

MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TASK FORCE, IN REGULAR MEETING OF MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2024 AT 5:30 PM, MUNICIPAL CENTER I, TOWER ROOM 146, 50 E CIVIC CENTER DRIVE, GILBERT, ARIZONA

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MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Sean Warren; Vice Chair Suzanne Lunt; Members Iya Affo, Chris Curley, Alexandra Rodriguez, Javier Rodriguez, and Heather Watts

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Staff Liaison/Volunteer and Community Resource Manager Melanie Dykstra, Community Resource Supervisor Linda Ayers, and Deputy Clerk Judy Martine

GUESTS PRESENT: Kathleen Dowler of Dignity Health

#### CALL TO ORDER

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

#### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Warren led the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### ROLL CALL

Staff Liaison Dykstra called roll and declared a quorum present.

#### WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The guests and presenters introduced themselves.

#### AGENDA ITEMS

##### 1. Consider approval of the minutes of the December 4, 2023, meeting.

A MOTION was made by Member Affo, seconded by Member Curley, to approve the minutes of the December 4, 2023 meeting. *Motion carried 6-0; Vice Chair Lunt arrived at 5:36 p.m. and was absent at the time of the vote.*

## 2. Review and discussion of priority area of Homelessness & Low-Income Challenges

Staff Liaison Dykstra reviewed the item topic. She said Kathleen Dowler from Dignity Health would help to facilitate the activity, and she hoped the group would be ready to make their recommendations at the end of the meeting. She noted she did not anticipate a Study Session for this topic until after the next topic was complete; the two topics would be presented at the same time.

Kathleen Dowler of Dignity Health said the group was provided their key ideas and takeaways from prior meetings. She discussed the other documents provided to them including past meeting minutes, prior presentations, and housing trend. She said one group would work for 20 minutes on the topic of Low Income Challenges and another on Homelessness, then the groups would switch topics. She said the best recommendations should not be too specific, yet specific enough to be understood, and they should be measurable.

After the exercise, the group discussed the following recommendations and they were placed in categories. Staff Liaison Dykstra noted that many of them would overlap between Low Income Challenges and Homelessness:

### LOW INCOME CHALLENGES

**Resource – Rent Cap** - The group discussed a limit to the percentage and/or time increments that rent could be increased. They discussed if it should be applied only to multifamily housing and investors, or also to those renting their own homes. Member J. Rodriguez noted a change in legislation may be easier to achieve if applied toward multifamily housing.

**Resource – Tiny Home Product** – They discussed rental communities being built of tiny homes in other areas, like in Tempe, and opportunities to bring them to Gilbert, possibly to in-fill lots. They discussed backfilling lots with tiny homes, zoning options, and using nonprofit partners.

**Resource – Utilities and Rental Assistance** – They discussed the need for more resources beyond what the Town offered, noting the process could take too long may be too difficult. They discussed the 6-8 week wait time with AZCEND and if Gilbert could have other programs or find other resources to help with rent, utilities, and referral services. Staff Liaison Dykstra noted the Town did provide funding to AZCEND, then spoke of the importance of private sponsors as well; she discussed

the four options and restrictions for qualifying 501-C3 organizations to donate tax dollars and noted the opportunity for awareness of this option.

**Resource – First-Time Homebuyer Assistance** – They discussed possible support for first time homebuyers, including down payment assistance.

**Education - Prevention Awareness** – The group discussed education and financial classes with topics to include average rent, utility, and food costs; salary needed, housing market, and other factors. Vice Chair Lunt supported education on budgeting. They also discussed what was commonly needed to first move into a rental, in terms of fees and deposits. They discussed possible locations for educational opportunities including churches and schools. Kathleen Dowler said she heard they were adding education on budgeting into high school curriculum. Member A. Rodriguez suggested Parks and Recreation being a resource, since they were a neutral zone, versus faith-based groups. Vice Chair Lunt stated her church offered self-reliance classes and would welcome anyone; the question would be how to partner up. Chair Warren asked if some of the “average costs of life in Gilbert” information was already on the Town’s website. Staff Liaison Dykstra stated some data was there, but not compiled to show what it cost to live in the community. Member J. Rodriguez stated it may not seem inclusive to state what someone needed to live in Gilbert; Chair Warren disagreed, stating facts were helpful.

**Awareness – Need for Facts** – The group discussed the need for statistics to be shared, including education for those wishing to help, but were unsure about what was actually needed, as well as best uses of funding and resources.

**Awareness – Make it Personal and Actionable** – The group discussed the need to include a call to action and also tell how the issue could affect families. They noted people would be more likely to take action if it felt personal.

**Resource - Housing Options** - The group discussed the possibility of expanding housing options with the House of Refuge, such as dorms or tiny homes, to help single individuals experiencing homelessness as well. They discussed how families were often prioritized in terms of needs.

