

Elmhurst Youth Commission Meeting Notes

August 18, 2014

District 205 Center, 162 S. York

12:30 pm

In Attendance: Lynn McCreadie (secretary) Melea Smith
Patty McKernan Sharon Karpel
Mark Soehn Jeff Kucera
Dan Corrigan Jackie Tamer
Karen Stezowski

Via Telephone: Jan DeCoursey

Absent: Derek Schlager Mike LaSpisa

Meeting Called to Order: 12:35 p.m.

Review of Minutes from June, 2014: approved

Chris Herren Visit Status (discussion) Melea & Karen Stezowski

After repeated attempts on behalf of the Commission to communicate with City Hall regarding a proposed speaking engagement with Chris Herren as part of an anti-drug/heroin awareness push, Melea Smith has not received any response from the Mayor or City Manager. She did reach out to Dan Leahy, the new Director of Communications, as well as other city officials. She spoke with Marilyn Gaston in the finance department. Marilyn stressed that the Commission's budget is \$1,000 and that fundraising would not be possible under the current structure. Therefore, any funds raised in support of this effort would need to be processed through a non-profit (501-C3) entity and could NOT be funneled through the City's budget.

To that end, Melea approached Lisa Fanelli, Executive Director of the District 205 Foundation regarding a partnership with that entity. Foundation Board member Maryann Kallis, former principal at Lincoln Elementary, expressed great interest in being involved in any efforts to provide a Heroin Awareness program. She has worked with the Robert Crown Center and has some experience with the issue. Other individuals, such as Foundation Board member Jay Web and former Elmhurst youth officer Frank Visconti have also expressed interest in this topic.

Jackie Tamer informed the Commission that it is too late to book Chris Herren for any kind of fall activity, and so if the Commission wished to pursue him as a possible speaker, such an event would have to take place in 2015.

Jeff Kucera expressed the idea that District 205 may be reluctant to have any kind of "sponsorship" role beyond providing facilities and student management because it would not want the negative publicity involved in being perceived as having a heroin problem.

Karen Stezowski wondered if piggy-backing seminars or other information efforts on to already-scheduled parent activities might be a solution, such as having something during Parent/Teacher conferences.

Ultimately, the Commission's efforts for a Heroin Awareness program need to be tabled until issues of money and fundraising can be addressed and solved.

Vision for Youth Commission (discussion)

All

Karen Stezowski felt that the Commission needed to have a broader discussion on what it wanted to accomplish, given its very limited budget of \$1,000. Discussion ensued in which all members of the Commission questioned the perceived value that the City of Elmhurst has for the Commission and its mission based on the low financial investment it has made toward the Commission's efforts – only \$1,000 annually in recent years.

The Commission members feel that the Commission's ability to be an effective entity is severely limited given that it cannot fundraise due to its status. The Mayor has indicated that he anticipates the Commission will continue to hold its annual Youth Service Awards event and also hopes for it to sponsor and execute a youth job fair and/or volunteer fair. To date, however, the Commission's budget has not matched these expectations. Members expressed an unwillingness to continue to serve on the Commission if it would involve nothing more than "glorified party planning."

Melea Smith expressed concern that the City itself is unsure of the nature and mission of the Commission, based on a call she received in which it was suggested that the Commission on Youth organize an effort where Elmhurst youth volunteer to help elderly residents with weekly refuse duties. All members were in agreement that creating volunteer opportunities for Elmhurst youth was NOT in line with their understanding of the Commission's mission - which is to serve and support youth.

Sharon Karpel suggested that we request to hold monthly meetings at City Hall in order to increase the Commission's visibility. She also suggested that the Commission request a City Hall representative to attend meetings. There has always been an alderman assigned to the Commission, although none has attended meetings or had any kind of relationship with the Commission for the past five years.

Mark Soehn suggested that the Commission approach Alderman Danee Polomsky to serve as the Commission's assigned liaison. Mark agreed to approach Danee and ask her if she'd be willing to serve in such a capacity.

Jan DeCoursey suggested that the Committee create or locate a mission statement that specifies for purpose the commission was created. A mission statement and goals were created by former members of the Commission in 2011 (Melea was part of that effort).

At the suggestion of Marilyn Gaston, the Youth Commission members agreed to write a letter to City Hall, to be signed by all committee members, requesting an increase in the its budget to the amount of \$20,000, based on estimates as follows:

Youth Services Award Ceremony - \$1,000

Heroin Awareness Event/Speaker - \$15,000

Volunteer Fair - \$1,000

Teen Job Fair - \$1,000

Other Youth-Centered Efforts and Miscellaneous Expenses - \$2,000

Additionally, this letter will request that an alderman be assigned as a permanent liaison between the Commission and City Hall, as well as spelling out the vision that the Commission has for its future endeavors. Jan, Karen and Melea have volunteered to draft the letter.

The hope is that the Commission will be able to ascertain its value to the City based on the response given to the budget increase request, as well as other aspects of the letter. It was agreed that based on the response, all members will need to decide individually their willingness to remain involved with the Commission.

Next Meeting: 12:30 p.m., September 15, 2014 at the District 205 Administration Center