

Welcoming Communities

Discussion Summary for Session 5

Imagining Welcoming Communities – A History of the Future

Imagine that you've time traveled 25 years or so into an ideal future where we've figured out how to nurture and sustain welcoming and inclusive communities that address many of the key challenges, concerns and core questions that we've discussed in this class. What is it like, what do you see, and/or what is happening in your view of this optimal future? What are they doing differently, what policies do they have in place to make it work, how did they get there, and what did they build on in our time to get there?

We devoted our 5th class session of "Welcoming Communities: Re-imagining Our Communities," to exploring different visions for the future that emerged from discussing the questions above. Below you'll find a summary that sketches out four different focal points, or "policy possibilities," that broadly correspond with and describe the different visions that emerged from these discussions. In the final session, we'll see how we might further shape and refine these possibilities for creating and sustaining more welcoming communities. We'll also consider what we might be missing and whether any new possibilities come to mind.

Different Policy Possibilities for Welcoming & Inclusive Communities

1. Enabling *Diverse and Inclusive* Communities. This possibility focuses on enabling diverse and inclusive communities by attending to the conditions that allow and encourage people across a range of differences to live and positively interact together.

Reasoning for this vision

- This vision is motivated by a desire for, and belief in, a community that is multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-generational, and multi-class. It envisions a community that is not segregated by race, national origins, ability status, economic status, or age—and where people positively engage with one another across these differences.
- This community's diversity is seen as a strength, a factor that makes it a more attractive, more interesting and desirable place to live.

Implementations for housing and the built environment

- Make sure there are a range of different housing options from low income to middle income to high income housing; from detached single family homes to townhouses and multi-unit apartments.
- Make sure there are multi-generational housing options, including units appropriate for extended families or other communal living groups that wish to be linked by shared common areas.
- Make sure the built environment accommodates people of all ages and abilities, including ramps, elevators, and play areas for children of all ages, etc.
- Create physical features that encourage, enhance, and sustain interactions among and across all community members, such as—

- More, and more varied, common public meeting spaces, especially outdoors, like: civic centers, plazas, sidewalk seating, parks and picnic shelters, shopping areas, public gardens, recreational spaces.
 - Community meeting spaces that are multi-use—can be set up for different functions and different size groups.
 - Spaces that mix open, public spaces with business—all within walking distance to housing and transportation.
 - Businesses that are themselves meeting spaces: e.g. coffee shops, other restaurants and pubs; book stores. Also post offices, libraries, day care, schools.
 - Public art: murals, statues, sculptures, fountains, sidewalk and other public art that celebrates the diversity and heritage of cultures within the community.
 - Large video screens and microphone/speaker systems for every meeting space so people can participate online as well.
 - Other features that encourage people to meet and linger outdoors: Benches!!! And more benches.
- The community has a wide variety of recreational options: from walking paths and bicycle paths, to soccer fields, courts for basketball, tennis, pickleball, volleyball, shuffleboard, skateboard parks, bocce ball, cross-training courses, frisbee golf, chess boards, accessible fishing docks, skate parks, hockey rinks, baseball/softball fields, etc.

Implementations that are social and cultural

- There are affirmative, specific, and ongoing efforts to redress the legacies of past segregation or past exclusions from the community.
- There is a positive emphasis on and promotion for social and cultural aspects of the community, including ways to encourage acceptance of, interaction and engagement with, and learning from our differences.
- There are a significant number of multi-cultural and cross-cultural celebrations and other programs and events that are open to all and where different groups can celebrate and share with the larger community their stories, food, music, language, dance, dress, art, etc.
- Older residents are enabled to play a key and valued role, not only as helpers in the community-wide task of caring for and educating the next generation, but also as sources of wisdom, expertise, and key professional or life skills.
- Community leadership reflects the diversity of the residents.
- The community's written statements—its mission statement, rules, policies, and marketing information—also reflect, and proudly highlight, its strong and ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion for all.