## HOMELESSNESS

**Resource – Voucher and Zoning Requirements** – They discussed the possibility of a voucher requirement for development and simplifying processes. They suggested the possibility of setting aside a certain amount of development for transitional housing, and to create favorable zoning for transitional housing on parcels not normally considered, such as church properties.

**Resource - Temporary Emergency Housing** – The group discussed the possibility of temporary emergency housing, including the option of working with a hotel, similar to what Mesa had done. They considered if it would be feasible for Gilbert or not, noting the Town could explore it more if the group was in strong agreement, but understood many of the hotels were already at high capacity in Gilbert. They also considered the use of office space. The group agreed to continuing the Town’s partnership with Community Bridges, Inc. (CBI) for those who could not do the I-HELP (Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program) and to research Chandler’s emergency housing model for Gilbert.

**Resource – Navigator -** The group discussed the navigator pilot phase and the possibility of having it be a permanent position embedded with Public Safety, similar to Chandler’s model. They discussed hiring requirements for a navigator versus a victim advocate.

**Education – Welcome All Income Levels** – They discussed the possibility for tax money to be used for one large housing complex, like the House of Refuge, and the need for some type of public housing with more rental control. They discussed the need to change the “not in my backyard” mentality.

**Awareness – Support for Youth Experiencing Homelessness** – The group discussed ways to assist youth including providing meals, programs beyond what schools offered, and surveying school administrators and social workers. Member Affo discussed the idea of churches helping to provide meals to students, stating there was no reason for children to go hungry in our society, especially being a large faith-based community. They discussed the free or reduced lunch program and about reducing stigma in schools regarding free lunches. Staff Liaison Dykstra discussed other groups that provided meals, but said some children only had meals at school. Staff Liaison Dykstra discussed the work of Matthew’s Crossing and other partnerships, stating there were very few providers for housing for teens. Kathleen Dowler discussed partnerships for high school students experiencing homelessness including money for transportation for students to get to jobs, support to keep them in school, mentoring, tutoring, and other resources. Member Affo also discussed how schools did not give students credit for school if they started after a certain

timeframe, noting it gave them no incentive to go, and some students transitioned often because of homelessness.

Kathleen Dowler said the groups did an impressive job and were in-sync regarding themes. She read the list of previously-listed ideas, asking if there were items not quantified in any way, and the group added a few other items (included above).

Staff Liaison Dykstra stated she would compile all of their recommendations, asking if they were ready to make a motion to finalize the topic for a future Council presentation.

A MOTION was made by Member Affo, seconded by Member Watts, to approve the recommendations as presented to be presented to the Council in Study Session. *Motion carried 7-0.*

## COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS

None.

## FUTURE MEETING SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

Staff Liaison Dykstra stated the next meeting in March would focus on the topic of Ensuring Gilbert is a Kind, Welcoming, and Inclusive Community. She asked the group for suggestions of presenters on the topic, noting it was best to let her know sooner than later for scheduling purposes. She noted that Parks and Recreation would likely present on what events they hosted. Member J. Rodriguez requested a list of the causes associated with special Gilbert Water Tower lightings. Staff Liaison Dykstra stated she could provide a list of the causes that were initiated by the Town; adding she would compile Town-initiated events, proclamations, and Water Tower causes. Member A. Rodriguez stated she would like to see a presentation from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ) perspective; Staff Liaison Dykstra noted she would reach out to One-n-Ten on that subject. Member Affo stated she wanted to hear from people of color, the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities, etc. about their experiences in Gilbert at schools, the court, the police department, hospitals, and other areas; Affo suggested hearing from individuals who participated in the Police Chief's Forum. Member J. Rodriguez questioned if the term "welcoming" should be defined; he noted faith-based groups could be asked how they worked to be inclusive in the community. They discussed options for presenters from churches.

Staff Liaison Dykstra stated their homework was to review the assessment on inclusivity that was provided to them before the next meeting; it would provide some

of the information they were seeking. She said she would reach out about the Chief's Forum. She added since the January meeting was not held due to lack of a quorum, the group would likely continue meeting through May 2024, rather than April.

## COMMUNICATIONS

### Report from Council Liaison on current events.

Council Liaison Tilque was in Executive Session and not present.

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

Staff Liaison Dykstra asked the group to review the Community Needs Assessment Survey by February 16, 2024. She highlighted the Gilbert Community-Wide Food Drive from February 12-25, 2024, adding there were almost 55 locations including schools, faith-based groups and businesses. She noted Chair Warren would be presenting on Homelessness and Low Income Challenges at a future Study Session, but it would be delayed and presented with the final topic.

### Report from Task Force Members on current events.

Member Watts stated she could not attend the March meeting; Member A. Rodriguez stated she could not attend the May meeting. Staff Liaison Dykstra surveyed the group to see if the date for March should be changed for quorum purposes; it was decided the meeting date should remain March 4, 2024.

## ADJOURN

Chair Warren adjourned the meeting at 7:43 p.m.

ATTEST:

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Sean Warren, Chair

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Melanie Dykstra, Staff Liaison