Coalition Race and Equity Committee notes of meeting April 20, 2023

Present: Sherrilla Bivens, Rob Huff, Rosemary Powers, Verda Washington and Carolyn Weisz,

Rosemary reviewed the plans for the May events around the documentary A Reckoning in Boston. Link to the on demand home screening will be available through Eventbrite on May 1 for screening May 13 through 15 and community conversation at Shiloh Baptist Church on May 18 from 5:30 – 7:00 pm.

Verda brought up the idea of gathering a small group together during the home screening time to watch the documentary together. This would be a good way to get more people to watch it, discuss it, and perhaps share refreshments together. Since the documentary is 88 minutes long, it would be good to ask people to plan for about 2 hours so there is time to discuss and socialize. Rosemary will share this idea with both the Coalition listserv and the League of women voters membership.

Carolyn briefly discussed the status of her research interviewing people who are in some way doing racial equity work in the context of housing/homelessness --in whatever ways that gets described. She has received approval to conduct some focus groups and will be inviting members of the Lived experience Coalition to participate in a group. Is still looking for people willing to be interviewed, but is not making a general announcement. If we know of people who are doing this kind of work who might be willing to be interviewed, we can let her know.

Rosemary asked for ideas regarding what we should focus on as a committee to ensure we hear the voices that are not well represented in our meetings.

Verda discussed the importance of hearing from youth—not necessarily only those experiencing homelessness –whether couch surfing or in some other vulnerable housing situation, or participants in foster care, but also young people, especially youth of color, whose talents may be unseen by teachers or other adults. She noted that these unrecognized youth may not be homeless now, but that they need encouragement to follow their hopes to build a stable future. Verda will be attending a couple of education focused group meetings in the coming days and will do some research on what these groups may be doing regarding youth/equity/homelessness/on-going education opportunities.

Rosemary added that we had earlier discussed inviting youth experiencing homelessness (such as those who are involved at the Beacon center or the Hype Center), to speak about their needs and experiences—either as a presentation during a coalition meeting or initially as a conversation in person that seeks their insights as people with lived experience.

Rosemary asked the group for ideas that we could share with the coalition governance workgroup. For example how to paying attention to ways our structure can reduce likelihood of participation by those who do not have flexible hours permitting a 2 hour meeting on Friday mornings. This might suggest an in-person event outside the coalition meeting time to facilitate more participation. Carolyn mentioned that the Lived Experience Coalition has a small amount of money available to compensate those with lived experience who may not be working regularly for pay but who might be able to participate in coalition activites as an internship experience.

Sherrilla suggested we might consider a community potluck with conversation that would be welcoming to those who want to help address homelessness as a volunteer and those who have experienced homelessness (or are currently homeless) to share their ideas of what is needed –both long term and in the meantime)

Verda identified the biggest problem for housed people as personal ideas about homelessness that get in the way of understanding the real issues. We could communicate about this through educational outreach over the next few months by participating in neighborhood council events –open houses, fairs, that have resource tables.

Carolyn added that it would be especially good if in our role as the Coalition, we could invite a variety of people to join these resource tables—shared housing opportunities as well as services available and accurate info about homelessness causes and experiences.

Rosemary noted that the communications committee for the coalition has a variety of handouts so we might not need to create things.

Rob suggested we collaborate with the communications group to organize this outreach project.

Rosemary said she would reach out to the communications committee for the next step. We’ll need to research the calendar dates for those neighborhood council/ community events over the summer. Rosemary added that this kind of focused, time limited project might appeal to other coalition members who haven’t been part of our race and equity committee yet. Doing something specific is s way to get ready to do something more.

We’ll bring our further ideas about any of these options to our next meeting.

The third Thursday of May is May 18, the same day as our Revenue in Boston community conversation. I propose that we meet instead on the following Thursday, May 25, as we would then have the opportunity to discuss what we learned at the event and what that conversation suggests about our work over the next months.