

MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK FORCE, IN REGULAR MEETING OF MONDAY, AUGUST 1, 2022 AT 5:30 PM, SOUTHEAST REGIONAL LIBRARY, ALCOTT ROOM, 775 N. GREEFIELD ROAD, GILBERT, ARIZONA

MEMBERS PRESENT: Katie Hackett, Chair; Sean Warren, Vice Chair; Chris Curley; Amy Holstein; Alexandra Rodriguez; Javier Rodriguez; Christine Sabel; Heather Watts; and Suzanne Lunt, Alternate

MEMBERS ABSENT: Iya Affo and Bus Obayomi, Alternate

STAFF PRESENT: Council Liaison Kathy Tilque, Staff Liaison/Community Resources Manager Melanie Dykstra, Assistant Town Manager Leah Rhineheimer, Assistant Town Manager Dawn Prince, Fire Chief Rob Duggan, Deputy Clerk Judy Martinez, Senior Organizational Development Consultant Jacqueline Parker, Police Sergeant Daniel Brause, and Intergovernmental Relations Director Rob Bohr

GUESTS PRESENT: Susan Cadena, K-12 Prevention Coordinator for Gilbert Public Schools; and Dr. Amina Simmons, Executive Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Paradise Valley Community College

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Hackett called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice Chair Warren led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Staff Liaison Dykstra called roll and declared a quorum present.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Hackett and Vice Chair Warren welcomed everyone and asked those present who were not members of the Task Force to introduce themselves. Those in the audience introduced themselves.

TASK FORCE MEMBER WARM UP – ENERGY CHECK-IN AND WEEKLY HIGHLIGHT

Member Holstein led a warmup exercise and explained the process and purpose. Each member shared their energy level, if they were comfortable or uncomfortable in that energy level, and a highlight from the past month.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS

Vice Chair Warren led the Communications from Citizens portion of the agenda.

Doralise Machado-Liddell, Gilbert resident, asked if individuals identified as homeless during the Town's Point-in-Time (PIT) Count were added to a map that identified the areas of homelessness. Assistant Manager Prince and Staff Liaison Dykstra discussed how they did not have a map included in the report, but stated there was a general heat map which could be provided.

Doralise Machado-Liddell discussed homelessness in her neighborhood, instances of homeless individuals in her back yard or pounding on her garage door, then stated there was an issue in Gilbert that was not being addressed. She said both the homeless and residents wanted to be safe, but she did not see anything happening. She discussed affordable housing and said rent control was not wanted. She said people did not want apartments, adding she did not see why they were not building more townhomes and condos. She discussed the control Gilbert had to approve apartments and change zoning, and said there needed to be a shift in the mindset. She said Gilbert Fire and Police treated the homeless with respect and dignity, but said the Town was creating a situation for law enforcement. She asked that the Town look at all the options and how they would affect the residents, property rights, and the homeless as well.

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Consider approval of the minutes of the June 6, 2022 meeting

A MOTION was made by Member Holstein, seconded by Member J. Rodriguez , to approve the minutes of the June 6, 2022 meeting. *Motion carried 8-0.*

2. Assessment of Gilbert Homeless and At-Risk Individuals Presentation

Assistant Town Manager Prince provided a presentation on the Assessment of Gilbert's Homeless and At-Risk Individuals Report. She stated it included families in crisis, as well as victims and survivors of domestic abuse and substance abuse. She discussed who may make up the homeless population and the reasons why. She discussed the assessment purpose and noted there was an increase in homelessness both nation-wide and regionally. She discussed the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and noted some of the limitations with the data utilized, such as being dependent on the participants and responses. She noted there was a comparison pre and post-COVID. She discussed defining homelessness, at risk individuals, Gilbert's strengths, and service priorities. She summarized categories of sheltered, unsheltered, and at-risk, noting some may be in a temporary location or transitional housing. She discussed top services and impacts including mental illness, housing, utilities, loss of employment, and closure of public restrooms and facilities.

Assistant Town Manager Prince provided data from 2018-2019, stating then there were 283 individuals who were considered vulnerable; in 2020-2021, there were 479. She discussed limitations with the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) in capturing those who were truly unsheltered, but said that was partly captured in the Point in Time (PIT) Count Results, which went from 9 individuals identified in Gilbert in 2020 to 15 individuals in 2022; she noted no PIT count was done in 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. She discussed who made up the homeless in Gilbert, including those who were struggling but did not qualify for assistance, the working poor, those with mental health challenges or substance abuse issues, and children over the age of 10 who may be lacking support or aging out of the foster care system. She noted others included seniors on fixed incomes and pregnant women. She noted reasons for not seeking help as fear, especially for victims of domestic violence. She discussed issues with housing affordability, those with serious health concerns or medical bills, and other factors.

