

Minutes of Housing Committee Special Meeting:
February 15, 2023

In Attendance: Kathy Hunter, Mary Dean, Jim Graham, Donovan Lofters, Lewis Schafer, Elaine Feldman, Nicole Donzello, Ben Fink

Meeting was held for the purpose of planning small community gatherings and training on story circles. Ben led the training and explained that story circle has roots in Civil Rights organizing. It grew out of the Roadside Theater in the Appalachian coalfields and has been used in organizing communities across the country. Ben explained that the method is good for communities where there is a divide on issues. It is important to create a space where people are not going to be talked over, where views will be honored. Ben reported that he has used this successfully in CT to discuss housing.

As a result of a discussion with Cathy Wick, Mary questioned whether the community conversations needed to be publicly noticed. Not sure if this is necessary as we are having conversations to listen to people and not making decisions. The determining factor could be whether there will be a quorum of the housing committee at these conversations and a working agenda. Kathy will check with the Town Clerk to confirm if we need to public notice all these conversations we are planning.

Ben stated that we need to talk to as many people as possible with varying views on housing. Discussed how with some groups, there is an obvious position, but for other groups it's hard to determine where they stand. Ben emphasized that it's important to create a space where you are not attacked and talk from your own experience.

Ben explained that in a story circle, you will mostly listen. The point is to listen intensely, creating a space where all voices can be heard and valued equally. Story circles follow a formal procedure. It starts with a prompt: "Tell a personal story about..." After the first person finishes, they will go to their left to the next person. The next person can choose to pass.

Prompts discussed: Tell a personal story 1) About how you felt you didn't belong; 2) you got concerned about housing in Woodbridge; 3) you overcame fear and made a stand.

Ben facilitated a story telling exercise that many committee members participated in. At the end, there were many themes that emerged that was connected back to housing such as fear of losing control, belonging, speaking out. This process is about co-creation and education. The goal is to create leaders in the circle who can go on and grow the conversation.

The committee felt it would be good to watch Ben facilitate a group. Reviewed options for potential meetings. Ben will be in CT the week of 3/20.

- 1) CONECT, Alana Rosenberg and Matt McDermott
- 2) Library workers

- 3) Senior events (planned at the library)
- 4) Small Neighborhood discussions, i.e. Quarry Road
- 5) DEI hosting events
- 6) Rotary Club (Kathy will follow up with Buddy).

Decided to start with the Land Trust groups and Conservation Committee. Mary will reach out to them to see if they would be available to meet. Suggested dates were during the day-3/20, 3/21 and either day or evening, 3/23.