

Tues. Feb. 7, 2017 Falcon height Inclusion and Policing Task Force
Call to order: 7:22pm

Attendance: Melanie Leehy, Council Member Randy Gustafson, Administrator Sack Thongvanh, Mayor Peter Lindstrom, Michael Wade, Kate Thompson, Kathy Quick, Ken Morris, Amy Johnson, Peter Demerath, Kay Andrews, Jim Ballentine, Dan Johnson-Powers, and Jay Colond

Review Agenda

Correction was pointed with VII. the next meeting will be Tuesday Feb. 21 not Feb. 7. There were no questions about the agenda. A quick story was shared from the community group for a school where leadership was transferred too quickly and problems were encountered. There were issues on both sides but shows the importance of working toward the goal of long-term change.

Review of Minutes From the Jan. 31 Meeting

Review needed to be added to the agenda. No changes were requested. Kudos were made to the minutes taker. :) Minutes were accepted unanimously.

Discussion of Community Values for Policing

Thoughts were shared about this being a matter of the heart, soul, and mind and that each resident of the city needs to be a committee of one so that this is a grass roots effort. Others disagree but seems basic for long lasting change. In a church there would be a communication to the congregation and small groups would be formed to build relationships. Collective ownership and active citizenship are needed. Community gatherings could be planned. Local businesses could be involved along with residents and police. If the world is watching Falcon Heights, let us think big. A definition of community that is an example to the nation would be a good place to start. Some are frustrated with the task force and have written it off as a delaying tactic. Others do not care about this process. Can something be done at least symbolically to show progress is being made?

Values are key in this process and the community piece of the task force will take time. Communicate to skeptics and hopefully they will see the value. Task force members need to believe in this process to help convince others. Listen for those nuggets during conversations. The city would like to gain understanding from each community meeting as people share their thoughts and experiences.

The example of Curtis Field was brought up where "suspicious" activity was reported to the police although nothing illegal was happening. There are challenges for the city and police where the message is, "If you see something, say something." Police can provide some communication and potentially help build relationships where distrust exists.

Most agreed there is a large part of the population that does not care to be involved or do not think there is a problem. Some are too busy and others are tired of not seeing more action during the last seven months.

The Task Force discussed the conversation sessions and the format. There may be the perception that the environment is not welcoming. Childcare could be an issue for some people and their ability to attend the sessions. Some may be working multiple jobs. Task force members need to remember that many asks may be needed to get one yes to attend. We need to remain hopeful and not pretend we have it all figured out.

Be thoughtful of input that has been provided so people do not have to repeat themselves. Discussion of action is not off the table. Threads of many conversations will be compiled in the conversations.

We typically look to government for solutions but has change occurred, but government has limitations. A grassroots effort is needed with invitations to a community group to start a new pattern and break old cycles. This ties into community and respect. Relationship is a critical to making change. Nextdoor.com was suggested as an avenue to invite neighbors.

Some felt using "guests" instead of "nonresidents" in the invitation was suspicious or a code word for person of color. Close to 50,000 vehicles travel through the intersection of Snelling Ave and Larpenteur Av. Most are nonresidents of Falcon Heights. Using the term "guest" sounded more welcoming than "nonresident".

Community engagement is important but is it the job of the task force to engage those who have decided not to be involved? There is an opportunity because they will be affected at some point. Some are comfortable, some do not want to invest, and some do not see a problem with the way people of color are treated by the police. Remember in Selma, there was not a large outcry until a Caucasian was killed.

Breakout: 8:31-8:41

Members broke up into pairs to discuss policing and public safety in terms of community values looking at new draft statements then had a large group discussion.

Reconvened at 9:07.

Thoughts from pair wise discussions:

Falcon Heights should have a suite of metrics on policing to be communicated quarterly. Course corrections can be done as needed. Trust and transparency need to be priorities. Opportunities needed where the community can respond about what is working.

Regarding welcoming and inclusion, practical ways are needed to demonstrate this like the national night out. Opportunities can be provided for people to talk about welcoming and ways of welcoming.

Active citizenship and engaging our neighbors are needed. We need to be have discussions without the fear of being judged.

Education is needed with both police and citizens in the same class. What is suspicious and what isn't? What does "If you see something say something" mean?

Active citizenship should be at the top of the list or an overriding value. Without this the rest are moot.

Sanctity of life is an overarching value as it relates to the use of force. This was from the Minneapolis Police Force. Another from St. Cloud is called Dinner with Strangers where the mayor cooks a meal for residents.

Active citizenship should be moved up. Responsibility should be added. Education on the history of racism is needed. Officers need to have a reasonable fear of mortal danger not just a fear.

Action Items for Further Discussions

What do we see as being different with the community conversations as opposed to other meetings?

Community Conversations

On Feb. 16 the format is circle talk not speeches. We are trying to be as inclusive as we can for residents and those who work here or drive through the city. Five conversations about who we are. This is the most direct way people can influence policing in the city. If they are concerned they need to be there.

Discussion of Features of the Current Police Contract

Look at where we might insert something about values. Metrics could be added. The future state of the contract is most important. Enforcement policies, standards, training, expected behaviors are all possible areas for change. Sack is involved when hiring a police chief. There is a formal meeting with police, mayors and administrators once a year. Quarterly meetings are also held for updates from the police.

Next Meeting

Tuesday February 21, 2017
Jim Ballentine will be absent.

Adjourned at 9:41