eastside Pathways are people of color, with the exception of the executive director.

Corvie Thykkuttathil noted that ze works as an adjunct faculty member for Bellevue College, and enjoys cooking contests, some of which she has won.

Nathan McCommon, Deputy City Manager, reported being a lifelong singer and a music performer.

Ken Wong noted a love of fishing and being out on the water even without knowing how to swim.

Monik Martinez indicated being a Taurus, grounded and stubborn.

Royce Tuen noted ze is a pastor by day and a DJ by night.

Justin Chan, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Community Outreach Engagement Administrator, noted having previously played in a symphony as a cellist and currently is part of a rock band.

Gloria Northcroft shared recently traveling to Disneyland with the family and having had a great time.

Sara Boyle, Equity Coordinator, shared having at one time been a trumpet player in a band, and having sold the instrument in order to purchase a plane ticket to Spain.

2. WELCOME FROM DEPUTY CITY MANAGER NATHAN MCCOMMON

Nathan McCommon noted that City Manager Brad Miyake is very invested in the work of the Centering Communities of Color team and is grateful for the member who are investing their personal time for the good of the community. City Hall needs to learn from the voices of the CCC. Representative government has a greater likelihood of success when members of the community bring to the table their values and meaningful contributions to public policy and the delivery of city services. At the local level, cities have the most accessible venue for that type of engagement. In Bellevue the City Council has sought to elevate the voices of communities of color by offering a structured way to directly and positively influence local public policy and services. If the lives of people of color become better, the entire community will benefit, and to the extent city government has control or influence on the quality of life in Bellevue, the City Council needs the voices of the CCC members. The members were thanked for being willing to set aside their personal time for the benefit of the community.

3. CARRY-OVER ITEMS FROM LAST MEETING
4. CCC OPERATING PROCEDURES
5. BUSINESS ITEMS

Dr. Whitehead allowed that many have asked how the CCC differs from the Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network (BDAN). While BDAN was established by, and to provide feedback to, the City Manager, the CCC was established by, and to provide feedback to, the City Council. Being a City Council creation, the City Council is subject to the Open Public Meetings Act. All recommendations from the CCC will be carried directly to the City Council. The CCC therefore has both great responsibility and great influence in representing marginalized communities within the city. The intent is for the CCC members to be the voice of those voices are either quiet or silent. The desired outcome of the work of the CCC will be the development of new policies and the implementation of current policies.

Dr. Whitehead noted that there previously had been a question raised regarding the transparency of the selection process for the chief DEI officer. The question was subsequently put to Human Resources and the answer given was that the position was posted at the city, state and national levels. Approximately 70 applications were received. Applicants had to submit background information, four references from persons able to speak to professional performance and personal character. The list of applicants was narrowed and those selected were interviewed by a 21-member panel of internal and external stakeholders. That was followed by another interview with the City Manager. The process was very thorough and fully transparent.

Dr. Whitehead said the CCC has been assigned three specific tasks starting with developing trust. The second task is to build racial literacy and skills through education and training, and the third is to co-create recommendations for actions. With regard to the latter, the staff are appointed to support the work of the CCC by providing a place for the body to meet, by

providing food for attendees, and by providing research at the direction of the CCC. Decisions regarding topics to be brought forward reside with the CCC.

Justin Chan said the work of the staff is to facilitate and ensure that all recommendations made by the CCC will be effectively and successfully brought to city leaders. In so doing, the staff will keep an eye on operational procedures and the requirements placed on all of the city's boards and commissions. To that end, the City Council will need to develop a charter and bylaws. Much will be dictated by approved Council objectives and goals, but key elements around definitions, objectives and the like will be part of the co-creation process.

Marcus Johnson stressed that the term co-creation refers to the CCC working together with the staff on everything from drafting bylaws to creating agendas and facilitating the meetings.

Corvie Thykkuttathil said one thing that comes to mind is that every organization creates agenda and runs meetings differently. The question was asked if there will be guidelines set with concrete information. The goal and direction continues to be very vague and there is a need to set a foundation before the CCC members take the lead.

Gloria Northcroft asked how many individuals there are on the CCC committee. Dr. Whitehead said there were eleven but one person resigned. With respect to the agenda, Gloria Northcroft asked if a committee member with something on their mind ze would like to have addressed could see the issue made part of an agenda. Dr. Whitehead said that was true. Gloria Northcroft wanted it confirmed that it will be up to the committee members to determine what topics and issues should be addressed. Dr. Whitehead provided the confirmation and added that the staff are willing to jump in and do whatever the committee needs to have done in order to be successful. The staff serve in a support role and do not want to take over.

Dr. Whitehead stressed the need to always keep in mind developing trust and awareness through dialog among the committee members, with members of the community, and with elected officials. It was noted that through education and training the city council of Des Moines, Iowa, created 20 new policies focused on racial equity.

Corvie Thykkuttathil asked if there will be opportunity at CCC meetings to discuss making changes to the agenda without being officially recorded. Dr. Whitehead said the answer was yes.