- 2. Fostering a *Community Spirit of Inclusivity*.** This possibility focuses on creating a community that has a strong, healthy sense of neighborliness, community spirit, and service. Key components of—and implementations for—this vision of community include—

- Community residents know each other. They are open and engage in conversation with each other—even when they have very different backgrounds or viewpoints.
- There is a shared sense of trust among residents.
- There is a feeling of engagement, that everyone takes part, everyone is in outreach, everyone is both serving and being served, a feeling of give-and-take.
- Community service is a key value and activity for the community that is also part of the appeal. There are many different options and opportunities to become involved. Everyone has a role, a purpose, and these can change over time.
- There is a generous spirit toward and among neighbors and all residents.
- Residents look out for each other and freely and frequently help each other out: sharing their practical advice and experience when asked.
- There are numerous community-wide events and celebrations that are open to all: e.g. concerts in the park, dances, art fairs, food fairs, craft fairs, fundraisers, sporting events, farmers markets, parades, presentations, wine and/or beer tastings, history night, spring clean-up (and celebration), treasure hunts, garage-sale Saturdays, etc.

3. Increasing Outreach, Coordination, Interaction. This possibility focuses on actively reaching out to, and coordinating with, other individuals, organizations, and communities—both within and outside of the community. It envisions activities that work to welcome and include members within a community, as well as coordinating and engaging in joint programs and initiatives with other communities.

Within a neighborhood

- Create active and coordinated welcoming committees that can operate at different levels (from the building floor, to the homeowner’s association, to the neighborhood or community level) and that go beyond the welcome mat.
 - Set up community ambassadors to carry out these outreach efforts.
 - There are individual, face-to-face home visits or interviews and follow-up meetings for all new residents to provide orientation, answer questions, and check on how they’re doing.
 - There are information and social events designed to help both newcomers and current residents meet, get to know each other, etc.
 - Personal emails, introductions, invitations to lunch, social events, to serve on committees and in other leadership positions; and opportunities to help out with the welcoming committee going forward.
 - Ongoing efforts to ensure that every individual feels invited, welcomed, and cared for—whether they’ve lived in the community for 2 hours or 20 years.

Across neighborhoods and other communities

- Focus on being good neighbors to other communities
- Create numerous joint programs with other, surrounding communities: e.g. connecting younger people with seniors; connecting across cultures. Examples could include—

- mentoring, tutoring, advising; learning a language, job skills, etc.
- assistance with setting up and using new technology
- assistance with household chores
- shared educational programming (history, culture, civics), and other activities
- shared recreational facilities
- shared cultural events, celebrations: trick or treating, parades, community clean-up, etc.
- Coordinate, sponsor, and support joint efforts with other organizations and institutions, including especially among schools, community centers, recreation programs, health care systems and hospitals, social work agencies, parks and recreation, etc.

4. Community Leadership that is Committed to Inclusivity. This possibility focuses on the vital role that community leadership plays in fostering an inclusive community that is genuinely welcoming of diversity.

- Make sure that community leadership (e.g. board members and officers) are committed to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Equity and inclusion don't just happen—they have to be intentional goals for the community: commitments to welcoming diversity and inclusion should be included in the mission statement, the community policies and rules, and within all marketing or publicity materials.
- Explicit commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion are also incorporated into and part of any planning or visioning processes, any strategic plans, or other longer-term planning goals for the community.
- Sustaining inclusive leadership means there should also be an ongoing effort to cultivate and mentor the next generation of community leaders.
- Inclusive leadership should be committed to ongoing education and training for themselves.
- Inclusive leadership should be willing and eager to listen to multiple and differing views, to survey residents, to try new things, and to change how things are done.

Bright Spots, and Possible Building Blocks or Starting Points in the Present for Welcoming Communities

- Build on the experience of this group and the people in it. Explore ways to keep it going: exchange contact information and follow-up with one another.
- The Diversity Relations Council as a locus for activity around these interests.
- Personal invitations to join or attend events hosted by other groups, clubs, organizations
- Include, consult, and work with community staff people (they are part of the community).

- Meet with the executive committee and share with them the interest and ideas developed through this class.
- Survey the community to get additional input, ideas, and involvement for welcoming communities
- Research what other communities and organizations are doing on welcoming, diversity, and inclusion.
- Convert this group into an advisory council for the executive committee(s).
- Revisit the strategic plan. What opportunities are there to use it to build toward a more welcoming community?
- Explore the possibility of hiring a staff person to oversee and coordinate the community's diversity and inclusion efforts.