Assistant Town Manager Prince discussed Gilbert's strengths and said there was funding available, as well as a group of non-profits and faith groups that helped. She also noted the use of Federal dollars that were used for programs to help with the issue. She discussed the high priority needs and said the number one thing was safe and affordable housing linked with long-term support. She said those who were unsheltered were interested in safe, small, affordable, long-term homes. She said some did not use shelters because they felt they were unsafe. She said basic needs were the next priority, such as laundry, food, showering, etc. and that health care and mental health was the next priorities. She discussed types of housing and services, highlighted prevention approaches and support that addressed basic

needs first and then considered more opportunities for higher level needs, and noted the role of community connection including faith groups and community outreach.

Chair Hackett asked about IHelp. Staff Liaison Dykstra said it was an interfaith program for assistance that rotated, noting the work of AZCEND to help pick up participants, get them a meal and mobile showers, and then to help with sheltering. She said it was reliant on the faith community and noted some limitations for the program, such as not allowing a pet to come or alcohol usage.

Member J. Rodriguez asked if there were any strategies discussed to ease the process for those who were already struggling, noting the process for assistance could be challenging for some.

Assistant Town Manager Prince noted there were a lot of the programs and the Town was not in charge of the requirements, for example, one may be a County-run program. She said there may be conversations on how to bridge support, but the Town did not have control over what the requirements were. She said there were people at AZCEND who could help.

Staff Liaison Dykstra stated the requirements came with the type of funding the individual would be seeking. She discussed work with AZCEND, but noted you may end up with a gap, and some programs were set up to help provide rent or utility funding support after a family had a crisis response, such as a car repair or medical bill. Those programs were more for a one-time need. She said they were finding now since COVID-19 that the rent and utility support was an ongoing issue, not just a one-time thing, which was not how it was originally designed.

Councilmember Tilque stated one of the reasons for the Community Engagement Task Force was to find the gaps, and one thing to consider was how to help someone before they became homeless. She said when they looked at recommendations, they may be short-term help, and they want to look at long-term and how to address issues before there was a bigger problem.

Vice Chair Warren asked why there was only one PIT Count per year. Staff Liaison Dykstra said it did not even have to be done every year; it could be done every two years per the Federal requirement, but regionally we find it important to do it at least annually in January and it was just a snapshot.

Vice Chair Warren asked if the Fire and Police Departments had a way of tracking.

Staff Liaison Dykstra stated they did start tracking calls for service of those who identified themselves as homeless; she discussed those numbers, statistics, and the reasons they were getting calls for service. She said some were illness, others were with an altered level of consciousness which could include substance abuse but also stroke, heat-related issues, etc. She said those were tracked by the Fire Department.

Vice Chair Warren asked why the Police Department did not track.

Police Sergeant Brause stated homelessness was not tracked that way, but if there was a call and they indicated no address, the Police Department tracked that. Staff Liaison Dykstra and Fire Chief Duggan noted the difference in reporting between Police and Fire.

Assistant Town Manager Prince said there was an internal team that kept a pulse on the subject, but said the homeless population was difficult to track.

Vice Chair Warren said it was safe to say the consensus was that the total population was growing nationwide and homelessness was also growing.

Assistant Town Manager Prince and Staff Liaison Dykstra discussed the nation-wide housing conditions, adding that Arizona had a favorable climate.

Member Sabel discussed the apartments in Gilbert and Section 8 Housing.

Staff Liaison Dykstra stated Gilbert did not have its own housing authority, and though it seemed like there were a lot of apartments in Gilbert, it was only 11% of housing, very low compared to most cities. She also noted that Gilbert had the largest amount of luxury apartments which would not qualify for Section 8 Housing.

Member A. Rodriguez discussed cases where people could work and live on the couch of a friend, but then could not get the help they needed because they were living with someone.

Chair Hackett asked if Gilbert had a drop-in center. Staff Liaison Dykstra stated no, but they do have a case navigator, and they can respond directly to this need. Assistant Town Manager Prince discussed staff who could go out and help connect homeless individuals to resources.

Member Watts said the sooner the basic needs could be met, the less likely it would lead to bigger issues. She emphasized the basic needs connection, then asked why Gilbert was so low with homelessness.

Vice Chair Warren said he asked a homeless individual at his church why Gilbert; the person said he felt safer, it was quiet, and there were more open spaces.

