



Youth Involvement Subcommittee

Mission

The Cambridge Youth Involvement Subcommittee is a group of young people, ages 14 to 18, working with adult supporters to increase youth participation in the civic life of Cambridge.

Our Guiding principles are:

- ***To have as many youth participate in opportunities created by and for young people.***
- ***To ensure diverse representation of youth throughout the city of Cambridge.***

Background

In 1991 when the Cambridge City Council unanimously adopted the ordinance to establish a Coordinating Council for Children, Youth and Families (The Kids' Council), one of the powers and duties of the Kids' Council under this ordinance was to ***"Encourage youth input through the creation of specific opportunities for youth to provide their perspectives on their lives, community and issues facing them."*** Beginning in 1998, the membership of the Kids' Council became more diverse. With that, the Council's areas of interests broadened to include a heightened awareness of the lack of opportunities for youth involvement in the City's decision-making processes. The Kids' Council began addressing this concern in September 2001 by having Youth on Board facilitate a discussion on youth participation on the Kids' Council. As a result, the Kids' Council formed a Youth Involvement Subcommittee in November 2001 to work on issues related to youth participation on the Kids' Council and potentially in other City decision-making bodies.

During early 2002, the Kids' Council recommended to the City Manager to allocate funding to support a youth participation planning process to be initiated by the Youth Involvement Subcommittee. The Kids' Council at its meeting on February 7, 2002 requested for the Youth Involvement Subcommittee to begin the planning for that process.

In response to the Kids' Council's February request, the Youth Involvement Subcommittee held three meetings to formulate the planning of a process for youth participation in Cambridge. At its first meeting, the subcommittee participated in the National League of Cities audioconference titled, "Getting Into the Act: Strategies to Promote Youth Community Participation." The audioconference offered many ideas for the subcommittee to consider in our application to promote youth involvement in Cambridge. The subcommittee then consulted with cities that had working models for youth involvement. On May 20, 2002 the City Manager recommended and the Cambridge City Council adopted a Budget Plan for FY2003 that included the initial funding to support a youth participation planning process. Given this, the work of the Youth Involvement Subcommittee was launched.

The importance of youth participation as a significant way to value and demonstrate respect for our young people has been well documented. This was highlighted in a publication by the National League of Cities titled *Promoting Youth Participation*. ***"...youth participation and involvement in local government promotes the full and healthy development of young people. Through civic engagement, young people gain work experience, acquire new skills, learn responsibility and accountability, develop a greater sense of confidence, empowerment, and membership, and forge meaningful connections with other youth and adults."***

Across the nation, many cities have developed infrastructures to engage youth in the civic life of their communities. From research, cities differed in the planning time spent and the process employed for youth participation. These items were dependent on each city's

specific needs and characteristics. Generally, the planning period ranged from a few weeks to two years. Most importantly, membership in the planning effort should include young people.

In order to ensure diverse youth representation and meaningful youth involvement for Cambridge, the subcommittee in its first two years focused on recruitment of youth to serve on the subcommittee, completion and evaluation of a mapping project to assess teen alcohol and drug use in our community, advocacy on increasing the City's rate for stipends to youth, development of the subcommittee's structure and governance, sponsorship of the City's first youth delegation to a National League of Cities conference to exchange ideas and network with peers and municipal officials from across the country on issues concerning youth, and planning of a middle school youth summit. Since that time, the subcommittee has elected its first youth co-chairs to partner with its adult co-chair to lead the subcommittee's efforts, produced the first youth summit held in Cambridge focusing on middle school students, testified before the Cambridge City Council on issues pertinent to youth, changed City law to add three voting youth members to the Cambridge Kids' Council, produced reports and videotapes documenting perspectives and recommendations from youth about youth issues, and been recognized by the Massachusetts House of Representatives at the State House for its advocacy effort to lower the voting age to 17 year-old residents of Cambridge to vote in local elections.

Possible future outcomes that could result from the subcommittee's efforts are: formation of advocacy and listening groups for youth; development of an annual citywide youth summit; establishment of youth representatives on more civic and governmental decision-making bodies; and the creation of job opportunities for young people.

The creation of this subcommittee and the mission of its work bring Cambridge one step closer to fulfilling the Kids' Council's duty as stated in its ordinance and in joining our fellow cities in tapping the potential of our youth and recognizing the importance of their participation.

The current membership of the Youth Involvement Subcommittee mainly consists of young people and it is co-chaired by two youth.