

CENTERING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

February 24, 2022
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

MEMBERS PRESENT: Corvie Thykkuttathil, Amirah Haque, Kalika Curry, Ken Wong, Kenny Pleasant, Monik Martinez, Randy Nunez, Sapan Parekh

MEMBERS ABSENT: Gjanje Smith Mathus, Royce Yuen, Gloria Northcroft

STAFF PRESENT: Dr. Linda Whitehead, Justin Chan, Sara Boyle

OTHERS PRESENT: Councilmembers Barksdale, Zahn and Stokes

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Whitehead at 5:09 p.m. All members were present with the exception of Gjanje Smith Mathus, Royce Yuen and Gloria Northcroft.

1. INTRODUCTIONS & ICEBREAKER

Dr. Linda Whitehead, Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer, asked the members to observe a moment of silence for the conflict that is occurring in Europe, which is impacting those locally who have neighbors who are Russian or Ukrainian. She added that those with children who are hearing about the conflict and not understanding what they are hearing should hold good conversations with their children to help them understand and how it may impact them.

Dr. Whitehead welcomed the team members and thanked them for their patience and understanding as the team was formed and as it grew. She said she also appreciated the support that has been given to the team. The presence of Councilmembers Barksdale, Stokes and Zahn was recognized.

Mr. Justin Chan, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Community Outreach and Engagement Administrator, briefly explained the methods for participation via Zoom. He also explained that the meeting fell under the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act and as such audio recordings and minutes would be made of all meetings, and members of the public are allowed to tune in and observe.

Mr. Chan invited the team members to introduce themselves, note their connections to the community, and share something about when they first became aware of their race. He said he has been a Bellevue resident since 1994 and serves as a member of the Diversity Advantage Team. He said he first became of his race when he was six on a trip to Yellowstone. The sheriff pulled them over for speeding and many unkind words were exchanged. The sheriff directed his father to go to a bank and get cash to pay the fine, something that likely was triggered by the fact that his family is Asian.

Mr. Kenny Pleasant said he has lived and had a business in Bellevue for the last 14 years. He said as far back as he can remember he has been aware of his race, primarily owing to several unpleasant reactions.

Mr. Randy Nuñez said he moved to Bellevue less than five years ago, though his wife is a Bellevue native and who has shared stories of what it felt like to be almost the only Mexican kid in many spaces. He said his is a family of five with a little one on the way soon. He said he works and volunteers in Bellevue. He said he recognized his race as a five year old through personally lived experiences that have continued throughout his life.

Ms. Kalika Curry said she works with Eastside Pathways, and prior to that started her career working at the Bellevue Family YMCA.

Ms. Monik Martinez said she lives and works in Bellevue and has for the last five years, having moved to Bellevue from a small town in central Washington where there was not much in terms of diversity. She said she was aware from a young age that she was different from some of her friends.

Mr. Ken Wong said he works for the Bellevue School District as a social worker. He said he serves as a member of the Eastside Race and Leadership Coalition. He shared that as an immigrant to the United States his awareness of race and identity became a part of his growing up experience.

Ms. Amirah Haque said she has been a resident of Bellevue since 2009 and is a student at Bellevue High School. She said she first became aware of how her race would affect how she would live in middle school during the month of Ramadan when a fellow student asked if wearing a bomb vest was part of the tradition.

Ms. Corvie Thykkuttathil said she works as an adjunct faculty member at Bellevue College and is also interim director. She said she several memories of becoming aware of her race, both positive and negative. One positive memory was seeing her dad with his beautiful afro talking with her about race at a very young age, and teaching her how to be a force in the space even as a child. On the negative side, she shared her memory of having a discussion with a great uncle about an injury he sustained.

Mr. Sapan Parekh said he grew up in Bellevue having moved to the city when he was six. He said he works as the Associate Director for Service, Learning and Community Engagement at Bellevue College. He said the first time he became aware of his Indian American race was in Idaho before moving to Bellevue. He said when he was five or so his sister came home crying and asking why people were making fun of her and saying that she looked wrong.

Ms. Sara Boyle, Equity Coordinator, said she began her work for the city in December 2021. She said while she is new to Bellevue, she is a native of the Northwest having lived in Seattle and in Snohomish County. She said her first memories of race are from the second grade and seeing students of different races and learning how whiteness was really normalized. It was not until her teen years, however, before she began to grow curious and ask questions about what it means to be white in the United States. She said her ongoing journey is continuing in that regard.