Member A. Rodriguez noted it was the same reasons other people wanted to live in Gilbert. She noted the increase of homeless individuals she's observed in Phoenix.

Staff Liaison Dykstra discussed a change in the management of the canal system, stating there would be more enforcement beginning in September that would include no camping or fires. She said the enforcement could lead to seeing more homeless individuals.

Vice Chair Warren asked how much of the budget of the Town went into these programs.

Councilmember Tilque noted that in the previous year the Town received a lot of Federal funds.

Staff Liaison Dykstra discussed a commitment letter that was being provided as part of the Pathways Home regionally effort and it outlined the monies and efforts of each city. She said she could send out that information to the Task Force with the amount.

Councilmember Tilque noted it had been a political conversation, as some believed Federal money should not be used to subsidize those types of programs.

Staff Liaison Dykstra noted there were also limitations on how much of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) funding could be used on public service support as well.

Chair Hackett asked Assistant Town Manager Prince if within the next month the Task Force picked a topic to tackle, which should it be first.

Assistant Town Manager Prince replied that there were various challenges but the biggest was housing, adding they could help to increase the education around Section 8 and funding, as well as to build trust and rally the community to fill those gaps.

Member J. Rodriguez noted that the community was having a hard-enough time with apartments in general, even luxury ones at only 11% of Gilbert's housing, and people would really have a hard time with Section 8 and affordable housing.

Staff Liaison Dykstra discussed communities that were low income tax credit properties, such as a 55+ community called Page Commons.

There was additional discussion regarding HOME funds providing affordable permanent housing. Assistant Town Manager Prince noted the price limitations for those homes were not in line with the housing market.

Susan Cadena, K-12 Prevention Coordinator for Gilbert Public Schools (GPS), provided a snapshot of the last couple of years in regard to homelessness and its effects on students, families, and staff. She discussed schools shutting down during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Federal mandate of identifying the needs of students who were homeless. She discussed homeless education liaisons. She said there were 40 counselors with GPS who were trained in how to identify cases of homelessness and what to listen for. She said there were 240 families at the end of the 2022 school year who were eligible for homeless programs and 30 youth on their own, noting some had lost their parents to COVID-19, some were sleeping on various couches, others may not be legally identified as runaways but decided to leave on their own. She discussed other factors such as teen pregnancies, elementary and junior high students identified as youth on their own, and an increase in staff vulnerable to homelessness as well. She said they were finding many families could not afford mortgages or rent, noting GPS had partnerships with hotels for short-term housing.

Susan Cadena discussed the need for displaced families to get their children transported back and forth to school. She noted the need for safe housing and support, noting how difficult it could be for teens or older children. She discussed the challenges for homeless teens to continue their education at the college level and receiving financial aid through the FAFSA because they don't have a parent to help fill out the forms. However, she said they had found some universities that supported students in that capacity, specifically some Texas universities, and that once resources were identified, the process worked well. She also discussed how some families were letting other families live in their back yards.

Member A. Rodriguez asked what was done to support the staff members experiencing those issues. Susan Cadena said they had staff who were supportive and creative of how to help; she spoke of two social services programs available that included funding and in-house donations that could be taken out of paychecks to support or help in funding a hotel stay for at least two weeks then contacting families to provide housing until the end of the year.

Member J. Rodriguez asked about Higley Unified School District as well. Susan Cadena said that her numbers did not include those from Higley, but that every

school was required to have the programs and that there was also the East Valley Coalition of Homeless Liaisons who met regularly.

Member Holstein asked if there were common themes of what worked. Susan Cadena answered creativity from staff and collaboration with partnering agencies.

Staff Liaison Dykstra discussed her working relationship with Susan Cadena and the homeless liaison to identify needs that volunteers and the town could assist in supporting.

Alternate Lunt noted there were other communities, such as one she saw in Colorado, that may be a good model. She encouraged the members to look at some outside resources.

3. A Trauma Informed Approach to Effective Community Engagement

Dr. Amina Simmons, Executive Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Paradise Valley Community College, presented on individuals impacted by trauma. She discussed a trauma-informed approach and gratitude, then discussed the term *parallel process* and how different systems interacted with one another. She said when a person was expressing gratitude, they should be modeling it and setting the tone for interaction with the community. She discussed terms and translations she would use in the presentation, adding it was okay to feel lost or confused, that language was meant is to be misunderstood. She asked the Task Force members to lean into their discomfort of confusion and that she would be using both jargon and more accessible terms. She said language was important and could lead to empowerment and social change, adding that jargon could evoke an emotional response but not to let the words be intimidating.

