

SOUTH ORANGE/MAPLEWOOD COMMUNITY COALITION ON RACE
June 28, 2018 Meeting

Call to Order: Chair Robert A. Marchman called the meeting to order at 7:32 PM.

Present: Carol Barry-Austin, Lee Boswell May, Colleen Breslin (late), Catherine Cronin, Tegan Culler, Deborah Davis Ford, Nancy Gagnier, Leila Gonzalez Sullivan, David Harris, Robert A. Marchman, Fred R. Profeta Jr., Kelly Quirk, George Robinson, Audrey Rowe, Barbara Velazquez, Meredith Sue Willis

Absent: Nina Essel, Rhea Mokund-Beck, Reynaldo Tapia,

Excused: Walter Clarke, Abigail Cotler, Dean Dafis, Stephanie Lawson-Muhammad, Erin Scherzer,

Minutes Approval: Trustee Willis requested inclusion of more details from SO Liaison Davis Ford's Liaison Report and Trustee Gonzalez Sullivan noted a few typos. Fred Profeta moved Minutes be approved as amended and George Robinson seconded followed by unanimous trustee approval.

Chair Report:

- Chair Marchman noted the challenges ahead for Coalition involvement in Schools-related issues and noted that things "may get ugly along racial lines".

Executive Director Report:

- The homepage has been designed for the Coalition's new Nation Builder web site and transition should be complete in August 2018.
- The reduction in last month's assets on the P& L Statement were a result of depreciated stock value. Investigation is being made by Finance & Development Committee into an automated feature to convert donated stock to increase our investment.
- The ED and Program Director met with Leland McGee and another Scotch Plains resident regarding the Social Justice organization there to explore how they might work with the Coalition. The idea of the Coalition hosting a conference for interested nearby municipalities to brainstorm, discuss best practices and collaborate on integration and inclusion issues is under consideration.

Program Director's Report:

- Trustees were directed to the full Program Highlights distributed earlier in the Trustee Packet.
- Schools Committee co-chair Willis corrected the timeline for Top Ten brochure revision indicating that it is not yet ready for publication.
- The XRootsFest crowd estimate methodology was discussed with agreement that the estimate used was conservative.
- Tips for discussing race and sensitive issues on social media that were generated from the April 2018 Coffee House Discussion are now posted on the twotowns.org web site and will have a link from the July e-newsletter. A suggestion was made to convert the list into a graphic for posting on the Coalition's Face book page.
- Coalition involvement with the Grassroots Collective Radio show is as a guest participant and not as a program organizer.

Schools Committee BOE Letter:

- This letter is a statement from the entire Coalition organization that has been drafted by the Schools Committee.
- It is a follow-up to last year's statement with the addition of added awareness for the Coalition's concerns about the yet-to-be-developed plans for true integration of the SOMA elementary schools.
- The letter which had been distributed earlier was discussed by trustees and resulted in recommendations to 1) replace the phrase "proposed new K-4 elementary arrangements" with "elementary school reorganization" and to 2) move paragraph 2 down to focus more on the integration issues.

- The revised letter will be sent to the BOE in advance of their next meeting and then posted on the Coalition's website for public viewing.
- Trustees voted unanimously in support of the letter as revised following a motion by David Harris seconded by George Robinson.

Future State Report:

- Team leader Kelly Quirk explained that tonight's discussion was to surface ideas for the initiatives that will be voted on at the August meeting.
- She used a hypothetical example of Equitable Representation as an initiative and explained how each Mission Focus Area (MFA) might align their work and objectives with that initiative.
- The *Seven Pillars of Community* introduced by Chair Marchman last year was also referenced as a potential source for overarching areas to consider in the initiatives.
- Trustees then brainstormed the following possibilities for initiatives:
 - Increasing total African American (Black) population in SOMA, given that this group is declining while emerging (Hispanic/Asian/mixed-race) populations are increasing.
 - Housing affordability impact on integration.
 - Equity in government services and civic life.
 - Addressing the "façade" of integration in SOMA.
 - Establishing social integration (restaurants, events, casual activities like jogging)
 - School restructuring
 - Under-representation in government and civic leadership
 - School integration and equity – all phases
 - Police community relations
 - Leadership development among under-represented groups
 - Academic Achievement Gap
 - Outreach to other communities (county, region, nation)
 - Power leadership and integration
 - Integrated social and civic spaces

Note: Per Liaison Davis-Ford, increasing visibility for the integration mission and for our organization at the county and state level is important for SOMA in the political arena.

