

Strategic Planning Committee
Community Relations Working Group

June 23, 2014 Meeting Minutes
Hammond 314 @ 10:30am

Committee Attendees: Elizabeth Walsh, Chair; Jessica Augat, Robert Carr, Christopher Hendry, Daniel LaFond, Karen Leary, Renée Scapparone. Absentees: Nicholas Capasso, Jannette McMenamy, Megan Pierce, Joshua Spero

Guests: Jay Bry, Jane Fiske, Michael Kushmerek

Meeting called to order at 10:35am

Minutes of the June 9th meeting were reviewed; motion to accept by Renée Scapparone and seconded by Jessica Augat; unanimously approved.

Discussions:

- Elizabeth Walsh (Chair) distributed attendance sheets for both the June 9th and June 23rd meetings to be signed by all committee members in attendance for these meetings.
- Jay Bry presented an overview of the Clark University Community Economic Development Plan: the project began in 1998 as a “self-defense” (self-preservation) to increase student enrollment. Initially began in a designated area (approximately 13 block radius). The intent was to designed to help current residents address their needs and not to displace them; intermix with the community by sharing the vision. This was not one organization but a collaborative effort with the university, the South Main Community Development Corporation (CDC), and the city of Worcester.
- Bridge financing was provided by Clark for a number of different types of investments such as a \$5K loan employees for 5 years; some for 7 years @ 12%; some were grants that were forgiven that did not exceed \$4K for property renovation. There was also an effort to have 50/50 ownership and affordable housing in the designated area.
- Since the onset of the program the focus has continued to be on students. Tuition is free for any resident in the designated neighborhood and remains for 5years in this area. Since the program inception, 72 students have had \$7M in tuition waived. Most would have been eligible for financial aid (Pell grants) thus this is not a loss in revenue for the university. Currently there are 24 students in the program that are advancing as a cohort and receive group advising as well as individual advising.
- In addition, Clark professors are actively targeting “at-risk” students in the Worcester public school system especially at the elementary school in the neighborhood. This interaction not has raised awareness of the opportunity for these students to attend Clark

but has proven to raise the academic scores of these students giving them incentive to succeed.

- Clark approached this project by conducting research with the community and not on the community and worked closely with the South Main CDC and involved local businesses and churches and other organizations. The project has struggled with the redevelopment of retail businesses which may be a result of the economic recession over the past several years.
- The project outcomes have been successful in part that families have invested and stayed in the area. Clark did buy some houses and renovated these properties and sold to families while other properties were rented.
- Questions were raised by committee members as to how FSU can do a similar project since we are a public university versus Clark being a private university. Suggested to focus on a designated neighborhood that would include the McKay Elementary School as well as the area that is part of the current Working Cities Grant. In addition, the focus should be on education and helping the local (neighborhood) students to have “access” to FSU. Strongly recommended that we need to get a better understanding of what the residents want and not what FSU, the Twin Cities CDC or the City of Fitchburg think the residents want.
- An explanation was provided about the Working Cities Grant (monies provided by the Federal Reserve to Gateway Cities). The focus is more than economic development but rather the “healthiness” issues that include (but not limited to) public safety, housing, education, and community engagement. The grant is for \$400K for a 3 year period that will measure the results from the initiative investment, not a one-time project but rather an ongoing one.
- Also discussed was the need to connect with the community and work from the ground up and FSU should not approach this effort downward to the community. A collaborative effort is necessary, that many efforts are being put forth but there is a lack of communication or focal point.
- There needs to be a “change” in the vision that education can improve the quality of life and that FSU should be a part of this; there is a need to have more residents and businesses involved that could raise the income levels of the area. Comments were made regarding the high number of single-parent households that are in need of resources such as education opportunities that include affordable housing and daycare services.
NOTE: It was recommended that this should be reviewed and possibly addressed by FSU.
- A brief discussion evolved regarding the high turnover rate of high school students; there is a 30% turnover rate of students who begin the high school year in Fitchburg and leave the area. Unable to identify why this high turnover rate is occurring but is a concern.
- Also discussed was the perception of the city as a whole is poor, not just the neighborhood surrounding the university.

- Further discussion regarding the need for community engagement and how to go about getting this engagement. As noted by Michael Kushmerek, from his experience as City Councilor in Ward 4, trust needs to be developed in order to get people engaged and that this is a lengthy process. The Twin Cities CDC has done an exceptional job at developing this trust and getting the community engaged, especially in this Ward (Main Street area). From this discussion, the recommendation was made to invite representatives from the CDC to attend a committee meeting.
- Also discussed was the need to narrow down the committee's focus and to highlight 3 to 4 issues by mid- to end- of August.
- Final discussion addressed the questions that should be asked of the Twin Cities CDC representatives as follows:
 - What outreach has been done (by the CDC)?
 - What is the community saying about this outreach (effectiveness)?
 - What is the best way to do outreach?
 - What is the community's perception of FSU?
 - What is the CDC and community's expectation of FSU?
 - Need an overview of what the CDC does and how FSU can help their efforts.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Elizabeth Walsh will invite representatives from the Twin Cities CDC: Mark Dohan, Executive Director and Vinny Rodriguez, Community Relations, to attend next meeting.

Next Meeting: Monday, July 7, 2014 @ 10:30am in Hammond 314

Meeting adjournment at 12:00pm

Respectfully submitted by,
Renée Scapparone