



CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

E. Denise Simmons
City Councillor

Mayor
2008-2009

December 15, 2015

Donna Lopez
Clerk of Cambridge
Cambridge City Hall

Dear Madam Clerk:

Please include this correspondence on the agenda as part of Communications and Reports from City Officers for the City Council meeting being held on December 21, 2015. With the end of the 2014-2015 City Council term upon us, I am writing to briefly reflect upon the work the Civic Unity Committee has conducted throughout the course of this term, and to issue some recommendations for what I hope the Civic Unity Committee, the City Council, and the City Administration will continue to work on in the coming term.

I have been honored to serve as Chair of the Civic Unity Committee in recent years, and much of the work that this committee engaged in over the course of this term was an outgrowth of the work that was conducted in 2013. Broadly speaking, the Civic Unity Committee has continued to examine how the City works to ensure that its staff reflects the diversity of the population it serves, and how the City works to ensure that all City employees are treated fairly and equitably. During this term, there were additional external factors that influenced our discussions and our focus; the national civic uproar over the murders of Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner, the unrest in Ferguson, Mississippi following the murder of Michael Brown, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement all certainly factored into our discussions. Lastly, the Civic Unity Committee continued pressing the City to look inward, to determine where its own cultural blind spots may reside, and to determine how we can all strive to do a better job of meeting the needs of our diverse population.

One important aspect of this work saw its foundation in a policy order the City Council passed in December 2013, in which we asked the City Manager to establish a Special Citizen's Civic Unity Committee. This special committee was to be comprised of City employees and Cambridge residents and tasked with taking up the work of continuing to hold monthly conversations about the lessons learned from the Malvina Montiero lawsuit and lessons learned from other issues pertaining to race and class concerns, and to explore how the City might improve upon its internal handling of race and class matters. I spent a good deal of 2014 working with the City Manager in putting together the general outline of what I envisioned this committee could be, and the work it could be engaged in. A number of highly qualified, well-respected people in the community were invited to participate, and the City Manager initiated the first meeting of this special committee in the autumn of 2014. This special committee will continue to work and build momentum in the upcoming term, and I look forward to hearing the recommendations that be issued from this body.

In early 2014, the Civic Unity Committee worked to take stock of the pertinent issues facing our community, and to determine what we should focus our attention on over the next two years. We heard

from a number of residents, employees past and present, and other community stakeholders on the great desire for the City Manager to take concrete actions to ensure that all City employees, at every level of employment, would be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect. We heard from a number of people who suggested that the City needed to take stronger actions to ensure it operated in a transparent and consistent manner. Many people speaking at our initial hearing voiced concerns that the City had not done an adequate enough job on either of these fronts. City Manager Richard C. Rossi pledged to take action on these concerns, and in April 2015, the Civic Unity Committee received an update from his office on the measures it had taken to increase diversity and fairness throughout the City's workforce. The specific steps that Mr. Rossi and his staff outlined are discussed in detail in the [meeting minutes for the April 7, 2015 hearing](#), and I strongly encourage my colleagues on the City Council to re-read these minutes online.

I appreciate the work that the City Manager and his administration have engaged in over the course of the past two years, and I appreciate the work the Civic Unity Committee has undertaken, both on the record and off. A great deal of my work as Civic Unity Chair during this term was conducted outside the realm of official City hearings, largely due to the sensitivity of the topics at hand. Much of the fact-finding work I engaged in concerned speaking with experts on civil rights issues and with those whose professional focus is on how organizations can take steps to create fairer, more transparent, more culturally sensitive work cultures. The common thread throughout these conversations was that, in order to be successful, this work must be broadly embraced by an organization, the organization must commit to a lengthy process of self-examination, self-reflection, and course correction, and the work must be sustained over a long period of time in order to permeate, and change, the workforce culture.

Some of those steps, in addition to the beginnings of City-wide Executive Trainings for Department Heads on how we can all be more proactive and more responsive to these issues and how we can be better at communication, have already been initiated by the City Manager, and I thank him for making this effort. In the upcoming term, I would also urge that the City be much more aggressive in working to answer the following questions:

- What are the specific changes we are trying to achieve? What problems currently exist in our workplace culture?
- What are some of our best practices? How do we measure our own performance?
- In what areas must we improve?
- How do we make these improvements – and, having achieved them, how can we sustain them?

In my conversations with the civil rights experts, a number of suggestions were offered, including that the City should survey its employees to get a better sense of what areas may need to be more closely examined, and that specialists should assess the leadership and communication styles of our Department Heads and suggest specific adjustments when appropriate; I am pleased that the City has already taken these particular steps. Yet there remain many areas in which the City must work harder in addressing, such as:

- Taking proactive measures to ensure that the City's Boards and Commissions more accurately reflect the diverse population they serve;
- Establishing a fair, transparent, and consistent employee evaluation process, so that all City employees feel they are being given the opportunity to advance as far as their ambitions and their natural abilities will take them;
- Establishing a more effective means of conflict resolution between employees (and for addressing conflicts that concern supervisors), perhaps via the creation of an employee-comprised advisory committee;

- Creating more opportunities for advancement to positions of authority for women and minorities; and
- Establishing a new position to work within the City Manager's Office to specifically review and refine how the City addresses issues pertaining to race, gender, orientation, and class.

Some of these steps may already be in the works, and I appreciate that implementing new methods of evaluating and refining workplace culture is a large, complicated, and significant undertaking. I have confidence that the City Manager and his staff, as well as the City Council itself, are committed to seeing this undertaking through, and I look forward to continuing to help steer this work forward in the new term. The work is never going to have a finite end point, and we must constantly build upon what has come before. That is why I am pleased to offer my thoughts on the work we have undertaken throughout the 2014-2015 term, and why I look forward to making progress on these items in the new year. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



City Councilor E. Denise Simmons