Monik Martinez said the topics outlined in the application, like anti-racism and coordinating communities of color, are very serious and not always easy to talk about. All of the members are passionate about those issues and by virtue of being members of the CCC have been invited into the system that usually works against them. Many joined after seeing it would be a great opportunity to share their voices in ways that will change the system. No member should have to do so, however, at the expense of their peace and safety. The audio recordings of the Arts Commission, of which Monik Martinez is a member, are not posted online, which leads to the question of why the recording of the CCC will be posted online. Ms. Boyle explained that the posting of the audio recordings of the meetings is a requirement of the Open Public Meetings Act. Monik Martinez added that nothing in the application indicated the ccc would be an official city board or commission, and the conclusion reached was that it would be a team sitting down to talk together. Nothing was said about the Open Public Meetings Act. Those who have voiced concerns about that have been pushed to the back, and that is not a great way to build trust.

Dr. Whitehead noted appreciation for those comments, adding that the CCC was established for the sole purpose of bringing recommendations to the City Council members. According to

the City Attorney's Office, because of the way the committee was created, it is subject to the Open Public Meetings Act. The public has the right to know about anyone talking to a City Council member with the hope of influencing their decision making. Dr. Whitehead agreed that the fact the CCC would be subject to the Open Public Meetings Act was not clear up front. It is specifically because of the language used by the City Council in establishing the CCC that the body falls under the Open Public Meetings Act. The Bellevue Diversity Advisory Network is not subject to the Open Public Meetings Act because that group is advisory to the City Manager, not to the City Council.

Kalika Curry suggested that because of the way the meetings are being held as a public forum, the asking of personal questions of the members seems inappropriate. All talk about racism and racialized experiences should be done in such a way that the influence of the group clearly will lead to change. The CCC is not the first BIPOC group operating in Bellevue. Kalika Curry said she has previously participated in multiple other spaces where people of color have been centered to help influence Bellevue policy and it is concerning to hear it said the CCC is not being informed and influenced by other bodies of work that are already in place. It is also not true that the voices of persons of color are silent or unheard given that many serve with various groups and have participated in various surveys. It should not be the stance of the city that persons of color are not being heard.

Dr. Whitehead said it was suggested that the CCC truly is the first official BIPOC committee. More research is needed to determine if that is in fact true. The hope is that the CCC members will show up and represent the communities of Bellevue in a most thoughtful way and in a way that has never been recommended before.

Justin Chan clarified that the members will be given the opportunity to set the meeting agendas. The staff team are all new and are all learning just as the CCC members are learning. Mistakes have been made and will continue to be made along the journey of trying to understand how to advance the mission together with the members. Attempts will be made to address all issues to make sure all members feel safe.

Randy Nuñez commented that at the first welcome or orientation, before the staff joined, there were impressions made and information shared that no single individual was handling the group unfairly or in ways that intentionally were misinforming. Given the way the body was designed and how things are unfolding, the problems are starting to reveal themselves, leaving many to question what the intent of the group is, what its responsibilities are, if the group represents the city in any way, and whose interests are the members serving within the group. It is right to call things out. Systemic racism is designed to limit opportunities for persons of color. Voicing critique should even include the City Council. Things will be messy and mistakes will be made, but there is a need to be critical about how things are designed to avoid leaving people and communities disillusioned and frustrated.

Dr. Whitehead asked the members to ponder the question of what it was that led them to join the CCC. It was stressed that the work of the body will impact the City Council members, who have authority over the city. The question was asked which city department would a person go to if they wanted to raise an issue of systemic racism.

Randy Nuñez noted that the conversation around voices has been had multiple times, including the email resignation from one CCC member. Including voices and centering voices does not necessarily mean communities will be empowered. If city leadership has already heard the concerns of the community and has not taken action, that should be the action piece. None of the issues are new; they have all been raised previously by community members. What is missing is the action piece.

Kalika Curry said it is not the responsibility of the CCC members to know how to navigate the city. The leadership who designed the program had that institutional knowledge. Surveying has been done year over year to get the needs and feedback from the community, so the invitation to join the CCC was to help co-develop and design strategies and implement them in response to the information already provided by community members. Kalika Curry reported participating in those surveys along with partners. Feedback was given and reported back out, but action has not been taken on that feedback. It is a misbranding to say it is not known what communities of color want. At the first meeting of the CCC it was noted up front that the members were collectively a phenomenal team of leaders, but the meeting ended with the statement that no one knows what they are doing. That wishy washy approach does not set up a good team dynamic.

Justin Chan asked the members if at the time they agreed to join the CCC they were aware of the Council-approved three-tiered scope of work.

Kenny Pleasant expressed not having been aware of that and noted ze joined ready to get right to work. Ze expressed a preference for stepping away from the group until the particulars are settled, stating it is frustrating that no actual work is being done.

Corvie Thykkuttathil said that was zir point about not being able to set an agenda when the meetings are being recorded. A lot of work could be done if the group was not tied to the existing bureaucracy.

