

ALTOGETHER VALPO TASK FORCE
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
September 29, 2015

The Altogether Valpo Task Force Steering Committee meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m. on Tuesday, September 29, 2015 at Valparaiso City Hall Council Chambers, 166 Lincolnway Street, Valparaiso, Indiana. Bruce Berner presided.

Members present were: Bruce Berner, Bill Oeding, Heath Carter, Tim Daly, Trista Hudson, Byron Martin, Jessica Burkman, Mike Jessen, Jacob Williams, and Stu Summers. Also present were citizens, and representatives of the press.

I. Welcome/Overview:

Bruce Berner welcomed everyone present. Mr. Berner advised that the overall theme of the steering committee and the three subcommittees is to move toward a welcoming environment in Valparaiso and a compassionate attitude toward all people. The three subcommittees are hiring, affordable housing, and inclusion. The steering committee, at a minimum, has to keep the three subcommittees in contact with each other and all working in a unified way. We will help develop time tables, work with budget requests, and help with action plans, etc. That being said, the steering committee would like to hear from all subcommittees as to what steps they are taking and what budget requests they have by December 1, 2015. The goal is to have a report to the City with our best synopsis by early next summer.

II. Discussion:

Q: What values are expected to guide the subcommittees and is Valpo Next the only basis they are working from, noting, that hiring was not deeply covered in Valpo Next. Housing was more thoroughly covered and at this point the data will most likely show that we have not achieved the Valpo Next goal for affordable housing. What will we do with that data?

A: Mr. Berner noted that we will need more discussion to get a better grip on that. We are not redoing what Valpo Next has already done. There will definitely be a larger overlap with inclusion, but not as much with housing and hiring.

A: Mr. Daly noted that the Valpo Next plan gives us a direction. We need to see the data and where it will take us first. We need to have an open mind.

Q: Has everyone seen the Valpo Next information?

A: (Consensus) No.

C: Mr. Oeding advised that it is available on the City's website; however, he will take steps to get it distributed to the members.

Q: With regard to the subcommittees, we know there is already an issue; it is important for them to determine how large the problem is, define the problem, and address a plan of action. In the issue of housing, Valpo Next already set the goal and the housing subcommittee will act as a vehicle to help achieve that goal. That is a minimum. We may certainly do more.

Q: As community members we know that there are a number of other issues as well; however, the City has asked these subcommittees to help with these specific issues at this time.

C: Problem identification is step one. Defining the problem will be the first step in being able to identify possible solutions.

Q: Does the steering committee need to set specific goals for each subcommittee?

A: The subcommittees have already been doing that among their own groups.

- A: Members of the steering committee are also on the subcommittees and the subcommittees will gather necessary information, define terms, and report back to the steering committee so we may help negotiate the goals. We need to trust in our subcommittees.
- C: We won't have all the answers tonight. We need to let the subcommittees meet as well to define their goals and their visions. We can't mandate what that is or should be, we can only guide them. We said that we would try to have this project done in one year, but that might not be case for every subcommittee. Some may need longer and some may be done prior.
- C: Let the subcommittees meet and report back to us in December (we'll need to schedule a December meeting) so we may review what the subcommittees plans are and what their budget requests are at that time.
- C: The steering committee is not prepared as a group to declare what the goals of each subcommittee should be. We all need to familiarize ourselves with the Valpo Next plan, and listen to the experts in their field that are on the subcommittees and those that are dealing with the issues first hand from the community members they are serving. We don't want to exclude those subcommittee members from the process and we also want public input. We as the steering committee approve, amend, encourage, and adjust the goals set by the subcommittees. We are dealing with very good, intelligent, and resourceful people. What they come up with will not be all that different from what we would come up with. The subcommittees want to know our views as well.

III. Public Input:

Bruce Berner asked if anyone in the public would like to ask questions or give comments.

Steve Cronch, thanked the members for doing this noting it is a very difficult job. The hard part is interpreting the data once it is received especially since it will have most likely changed by the time it's received. Be mindful. Results are fluid. Apply your values to the data. You have the community's support.

Christopher Pupillo, 302 Madison Street, Valparaiso, states that the steering committee is not reflective of the diversity of this community. What will be done to share the gathered information with the community? Where and when are the subcommittee meetings and how will they be inviting the community? Although we value the data process there are short term steps that can be taken in the meantime such as the LGBTQ Protective Order. Don't let the process preclude you from taking other actions that can and need to be done now.

- Subcommittee meeting dates and times were announced at the last meeting. We will check into getting those meetings on the City website and Valpo Next's website, and we send notices to the newspapers. We have also talked about meeting at places within the community and not always at City Hall. We will continue to work on a plan for that. There was a sheet distributed this evening for members of the public to submit their email address. We can send notices via those emails also.