Dr. Simmons discussed an invitation to care and said having emotional discomfort did not mean that someone was unsafe. She discussed who she was on a personal level and explained why it mattered. She noted assumptions that may be made about her appearance and said that the Task Force members would also be engaging with community who have painful experiences associated with their identities. She discussed how understanding who you are and your identity and perceptions could help when working with the community. She asked the Task Force members to complete an activity called “identify petals” where each member filled in with categories such as biological sex/gender identity, sexual orientation, region, nationality, race/ethnicity, accessibility, and class. She then asked the Task Force members to identify which of those characteristics they thought about daily, which they thought affected how others viewed or treated them, and which ones affected how they treated others. She encouraged the group

to find a partner to discuss, then asked the members to share what they would like to about those discussions with the group as a whole.

Dr. Simmons discussed trauma and how it may affect the work of the Task Force. She defined trauma as events that were emotionally disturbing, and discussed different types of trauma, perception, frequency, and diagnostic discrepancy. She discussed nuances in traumatic experiences and noted that racism was a type of trauma. She discussed how most people would experience some type of trauma in their lifetime, then provided examples of how trauma may look and feel and how it could affect someone's trust in individuals, groups, government, churches, etc. She discussed how individual trauma could impact systems or how we think, feel, or behave. She noted they could contribute to historical mistrust in individuals or systems. She asked the group why our personal experiences affected the community, then discussed the concept of re-traumatization. She said the way we do business can hurt people, who we are mattered and had an impact on the whole community, and there were many nuances that contributed. She said intentionality and purpose was critical. She asked the Task Force to brainstorm on their individual understandings of the goals of the group and how that would fit into Gilbert's core values of being bold, driven, humble and kind.

Member Curley said the group was still working to identify what the goals would be and what the community wanted help with, noting it did meet Gilbert's core values.

Chair Hackett noted there had been a lot of good education and the Task Force was not deciding on "the what".

Member Watts stated a lot of the meetings of the Task Force had also focused on understanding themselves and others in the group to help them work well together.

Dr. Simmons asked again about how the members related to Gilbert's core values.

Member Curley stated they were all driven because they wanted to be there, they all applied and volunteered.

Member Watts discussed how being humble was not a lack of confidence, it was thinking of others and not yourself.

Vice Chair Warren said it was about seeing it from an outside or other perspective.

Senior Organizational Development Consultant Parker discussed putting people over processes, adding it was not easy to do in government and took humility.

Member A. Rodriguez discussed wanting to build a shelter and being a big thinker, but how there needed to be other perspectives and details to find solutions.

Doralise Machado-Liddell, Gilbert resident, asked if this discussion was teaching Critical Race Theory. Dr. Simmons stated no, it was not.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Councilmember Tilque explained the purpose of this item.

There were no comments made.

COMMUNICATIONS

Report from Council Liaison on current events.

Council Liaison Tilque expressed gratitude to the members of the Task Force for sitting through the education piece and said they would now be moving from education into action. She reminded the Task Force that the next day, August 2, 2022, would be Election Day and encouraged everyone to vote. She announced that Rob Duggan was the new Fire Chief and thanked him for assisting with the Community Engagement Task Force. She mentioned the East Valley Veterans Court in Tempe, stating that Gilbert participated with that group as a resource. She noted that Gilbert approved a position for a police officer who would serve in a human trafficking division. Lastly, she stated there would be an upcoming public study session about transit and land use, not about commuter rail, and said there was a lot of misinformation about the topic.

Report from Staff Liaisons on task force assignments and current events.

Staff Liaison Dykstra stated she would not be asking the Task Force members for input on focus areas due to time constraints tonight but would send out a survey with five categories for the members to individually rank priorities and answer some questions; this would be used to help determine what to tackle first and help set the September agenda. She stated there would be a Regional Human Relations Commission (HRC) dinner for East-Valley cities on September 8, 2022 in Chandler and she would be sending the group an invitation. She noted the homework for the Task Force members was getting the survey done and reviewing other information and statistics that would be provided. She also noted the Town funded the creation of a Crisis Care Team with the Police Department which would be helping to respond to the mental health issues with calls.

Report from Task Force Members on current events.

Member Watts stated that 9/11 was a National Day of Service and asked if Gilbert was doing anything for that effort. Staff Liaison stated the Town would be having their memorial service but was not currently coordinating any volunteer efforts for that day, adding they had participated in a day of service in October.

ADJOURN

Chair Hackett adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

ATTEST:

Katie Hackett, Chair

Melanie Dykstra, Staff Liaison