Marcus Johnson said ze was hearing a question around accountability. There have been conversations and people suggesting what should be done, but it is being said there is no way of determining if those things are actually being pushed through or addressed. Dr. Whitehead said that was a correct interpretation. Marcus Johnson said ze came into the space in order to help. Given all the concerns about the meetings being recorded and the data being collected, the focus should be on what can be done to aid the process. Kenny Pleasant suggested what is needed is clear guidance. The members were not chosen for their expertise in providing structure. It is simply not clear what the committee or its members are supposed to be doing. While individually there are objectives, absent collective consensus they mean nothing. Clear direction and structure is needed. Someone should be acting as mediator and moving the group on to the next topic.

Justin Chan said there are specific deliverables that have been set. The structure put out there is the information available so far in terms of the scope of the work and the roles and responsibilities of the staff and the committee members. The next steps will involve the development of procedures and a work plan. The preliminaries must be addressed first.

Monik Martinez said moving forward personally would not be possible until the issues on the table are addressed. Terms like “non-negotiable” offer no hope for changing the system. Nothing was said in the application about recommending directly to the City Council, or about a four-year appointment. Somewhere along the line things have changed, and those changes had nothing to do with direction from the members. The application says nothing about being a commission or a board, it mentions only being a team.

Dr. Whitehead thanked the members for their time and passion, and for caring enough to have joined the CCC. All of the members have the same reason for participating. Nothing has been changed, and the commitment is for three years. The three tiers are supposed to represent those three years, and the task of the CCC is to bridge the gap between the community and the City Council. That is the developing trust tier. The second tier, building racial literacy and skills through education and training, is not just for the members of the committee. The CCC body may recommend to the City Council members that there be training sessions for the

Councilmembers as well as all employees of the city. The co-creation element is in place as a way of avoiding being authoritative and top-down. The CCC members were chosen because they are smart and compassionate, and the focus should be on how to work together by working first to identify topics to be addressed.

Monik Martinez stated that regardless of where the changes came from, changes were made. Dr. Whitehead said the four-member leadership team of which ze is a member along with Marcus Johnson, Ms. Boyle and Justin Chan have not made any changes to the structure. It was the city attorney who raised the issue of the Open Public Meetings Act based on what was said at the City Council level about the CCC being formed for the sole purpose of making recommendations to the City Council members.

Kalika Curry asked what it will take to get the group to that place. Questions have been continually posed and recommendations have been made by group members, but the focus never turns to the actual work. Kalika Curry expressed frustration with the process and around the shift in the change in leadership. The way the meetings are being run has involved a lot of teaching and no doing. Each member represents the community, many even work for community organizations, and instead of what has happened so far, the group could have been sitting together, talking and taking notes about the things the community wants to see addressed.

Gloria Northcroft asked what issues have been heard by the staff that prompted the formation of the CCC. Also asked was in what context the issues were raised.

Before addressing that question, Justin Chan acknowledged that there has been miscommunication, and allowed that many joined the CCC without being aware of the three-tiers that were approved by the Council. The tiers are now on the table, it has been made clear that the group is subject to the Open Public Meetings Act, and it has been stated that a three-year time commitment is required. The focus needs to turn next to identifying specific issues to be addressed. Justin Chan said there was no intention to perpetuate trauma, harm or systemic racism. It should be acknowledged that the design of the CCC may not lead to the outcomes desired by the members. Those not in agreement with the structure and work of the CCC are free to say so.

Gloria Northcroft said it would be helpful to have a hardcopy of the Open Public Meetings Act rules. Additionally, the three tiers of work to be accomplished over a three-year period should also be printed and provided to each member. Justin Chan said that can be done.

Kalika Curry reiterated that the structure of the CCC has not been set up for success. It would not be difficult to look up past efforts made by the city to gain the community's voice through a community needs assessment. Putting the pictures of CCC members on a website along with a statement that the members are going to do something about the issues, while emphasizing their collective responsibilities rather than their collective authority, and while saying nothing like it has been done before and that the voices of people of color in the community are silent, are all red flags.

Dr. Whitehead said the cross-cultural feasibility study is different. It specifically addresses programming and/or a new building. It is not part of the work of the CCC. There clearly have been many surveys done, and those who participated in those surveys have been heard. The three tiers will be printed out and provided to the members, and before the next CCC meeting there will be a training session held by one of the city attorney's on the Open Public Meetings Act. Nothing new has been added by the leadership team, and all information shared is information that was handed to the team. The CCC was specifically established for the purpose of giving input and information to the City Council members, and because of that

language the work of the CCC falls under the Open Public Meetings Act. Dr. Whitehead agreed with need to narrow the focus to what the group wants to do and to then decide how to do it.

Sapan Parekh commented that despite all the work done to survey the BIPOC community, it is very telling that the City Council still felt it necessary to form the CCC. That means either that the surveys and the perspectives collected have not been reaching them, or they have not been considered. That is a red flag. Sapan Parekh agreed that the committee needs to turn its attention to actually doing things and moving toward actions.

Dr. Whitehead urged the members to hang in there and said things will get better.

6. CLOSING

Dr. Whitehead adjourned the meeting at 6:32 p.m.