- Comments
 - The gross number of African Americans/Blacks is critical to overall SOMA racial diversity
 - However, we may not be able to have a direct impact on increasing the AA population
 - It's more than economics. Issues around feeling welcome are at play.
 - Negative issues can be framed as a positive by explaining the work that is being done here to address them.
 - Fixing the issues may be required before increasing SOMA's attractiveness to Blacks and others.
 - Addressing the African American/Black population increase issue is a multi-year effort that also requires research.
 - Communities that compete with SOMA for Black population have the same issues, but theirs have not been made as visible.
 - Marketing is key, but the media landscape has changed since the Coalition's earlier successes. So, we must adjust our expectations and approaches. We must work to manage negative press with our promotions and by highlighting concrete actions underway in SOMA.
- Next Step: Kelly Quirk will condense these ideas into 5-6 initiatives with examples of MFA derivatives and send that information to the board before the August meeting.
- **REMINDER: NO JULY MEETING**
- Chair Marchman thanked the entire Future State Committee for their hard work and emphasized how this approach will infuse more discipline into our organization's efforts and improve our ability to get ahead of issues.

XRootsFest:

- The XRootsFest team collected over 100 evaluations indicating that this event, including Edutainment, was well received.
- The level of support and volunteers needed are still concerns per coordinator, Trustee Velazquez.
- The festival content was excellent per South Orange Liaison Davis-Ford incorporating cultural diversity and quality performers, but the event attracted too few attendees. We need aggressive marketing to publicize the event.
- Competing events in our own town, as well as other near-by communities, plus uncertainty about weather negatively impacted attendance.
- One recommendation was to focus on the event's best components and transform it into an indoor event reflecting our community's cultural diversity – This is SOMA.
- The XRootsFest name is confusing and should be changed.
- There was general support within the organization for the event. However, it may take time to build audience, as has been the case with other major, local festivals.
- There appears to be a way to fit this event into a potential initiative list.
- South Orange locations, along with The Woodland in Maplewood and other locations, should be considered as potential venues.
- We can always apply to ECLAP for the grant and then return the award, if we find the event is not a good fit for initiatives or resources.

Maplewood Liaison: Excused

South Orange Liaison:

- Debra Davis Ford expressed that the South Orange Master Plan which defines the township's multi-decade vision needs diverse representation. (NOTE: The Coalition received an invitation from SO Village President Collum to participate/provide input).
- A voting machines issue has been brought to Davis-Ford's attention by SOMA Action Voting Rights Committee, and she has engaged Janine Bauer at the County level and will try to arrange a meeting with the New Jersey Secretary of State to resolve it. Coalition Trustee David Harris is also a leader with SOMA Action and explained that the problem is the inadequacy of current voting machines in South Orange to meet the auditable paper trail NJ state requirement. Davis-Ford shared that a draft resolution is underway from the New Jersey Freeholder Board documenting support for new machines.
- Effort is underway to increase diversity in the South Orange Fire Department which is among the least diverse in the township. This trend in fire departments is common across the country.
- However, the last 8 hires in the South Orange Police Department have been people of color.
- South Orange is aggressively working to meet the COAH (Council on Affordable Housing) standard for 2024. Currently, all development pilots in South Orange must commit to designating 20% of all units as affordable housing. Trustee Gonzalez Sullivan commented that the Coalition's MERT Committee is looking at this issue and that Maplewood retires the majority of its affordable housing commitment with elderly and disabled residences.

New Business:

- Two candidates have been selected, but not yet confirmed as 2018 Annual Dinner Honorees.
- Carol Barry-Austin will be managing the Annual Dinner Ad Journal and information will be coming to trustees soon to begin solicitation.

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 9:14 PM

Next Meeting: Thursday, August 23 at 7:30 PM at Prospect Presbyterian Church, 646 Prospect St. Maplewood NJ

Submitted By: Audrey Rowe

Secretary: Carol Barry-Austin