Dr. Whitehead shared that she was originally from the East Coast and that she was raised during segregation. She said she recalls as a five year old going to Woolworths and walking through the food counter section where there was a container with donuts. People were sitting there eating and she said she asked her mom if they could have a donut. She said her mom tightened the grip she had on her hand and pulled her quickly out of the store. She said it was then she learned that she and her mom could not sit at that counter and eat the donuts because African-American were not allowed to do so. She said she grew up in a Black neighborhood and attended segregated schools in which everyone looked alike. It was not until the Woolworths experience that the conversation about race began for her. She said she and her

husband moved to the Bellevue area in 1987 and have been blessed with four sons. While waiting to close on the purchase of a home in Redmond, the family stayed in at a hotel in Bellevue. One day after her husband went to work, she and her sons went to Fred Meyers on 148th Avenue NE. Standing in the checkout line her youngest twin kept moving because the Caucasian boy behind him kept putting a hand on his head and rubbing it. That was the family's welcome to Bellevue moment. She said acting in a mom role she addressed the boy's mother and explained that one does not put their hand on someone else without permission. That event started her teaching of race to her family and others and what can and cannot be done. As an educator, she said she walked into buildings as the principal but also the only Black person. She said she took each experience throughout the years and used it as an opportunity to teach the children.

Ms. Boyle noted that each team member would be receiving a stipend of \$50 for each core monthly meeting attended. She stated that that will require each member to fill out a Form W-9 as well as an attendance form for each meeting.

Ms. Boyle sought from the team members direction as to which day of the month would work best for them to meet. There was general agreement the meetings should be held on the fourth Thursday of every month. Ms. Boyle said she would continue to negotiate via email with the members to determine the time of day.

Ms. Boyle noted the presence at the meeting of the coordinating team as well as some observers. She said the group because the group was established by the City Council, it is subject to the Open Public Meetings Act, which dictates that all meetings must be open and public and must allow any person to attend any meeting.

Dr. Whitehead noted that for subsequent meetings, the full team would be co-creating the agendas with the leadership. She explained that under the OPMA all meetings must be open and accessible to the public. The CCC will be making recommendations to the City Council and at any time a member of the public may request meeting minutes and the meeting recordings. All written communications can also be requested by the public. The strictures of the OPMA are in place to protect the team members as well as the City Council members. The agenda for each meeting must be posted 24 hours in advance. A professional will be writing the minutes for each meeting.

Ms. Boyle explained that each member of the team will be required to take some in-depth training in regard to the Open Public Meetings Act. The training session will be up to an hour and a half long and it will be provided by a representative of the City Attorney's Office. One option would be to devote the March CCC meeting to the training. Another option would be to convene a special meeting for the purpose of the training in addition to the regular March meeting.

Ms. Martinez shared that she serves as a member the city's Arts Commission and as such had received the OPMA training just a few months ago. She asked if she had to take the training again as a member of the CCC. Dr. Whitehead said she would seek an answer to that question from the City Attorney's Office.

Ms. Boyle clarified that the OPMA training will be via Zoom and will be made by a member of the City Attorney's Office staff.

Mr. Parekh asked if there would be opportunities for members to make up the OPMA training if for some reason they miss the session. Dr. Whitehead answered that the training is offered only on an as-needed basis. She said she would check on the availability of the City

Attorney's Office, stressing the need for the training to occur with the full team. She reiterated that the training is not optional.

There was general agreement that the training should occur as part of a regular meeting.

Ms. Curry indicated a hesitance to commit more time without having clarity in regard to the role and responsibilities of the CCC. Dr. Whitehead allowed that in the beginning she was only a member of the team, and at no time did anyone indicate the body would have to operate under the OPMA. She apologized for the new information but stressed that the training will have to occur. She urged the team members to review the OPMA, which is found at RCW 42.30.

Ms. Martinez said she along with the rest of the group was just learning that the meetings would fall under the OPMA and said it was concerning to her how the city would protect the team when there may be people watching the meeting who have views that are opposite to the purpose of the team. That issue should be addressed. Dr. Whitehead said the CCC is unique in that it was established by the City Council with the sole purpose of making recommendations to the Council. The training session will include examples of instances where bodies have been sued because they failed to follow the requirements of the OPMA. It is not expected that there will be interest on the part of news stations to attend and report on the meetings, but it certainly could happen. The same is true for all of the city's boards and commissions. The training is intended to provide protections for the team members as well as the Council, and the session will seek to answer all questions.

2. OVERVIEW OF CENTERING OF COMMUNITIES OF COLOR INITIATIVE

Dr. Whitehead said the overarching goal of the CCC is to engage the community to ensure an equitable future for the city of Bellevue. The first goal is to develop trust through dialog. She said that may be more difficult by virtue of the fact that the dialog will be open to everyone and fully transparent. With assistance from the city staff, the CCC coordinating team made up of diverse community members will create a series of community discussions on equity issues during the first year. The second goal is to build racial literacy skills through education and training. The city will educate community members on racial equity issues, potentially in partnership with local businesses, non-profits and government organizations. The third goal is to co-create recommendations for action. In collaboration with the CCC team, city staff, leadership and other stakeholders, the city will explore recommendations to update and advance Bellevue's Diversity Advantage Initiative plan.

