

Falcon Heights Community Conversations II
Meeting #1
Thursday, December 3, 2020
6:00 – 7:30 PM
Zoom

Meeting Notes

The facilitators welcomed the meeting participants and discussed meeting protocols. The meetings were designed with the participation of a Falcon Heights planning team which included City staff, elected officials and members of the Citizens' Engagement Commission.

Falcon Heights Mayor Randy Gustafson and Councilmember Melanie Leehy welcomed the participants, provided a brief history of community conversations in Falcon Heights, and provided an update on what the City has done for its Cultivating a Caring Community Initiative.

Participants broke into small groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Rate the progress the City and Falcon Heights Community have achieved to address inclusion and public safety since the last community conversations (2017) on a scale of 0 to 5 with "0" being "worthless" and "5" being "perfect."
2. Now that you have heard the results of the poll, how do you feel about the outcome and what do you recommend the city and community do together to move forward? Keep in mind the collaborative work the City and Falcon Heights community has done to increase inclusion and public safety since 2016.
3. How can the City and residents collaborate to create a stronger and safer community? Please take into consideration the calls for the movement for reform sparked by the deaths of Mr. George Floyd and Mr. Philando Castille.

Small group participants reported highlights from their discussions to the full group, which are recorded below for each question.

1. RATING
 - In response to the question rating the City's progress to address inclusion and public safety since 201, two groups rated the City a "3" and one group rated "3 – 4" on a scale of 1 – 5.
 - One group noted that the range was between 2 and 4, and their "3" represented an average.
2. MOVING FORWARD
 - A theme from all three groups centered on communication.
 - How does Falcon Heights communicate with residents about Cultivating a Caring Community? Feeling that more could be done.
 - Falcon Heights needs to tell the story about what is going on.

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- Falcon Heights could be a champion of change – be more explicit in our language, not just caring community but specifically anti-racist.
- Listen to people ... more interaction with residents.
- People want more and better communication from the City about their interactions with the Sheriff.
- Good things were happening, and there needs to be visibility ... share these activities and outcomes so that community members understand that progress was being made.
- Visibility is important for funding.

3. HOW CITY AND RESIDENTS COLLABORATE

- **QUESTIONS:** The groups discussed specific projects which are in process and the community at large wants to know what is happening.
 - Desire to understand what the barriers are to have a permanent memorial at the site where Philando was killed. It is important to understand, provide updates. (Answer: The memorial effort is still underway and is fundraising right now.)
 - Question about the status of the Philando Castille Peace Garden. (Answer: A committee is continuing to meet. It is ongoing, monthly meetings. It is a slow process.)
 - It was noted that the City cannot be a fundraiser and these projects need additional funding. The City could invite others to present at events and request funds.
- **STRENGTHS:** Participants identified Falcon Heights' strengths, wanted more of the same.
 - Restoration Day.
 - Unity Day.
 - More opportunities for residents to mix during events such as free play for kids on Curtis Field (noted that parents get to mix too).
 - Citizens report feeling secure, less harassment on the streets by law enforcement. Cited an example when the Sheriff's department diffused a potential gun violence situation and community members helped establish safety.
- **SUGGESTIONS:** Participants identified areas for improvement.
 - Provide new residents with information is good, and it was commented that the information is white centric. Suggested to specifically work on anti-racist language.
 - One group discussed the need to work across barriers such as the City being broken into quadrants (by roads) and renters/homeowners. Would like to see more communication across barriers.
 - Another hurdle which was identified was the need for deeper listening and understanding many different viewpoints.
 - Residents' might be able to share their skills and ideas, efforts don't need to be City led. The City could help, looking for ways to partner.

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After sharing reports from the small groups, the full group generated ideas to communicate better.

- Could we put notice for these conversations on NextDoor?
- Dedicated newsletter that goes out periodically.
- Crowdsourcing information.
- How could community members help communicate?

City Council and staff discussed what will happen after this evening's meeting.

- There are two more meetings (on December 17, 2020 and January 7, 2021), which will build on this one.
- The ratings tonight were basically a "C" – next meeting could focus on how do we get an "A"?
- Hopefully COVID will be over and it will be easier to gather, share experiences, tackle hard questions. I know there is interest ... it is frustrating that we cannot gather in the same place. Zoom is great, and it can be frustrating also.