

Community Relations Board (CRB) Minutes

Wednesday, January 11, 2017, 6 p.m.

Municipal Building

Attendance: Lisa Borrelli Dorn, Dianne Wainwright, Robert Taylor, Dana Hackley, Matt Foreman, Mark Trumbull, Kiersten Lane, Commission Liaison Steve Silverman, Staff Liaison Susan Morgans

Call to Order: Vice chair Dana Hackley called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

Consideration of Minutes: The December minutes were unanimously approved.

Topic of the Month: Fire Chief Nick Sohyda discussed the human services issues firefighters encounter in the course of their work. The two main problems are elderly people who have no one to help connect them to services, and people who hoard, creating safety and fire hazards. The board said it would consider putting together a web-based guide that could connect people and families with appropriate services, along with a card that firefighters, police and medics could pass out (since everyone does not have access to a computer). The board is interested in learning more about hoarding. Chief Sohyda suggested that the board invite an expert to come to a meeting and address this subject. Chief Sohyda said that his department would be pleased to participate in a session of the planned CRB Neighborhood Academy.

REPORTS

Chair's Report

Lisa Borrelli Dorn's report focused on the successful Unity Rally and board members' suggestions for follow-up. Everyone agreed that something for children would be appropriate. Dianne Wainwright suggested that the continuing community dialogue be light-hearted and focused on getting people of various backgrounds to get to know one another. Dana Hackley asked that the board make sure it does not focus only on cultural diversity; the board also needs to consider people with physical and intellectual disabilities, the LGBTQ community, etc.

Bob Taylor moved and Dianne Wainwright seconded that "the community relations board sponsor an art/photography/essay contest with the theme of diversity." Board will work out the details at February meeting.

The board also agreed that Bob Taylor and Lisa Borrelli Dorn will meet with librarian Sharon Bruni at Mt. Lebanon Public Library to see how the CRB might partner on programs with the theme of diversity and inclusion that the library has announced it is planning in 2017.

Board decided to use the CRB magazine column for first-person stories by residents who might not be considered "typical." Bob Taylor will manage this. Some of the participants might be people who participated in the Unity Rally.

Other ideas for promoting inclusion and diversity included:

- Regular magazine Facebook posts promoting diversity
- Events that offer opportunities for neighbors to meet neighbors.
- Invite a social worker or a performing troupe to address (perhaps using role playing) how someone confronted with an offensive or hurtful comment can make it clear that such speech is not acceptable.
- Devote a portion of the planned neighborhood academy to Mt. Lebanon's increasingly diverse population and the economic and cultural value it brings to the community.
- Offering to mediate (in a less formal way the mediations requested by the magistrate) any incident or ongoing issue that is unpleasant and hurtful but does not rise to the level of a hate crime.

Citizen's Comments

A number of residents who helped plan the Unity Rally attended the meeting. Several commented.

- Rabbi Mark Mahler of Temple Emanuel suggested that all follow-up should “acknowledge our difference and celebrate our similarities.”
- Father David Bonner of St. Bernard RC Church thanked the board for its work and said the Unity Rally showed what can be done when people work together. He offered the help of his church in future initiatives.
- State Rep. Dan Miller thanked the board and the audience for their efforts and encourage them to continue.
- Sheryl Cohan from Rep. Miller’s office suggested that an International Culture night might be a nice community event. She said that Jefferson School has an annual event sponsored by its Culture Club and recommended contacting the chair of that event. She also suggested reaching out to the religious community to help publicize events.
- Lana Shami said that Mt. Lebanon High School classes sometimes come to the Islamic Center of Pittsburgh but suggested it would be better to begin educating children about world religions when they are younger.
- Carla Clipper of the Mt. Lebanon Partnership and Kelly Fraasch, commission liaison to the partnership, said the partnership wants to plan a community family dinner on Parse Way. They would like help from the CRB, and will keep the CRB posted.
- Sheila McCollum president of the Black Association of the South Hills (BASH) said it would be a good idea to resurrect the now-defunct Celebrating Diversity group.
- Andrew Flynn said that rather than create new events, more diversity might be included in existing events such as the July 4 Community Day and First Fridays.
- Kelly Fraasch said gender equality is an important part of inclusion She said she hopes that board can promote genders working more respectfully together in government roles. She also noted that the community has some structural issues that need to be addressed so that people with physical disabilities can more easily participate in activities. She noted that the Mt. Lebanon Partnership, though the Accessible Lebo program, has helped with this issue already.

Other Business

Susan Morgans will do a news release this week about the approaching deadline for the Volunteer Service Award. She also will send board members a suggested email they can send to friends to promote nominations.

The March agenda should include: art/essay contest, service directory, report on library programming, community service award.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

The next meeting is Wednesday, February 8, at 6 p.m. The meeting adjourned at 7:30.