In all, there are 60 components to the Diversity Advantage Initiative plan that was created in 2014. Each area of the plan needs to be revisited to chart the progress made and to outline the progress that still needs to be made. Some things the city is doing may need to be stopped, while some things the city is doing may need to be continued. The task of the CCC will be to peel back the onion, take a clear and honest look at the work done within the city, and asking questions about how to improve, how to get better, and how to engage the community around equity issues.

3. DISCUSSION ABOUT YOUR VISION

With regard to the first goal, Mr. Parekh asked with whom trust is to be developed: between the broader community and the team, or between the broader community and the City Council. Dr. Whitehead said the stakeholders will be the communities represented by the team members. The intent is to develop trust with those communities and to engage them in developing trust with the city. The DEI team will not in any way alter the words and recommendations of the CCC; the recommendations will be forwarded to the Council directly.

One area of trust will thus need to be between the CCC and the DEI team. The DEI team will serve as co-creators and will not in any way dictate to the CCC.

Ms. Thykkuttahil voiced support for the idea of developing trust but suggested it will be a difficult task when there is not the feeling of a safe space. She said she felt as though she would be placed under a microscope given that there will be participants the CCC will not be able to see and who have not introduced themselves. If the meetings are open to the public without having an opportunity for dialog, the CCC will mostly be talking to itself. With regard to the third goal, she asked when the CCC would be expected to take up its review of the Diversity Advantage Initiative plan. Dr. Whitehead said the CCC is intended to operate for three years and noted that the intent of addressing the third goal in the third year.

Mr. Chan said the Diversity Advantage Initiative is a public document. The CCC would not have to wait until the third year to have an initial discussion of that plan. Dr. Whitehead reiterated that the plan has been around since 2014. The work of the CCC will be to take a look at the plan and decide what is relevant and what is not.

Ms. Haque allowed that Zoom meetings can come across as being really cold and not overly safe. Once allowed to return to in-person meetings the group will gain a lot of energy. She asked if there are particular groups the CCC is expected to target, or specific projects the City Council is expected to accomplish, or if things like that will be brainstormed and created as a group. Dr. Whitehead commented that while it has been around for a while, the Diversity Advantage Initiative plan is a work in progress. The CCC will essentially be working to develop a progress report on the plan. The staff will bring forward information that will allow the CCC to delve deeply into the document and determine if it is truly answering the concerns and the needs of the community. There is a clear need for the team and the team has all the right people to make it work.

Dr. Whitehead said it would be very helpful to know if some other jurisdiction has taken on a similar project and to determine if anything useful could be gleaned from their work. She said she found that the city of Des Moines, Iowa, has a team similar to the CCC that was in place for three years or so. The ultimate outcome of the work of that group was a tremendous impact on policies. Their City Council developed new policies and revised or eliminated some old policies. The work of the group also impacted the operational practices of the city's work. The organization was called Raising the Bar. She encouraged the team members to review the work of that body.

Ms. Haque said she wanted to come away from the meeting knowing the purpose of the team and what power the team will have. Dr. Whitehead said the authority of the team will be in the voices of its members and its recommendations to the City Council. It is the Council that has the authority and the power to act on the team's recommendations. The CCC will lead the solutions on how to get to racial equity, partnerships and support for the community.

Mr. Chan added that the three goals represent the scope of work for the CCC. It is under the third goal that the CCC will make substantial recommendations regarding the Diversity Advantage Initiative plan.

Ms. Curry commented that the members of the CCC were selected because of the relationships and influences they hold. She said her concern is that the three goals do not reflect that. The goals are in service of the Council and not necessarily aligned with the goals and visions of people of color. To some degree it feels like a one-sided relationship. If the CCC is truly different from other groups that have operated in the city in the past, that should be clarified. She allowed that for many there is a lot of political risk involved in participating with the CCC.

Ms. Martinez said she would like to see the CCC allowed to use what has been presented as a working document and build on it with additional goals. The CCC should have some power and say in how it maneuvers as a group in more than just the eventual recommendations.

Ms. Parekh echoed Ms. Curry's point that the presentation had come across as a bit one-directional. He asked how invested the City Council is in the three goals set for the CCC and the eventually recommendations. Dr. Whitehead reminded the team that there were there Councilmembers participating as part of the audience. Their investment is one hundred percent and there has been no wavering of their commitment to the team. She asked what the team members were looking for in referencing having authority.

Ms. Curry said she did not believe there was enough time left in the meeting to collaboratively unpack what authority means in terms of the CCC. She noted that she had received feedback from her partners that the city has not effectively communicated the transition of Dr. Whitehead into a leadership role, and that is one example of questioning commitment. Some resources should be poured into broadly and effectively communicating that the group exists and who is leading it.

4. CLOSING AND NEXT STEPS

Dr. Whitehead said the next steps will be to address some of the concerns voiced and to continue unpacking the issue of authority. She said also said she heard from the group a general agreement about entertaining the services of Raising the Bar to help the CCC move its work along. If so directed, staff will move forward with trying to secure some type of relationship with that organization.

Dr. Whitehead adjourned the meeting at 6:36 p.m.