

MINUTES

Inclusive Community Task Force January 23, 2008

Present: All task force members

Procedural Note: Prior to the first task force meeting, the co-chairs agreed to adopt the customary commission practice of welcoming observers to all meetings but limiting meeting participation to task force members with the exception of input offered as part of a posted "public forum" agenda item. However, as they omitted to announce this policy to the group or include it in the ground rules established at the first meeting, it was not enforced at the January 23 meeting. In the future, in order to assure equitable access to all community members, participation will indeed be limited to task force members only, with the exception of posted "public forum" input. Members of the public are of course welcome to communicate their views to task force members at any time outside of meeting times, and to observe all meetings.

1. Minutes of the January 12 meeting were approved.
2. Task force members noted important themes and observations from their conversations with community members over the past two weeks. They then divided into three groups for discussion, and reported back to the group as a whole*.

Group One

- Ames is a difficult community to "break into." There is a perception that "people need to act like us."
- Race is not an issue at Ames High School. Students there wonder if older community members are afraid of change.
- Some residents are open minded, but feel challenged, and unsure of how to act.
- Some people don't understand what their rights are, and feel violated.
- Some feel that a "color slant" is placed on everything.
- People don't like being asked if they are from another country if they are dark-skinned. The questioning is usually very one-sided.
- There is a difference between being unwelcome and being uncomfortable.
- 30% of the clients at the Ames Free Clinic are Hispanic. In general, this group seems to prefer to go overboard in staying below the radar, attempting to be accepted.

Group Two

- Some residents are experiencing fear, and a heightened perception of crime in the community.
- What is the role of the media in exaggerating these fears? The actual number of people involved in criminal behavior may have increased, but is still very small.
- Citizens appear to lack trust in civic institutions (police, schools) to do what's right. In some cases, this mistrust came with new residents from other communities.

- Local businesses are not supportive of minorities in services provided or merchandise offered.
- Many issues related to schools were noted: parents are anxious about how safe their children are at school; teachers appear in some cases not to know how to interact appropriately or effectively with minority students; parents and school administrators both feel tension between accommodating the needs of students to “catch up” with Ames standards, which can shade into enabling behaviors, and holding all students to high standards, which can lead to rigidity and insensitivity to individual circumstances.
- Ames doesn’t have a safety net in place for its poorest residents, other than the Emergency Residence Shelter.
- How can we facilitate person to person (“mom to mom”) connections?

Group Three

- Perceptions vary widely as to whether Ames is welcoming or not.
 - Some feel that the situation here relative to minority residents is actually improving.
 - Some newcomers appreciated welcoming mechanisms that offer a “personal touch,” which are possible in a smaller community.
 - Communication issues can be complex, especially when language or cultural barriers present challenges.
3. Full consideration of resources and other relevant information which had been gathered by task force members was deferred. The group agreed that there was no need to duplicate efforts that have already been made in compiling directories of services. However, an accurate and complete catalogue of services available in Ames for newcomers will be useful in determining how our community might fall short in this area. Task force members are encouraged to bring relevant materials with them to the next meeting, and to send any electronic materials to either Jane Acker or Barbara Woods so that they can be shared with the group prior to the next meeting.
 4. **The next meeting will be held on February 13 at 4:30 pm, on the City Auditorium stage.** At this meeting, we will discuss what a welcoming community looks and feels like, and will continue to a consideration of the ways in which Ames is succeeding as a welcoming community as well as deficiencies. Prior to the meeting, members are urged to continue talking to community members about what makes them feel welcome/not welcome, and to share relevant resources with Jane or Barbara.

* The entire list of comments by all groups is attached to the minutes as Appendix A.