

Prep Meeting for Fall Goal Setting Session

August 12, 2020

9:00 am

Via Zoom

Minutes

2020-54

Present: Mayor Gawron, Vice Mayor Hood, Commissioners Rinsema-Sybenga, Emory, German, Johnson, and Ramsey along with the City Manager and Department Heads all joined by zoom.

Introductions

Two videos were shown to the group. The group was asked to state what stood out to them personally in the videos regarding diversity.

Public Comment

Kimi George commented that complaints simply mean citizens want to be seen and heard and we should remember that and be open to the process.

Laying the Foundation: Where are we now as a community?

Beth Buelow, the moderator of the meeting, asked Commissioners and staff where are we now as a community. What are you hearing from others?

Mayor Gawron - Neighborhoods, safe place to live, public safety, expansion of economic opportunity - a great concern now during the pandemic.

Vice Mayor Hood - People are tired of lip service. People will agree and say we are with you but they do not want you above them. We need to be honest with people and our answers. Once the rage is over, we are back to normal until something else happens. We need to get ahead of that. We have a long way to go.

Dwana Thompson - Gun violence, voter registration, gerrymandering, getting absentee ballots on-time, culturally friendly business community, and retaining employees in the community.

Commissioner German - Downtown development - people like it, everyone needs to feel included, not enough black-owned businesses, development of inner-city, concern of gentrification, less people of color graduating, more equity for marihuana facilities, and Covid-19 making sure we are not in a red zone.

Commissioner Dan Rinsema-Sybenga - Economic uncertainty, city services, police reform (How is our police doing and what do we need to do to move forward.)

Jake Eckholm - Giving minority owned businesses an ear. We might have the right words to say, but we are not the person to say it. We need to acknowledge who should be part of the conversation.

Ken Grant - The black people know this has been happening for years. It's cameras that allow others to see it. Actions speak louder than words. Muskegon would be better if the people who live here actually sent their kids to schools here. It's actions.

Dave Alexander - Educational equity. We need programs. We need Caucasian people to be excited about these programs and want to participate.

Commissioner German - each community has different concerns. We need to put ourselves in those individual shoes. Different Wards have different concerns and we need to be open to listening to those concerns and solve issues.

Reason for optimism:

Commissioner Ramsey - we can learn to foster relationships in groups and there is strength in numbers. I'm most optimistic about us coming together as a team.

Mayor Gawron - we live in a community with a long history of neighbors bannings together at the neighborhood association level. There are many good people, engaged people, willing to share their minds and hearts.

Vice Mayor Hood - We have a good Commission. We have a great Mayor and City Manager and the rest of our employees and leadership team. I have been with the City in one way or another since 1988. I have seen so much improvement especially when it comes to equality and diversity.

Commissioner German - Our youth. They are the future. I connect with a lot of youth and I see the excitement. They want change. The kids do not care about ethnicity or the background we come from. They want to see change. Racism is learned behavior. Kids want to seek knowledge. I went through Muskegon Public Schools. It was very diverse. It seems more segregated now.

Commissioner Rinsema-Sybenga - There is a great team at the City. I've seen when they put their mind to something, they get it done. I think it's something we can move forward with.

Dave Alexander - Everything from affordable housing, market rate housing, convention center, rehabbing of homes, makes me optimistic that we will be back to that transformational energy we had prior to Covid-19.

Kirk Briggs - Blight fight projects downtown, the changes over the last few years have been fantastic. Imagine what it will look like eight years from now.

LeighAnn Mikesell- Developers are now reaching out to us. They see what we are doing and they are stating that Muskegon is a really cool place. Excited that others are recognizing it finally.

Dwana Thompson- Happy to see what is happening here and having these conversations towards equity.

Oneata Bailey - Happy to see new staff, younger staff, great to see the new housing in our old employee parking lot - affordable homes. Excited about the development of new housing at the old farmers market site.

Commissioner Johnson - Awesome staff at city hall and leadership on the Commission. More effort to collaborate with other communities more than ever before.

Looking Ahead: Where do we want to be?

Oneata Bailey - Talked about what we see moving forward after covid-19. We will be a sustainable community. We will be stronger. We will have recovered. We will understand that we are not all operating the same way. We are looking at ways we can help every individual, community, and city as a whole.

Commissioner Johnson- Who do we want to be moving forward. We are a diverse community with arts and culture. We want to be attractive to families and somewhere where people want to live. Have a sense of pride living here. Be happy and proud residents living in this city. Be able to live together and work together.

Ken Grant - Emphasize Muskegon is a great destination for tourism, focus on more diversified restaurants/food courts, utilize farmers market, want to be known as a place to come here and have a good time. Want to have a more lively downtown, have more foot traffic all year around.

Dave Alexander - Aspire to enjoy. Be a joyful community. Enjoy being with each other. Current conditions liberate us to put things on the table that we would not have on there before. Be a place that meets the basic needs of everyone. Be a community that is unique with glorious resources around us.

Leighann Mikesell - Diverse neighborhoods, everyone feel comfortable sending their kids to the neighborhood schools, welcome everyone, more diverse downtown, and want city employees living in the city. Cultural, economic, ethnic, age, etc.

Beth Lewis - Everyone benefits from progress and feels part of the progress. Not everyone views progress the same way. Muskegon has a lot of momentum going into Covid-19. We could be a good case study on how this should be done. We see a lot of positive things in this city to begin with.

What stood out to you?

The word ALL stood out. A word used often in the discussion.

Pay attention most to those that are most marginalized.

Commissioner Emory - How to make people in our city feel included. Finding a way to take those barriers down.

Commissioner Johnson - What kind of metrics do we have to make this quantitative measure?

Community Stakeholders: Identification of primary constituents that will inform City of Muskegon goals, including outline of purpose of meetings and strategy for engaging with stakeholders

Next Steps

Oneata Bailey - Invite them in as we address the priorities of the city. Which stakeholders should be brought in when we are talking about that segment?

Commissioner Rinsema-Sybenga - Identified groups such as small business groups, disability groups, LGBTQ, K-12 youth, senior services, youth groups, etc. to engage with.

Dwana Thompson - Sorority, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Jaycees, Optimist, and GVSU should be added to the stakeholder list.

Dave Alexander - Do it in small, intimate settings. Commissioners & staff need time and space to hear the stories. Should not be bigger than 15 people. Local landlord associations, hear from the young people, faith-based communities, and surveys to gather information.

Beth Lewis - Educational piece, Orchard View School should be added, Muskegon County should be a partner, WMSRDC, larger employers, also look at smaller businesses owned and operated by Muskegon people.

LeighAnn Mikesell - Social Justice Commission - start with groups most likely not to be included, Muskegon Democratic Black Caucus.

Need to be open to ideas not on our radar right now.

Closing Remarks

It's a large list. There is much to be done. We should make a list of what groups should be put together to discuss which topics. We could break it down among employees.

Ideas and suggestions should be passed along to LeighAnn Mikesell.

Public Participation

Kimi George stated when approaching stakeholders, are you looking for buy-in or input? Those are two different things. Be upfront with the public. Be honest if you are looking for public support and not necessarily public input.

Meeting adjourned at 12:30 pm.

Ann Marie Meisch, MMC
City Clerk

You may copy the link information below and paste it into a browser to view the meeting.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMEIG-QQed0&feature=youtu.be>