Janet French, asked that members identify themselves when speaking. Having tables in the middle of a room with facing away from the public is not the best way to make people feel welcome.

- Mr. Berner noted that prior to the meeting starting he did address the public stating the members would be meeting with one another prior to inviting public input. The city has not tried something like this before so we are certainly all learning together and appreciate the input and will try to make things better.

Garner Tullis, asked that especially with housing and inclusion the members really look at the statistics involving children. Mr. Tullis works with high risk and troubled children and would really like to see the gap closed in that area. Please don't just look at the adult statistics.

- We understand that surveys that get sent home to parents often exclude the child's input. The subcommittees will work to engage entire families and have those conversations with the schools as well.

Kathy DeWitt, questioned what the process is for collecting the data? Noting she has 35 years of experience in the field and focus groups have been the most successful in the past. When you go to them it works better.

- It has not been decided at this time, but we will take all options into consideration. We want to reach as many people as possible and will certainly entertain every option.

Jane Schreiner, asked the members to keep in mind that while they are researching and gathering data there are people out there that are hurting deeply. We don't want you to rush, but remember that the need is now for some.

Heath Carter, states that he has an African American child that attends a school (system) with not African American teachers, and as of last March there were only three African Americans working for the City of Valparaiso. Would you be comfortable sending your child to a school where all the teachers and peers are white?

- We understand that there is urgency for some where all of these issues are concerned. There are 28 committee members and not one of them wants this task to last any longer than it has to in order to be successful. While this task force is moving forward other stuff will be happening and will be handled outside of this group. We will work as fast as we can. If it takes longer then it takes longer because we are thinking of the next generation. We want things done correctly and thoroughly.

Candace Shaw, noted that the former HRC discussed these same issues for at least eight years and there have not been any results. This community is not tolerant to autistic children, ADHD children, struggling mothers, etc. A lot of white men have been running things for a long time. It has been talked to death. We need to not duplicate efforts and get things accomplished.

Paul Schreiner, stated that he recently ran into someone that has worked for Valparaiso University for eight years and she told him she was leaving this community due to her perception to racism for her children. Steps need to be taken.

Elijah Cramer, states he helped with Valpo Next and it was surprising. He thought people would come in and be negative but was astounded on how there was almost none of that. We got valuable feedback and people were happy to be asked. People were happy to be engaged. We have a wave and we need to keep it going.

- We already have an email list and we will continue to find other ways to get to those that can't attend a meeting like this.

Larry Baas, noted that in 1999 Mayor Butterfield put together a committee of respect and the committee didn't really do anything. This seems like déjà vu. He hopes that progress is made this time.

Nathan Hallenbeck, states that we need to look a past human behaviors and how we have changed what we did to change. We need to look at what is being predicted so we have a better idea of what to expect. We need to plan ahead and for the future. Don't plan for today; it's the past tomorrow.

John Novak, encourages the committee to look at the future and predict based on trends. Look at the data but also look at the future trends. Technology, education, and housing already have data available. Mr. Novak states he is willing to help with the data aspect of the project if needed.

Julie Storbeck, suggested providing copies if the committee member listing and contact information for the public and make them available at the library, V-line bus stations, Banta, etc.

Janet French, states she is concerned with the LBGTQ Ordinance. We would like a recommendation from this group to pass the Ordinance. What should we tell people when they ask what is happening with that?

- That is not the charge of this group. There is some concern with backlash of such an Ordinance. Those that are truly affected need to come to the table and that takes time. This body has not been asked to comment on this. Thing are already in process for this, but again, it is not the charge of this body.

IV. Wrap Up:

Q: What do we want the subcommittees to bring back to our next meeting?

A: Goals, budget requests, meeting dates for subcommittees with locations, and a projected timeline.

Q: Would this committee like to meet again before December with a major leader in this field. Mr. Carter notes that he has a relationship with the Community Relations Director in Oak Park, Illinois (Cedric Melton) and he would be willing to invite him to talk about what they have done. This may help further our thought process.

A: The consensus was that this would be a great step and a good idea for all the members and the members of the community. Mr. Carter noted that he will reach out to Mr. Melton to see if he can give a presentation in early November, after Election Day. He will suggest a presentation and then a meeting to follow.

C: It is suggested that we talk about a survey as an entire group so we can combine and not be asking the same questions on several different surveys. That is, if we decide to go with the survey option.

C: Please get any changes to the committee member list to Deb Butterfield so she may update the listing prior to distribution.

Q: Who does this committee make recommendations to?

A: The Mayor and City Council.

V. Adjournment:

The September 29, 2015 Altogether Valpo Task Force Steering Committee meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.