

Boys Totem Town Work Group Meeting - February 13, 2017

The meeting began with members sharing a favorite childhood activity. These introductory exercises are meant to help the members learn more about each other, feel more comfortable with each other and find shared interests.

There was some discussion from our East African members that the name of this group is confusing to that part of our community. This discussion led staff to believe that some of the misunderstandings about what the group is doing may arise from similar confusions. So we are proposing that the group be called the Boys Totem Town Work Group.

Our first work for the evening was outlining the positive aspects of the first community workshop. These included: the number of people, the variety of people and perspectives present along with their passion, the opportunity to come together face-to-face, and the feeling that everyone was free to speak in the small groups. The small group activities had the feel of a game and they allowed more people to speak and to speak more. The fact that there were mostly just neighbors in the room allowed tensions to diffuse, and people could see that the politicians were there to listen, observe and explain when needed. People appreciated that there were activities for children, and also that the custodial staff at the school was so helpful.

Our second task was to assess what could be improved in the structure and process of the workshop. We recognized that there initially was a lot of impatience among participants in part because they did not have an accurate idea of why they were there. Much of this was a result of the misinformation that people had received about the evening's purpose. So a clearly stated agenda that is communicated beforehand, is adhered to, and that includes background information so that everyone is starting from the same place, is essential. People need to understand and be reminded of what the process is for making decisions. The space where the workshop is held should be initially set up for the work that will be done, and not in a lecture hall style of chairs in rows facing the front. There is also a need to help facilitators know not only what they are doing and why they are doing it, but also how to facilitate. So increased training for facilitators is necessary.

We followed this work with a review of the 4 themes that came out of the comments at the meeting. There were interesting differences in how people approached the questions – how they defined the limits of their neighborhood, what they were and were not aware of that was available to them. Many of the comments that people made were 1) associated with more than one theme – therefore, the themes are interconnected; 2) identified misconceptions of what the neighborhood is and who lives there and may be associated with simply what people see; and 3) associated with certain advantages that some portions of the population have that others may not have. We hope to explore these themes in greater depth at the next community workshop. Work group members are encouraged to send additional comments about the themes to staff.

The next question we had to deal with is who was still missing from the attendees. First, there were still fewer representatives from the apartments than their proportion of the overall neighborhood. Second, not all the diversity of cultures is represented – other African immigrants, for example, or African

Americans. Few of the homeowners of color were in attendance, and this is a growing population. Small business owners were missing as well, and youth. The group suggested a variety of outreach methods and locations that staff is considering how to approach, but work group members are encouraged to do outreach as well. In fact, this is necessary for our success.

Finally, we ended the evening with concern for our local mosques, which have been targeted for hate mail and threatening behavior recently. The local police have had to be involved. We want to make sure that these faith organizations, and their congregants know that all of us stand in support of their fundamental rights here and elsewhere in the City, County and our country. This should be a part of our ongoing work.