

Demographic Change Task Force – Minutes of meeting on July 29, 2009

Present: Marian Cohen (2020 Vision Com. Liaison), Margaret Coppe (School Liaison), Ben Esty, Dan Krupka, Carl Valente (Town Manager)

The meeting began at 7:10 p.m.

Preparations for the Task Force's Report

The meeting was devoted to discussing the potential content of the report of the Task Force to its sponsoring body, the 2020 Vision Committee. Although the charter of the Demographic Change Task Force calls for it to complete its work by the spring of 2009, Carl Valente suggested that we should aim to submit our report by the end of 2009. He also recommended a structure that consists of: (1) facts; (2) issues implied or raised by the facts; and (3) a few potential, testable solutions.

Data – Needs and acquisition

Since facts form the foundation of our report, the Task Force discussed the need to supplement the data available from the decennial census and the Community Surveys with more detailed data, possibly obtained by adding questions to the annual Town Survey. According to the Town Clerk, Donna Hooper this is indeed possible, and has invited us to submit our additions by October. However, there is no guarantee that Task Force's proposed additions would be included.

The discussion then turned to the trend in the number of Lexington Asian residents who "Speak English less than 'very well'." The topic is important because the fraction of the Town's Asian population that falls into this category appears to have grown from 3% in 2000 to 4% in 2005-2007. The first figure is based on the 2000 census while the second comes from the 2005-2007 American Community Survey (ACS), also conducted by the Census Bureau. Since the ACS is based on a sample of the population, it has a substantial sampling error. Moreover, since neither report includes a breakdown of the category by age group, the data would not allow the Town to assess whether the trend might call for more teachers of ELL or for ways of improving communication with adults.

After discussing the importance of well-formulated and tested survey questions, the Task Force concluded that the wording of any questions added to the Town's survey should be modeled, wherever possible, on those already appearing either on the decennial census or the Community Survey. Dan Krupka agreed to obtain copies of the documents and to learn about the methods used by the Town Clerk's office to record and analyze the results of its survey.

The following potential questions – but certainly not their wording – were briefly discussed:

- What is the primary language spoken at home?

- Do you rent or own your place of residence?
- If you are over 65, are you “active” or “frail”?

In addition, since the Superintendent of Schools, Paul Ash, is also interested in adding questions to the Town census, the Task Force decided that it would invite him to submit his questions through the Task Force.

Potential recommendations to be included in the report

After briefly reviewing the presentations made to the TF, the members observed that many included impressions of demographic trends rather than data. The potential recommendations might therefore include asking Town departments and services to maintain demographic data. How this was to be accomplished, however, was not discussed.

Other potential recommendations:

- Identifying citizens’ groups by language to be contacted for support and assistance by those who do not speak English fluently
- Arranging for high school students to perform informal translation services
- Actively recruiting Asians to serve on school and Town bodies
- Cultural sensitivity training for Town employees, e.g. EMS, who are likely to come into contact with residents under difficult circumstances
- Recommendations for dealing with a particular issue should always include a low-cost option, one that would impose a minimum burden on the Town’s budget

Report structure

The Task Force agreed to use the structure of Ben Esty’s minutes of its March 14, 2009 minutes as the starting point for its overall organization.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Next meetings:

Wednesday, August 26 – Working session devoted to the preparation of the Task Force report
Wednesday, September 23 – Housing (50%); Working session (50%)

Minutes submitted by:
Dan Krupka