

CITY OF CRANSTON
Cranston Census Complete Count Committee
Regular Meeting of January 15, 2020 – APPROVED MINUTES

The Cranston Census Complete Count Committee met on January 15, 2020, in a meeting advertised in accordance with the Rhode Island Open Meetings Act on January 8, 2020. The meeting was called to order by the Chairperson, Edward Garcia, at 2:15 p.m. It was held at the Cranston Central Public Library.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Edward Garcia (Chair, Cranston Public Library), Nicholas Lima (Recording Secretary, Canvassing Dept.), William Hochstrasser-Walsh (CCAP, for Joanne McGunagle), Maria Giarrusso (GIS Manager), Jeffrey Barone (Senior Enrichment Center), Andrea Champagne (Cranston YMCA)

MEMBERS ABSENT: John Psilopoulos (Administration), Robert Coupe (Cranston Housing Authority), Cpt. Carl Ricci (Cranston Police), Norma Cole (School Dept.)

NON-MEMBERS PRESENT: Galen Auer (Common Cause RI), Deborah Smith (U.S. Census Bureau)

The chair declared a quorum present.

AGENDA

- I. CALL TO ORDER
- II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – 10-29-2019
- III. CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS – EDWARD GARCIA
- IV. OLD BUSINESS
 - A. THE COMMITTEE MAY DISCUSS AND TAKE ACTION REGARDING ITS APPLICATION FOR THE RHODE ISLAND FOUNDATION CENSUS OUTREACH GRANT PROGRAM AND DISCUSS AND DECIDE WHETHER TO APPLY FOR THE PROGRAM'S SECOND ROUND
- V. NEW BUSINESS
 - A. THE COMMITTEE MAY HEAR FROM COMMON CAUSE RHODE ISLAND OUTREACH COORDINATOR GALEN AUER, AND DISCUSS THE 2020 CENSUS AND THE STATE COMPLETE COUNT COMMITTEE'S ACTIVITIES
 - B. THE COMMITTEE MAY HEAR FROM U.S. CENSUS BUREAU PARTNERSHIP SPECIALIST DEBBORAH SMITH, AND DISCUSS THE 2020 CENSUS
 - C. THE COMMITTEE MAY DISCUSS AND TAKE ACTION ON STRATEGIES TO ASSIST IN ENSURING A COMPLETE COUNT IN THE CITY OF CRANSTON, INCLUDING OUTREACH, COORDINATION WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, EVENTS, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND A MARKETING CAMPAIGN
 - D. THE COMMITTEE MAY SCHEDULE ITS FUTURE MEETINGS
- VI. ADJOURNMENT

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Garcia asked for a motion to approve the minutes of Oct. 29, 2019.

MOTION: By Mr. Barone and seconded by Ms. Giarrusso to approve the meeting minutes of 10-29-2019.

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY – 6-0

CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS – EDWARD GARCIA

The second meeting of the Cranston Census Complete Count Committee was called to order by the chairperson. Mr. Garcia welcomed the attendees to the Cranston Central Public Library and had them introduce themselves.

Mr. Garcia mentioned a recent news story about the Census affecting Rhode Island where a reapportionment expert said there is a slightly better possibility than before of the state holding on to its second congressional district seat. He said that highlights the importance of the outcome of the Census for our state.

With two people present to provide presentations to the Committee, Mr. Garcia asked for unanimous consent to move Old Business Item A to after the presentations.

NEW BUSINESS

A. THE COMMITTEE MAY HEAR FROM COMMON CAUSE RHODE ISLAND OUTREACH COORDINATOR GALEN AUER, AND DISCUSS THE 2020 CENSUS AND THE STATE COMPLETE COUNT COMMITTEE'S ACTIVITIES

Mr. Garcia introduced Mx. Auer and Ms. Smith to provide their presentations to the Committee. Galen Auer, outreach coordinator for Common Cause Rhode Island, presented first and said they are providing staff support for the state's Complete Count Committee. Mx. Auer provided a presentation on the basics of the 2020 Census operation nationally and in Rhode Island, and the impact the count's results will have on reapportionment and redistricting, \$3.8 billion in annual federal funding, and other areas. They stressed the nature of the strict confidentiality of personally identifiable census data, and that one of the challenges is overcoming unfounded fears in the community about responding to the census.

Mx. Auer provided details regarding the difficulty in accounting for hard-to-count populations, and said that improving response rates for those communities is a primary focus of complete count committees. In particular, cities in Rhode Island's urban core have had historically lower response rates, including some areas of Cranston. Additionally, this is the first Census where a significant percentage of responses are expected to come over the internet, whether via a computer or smartphone, so providing outreach to communities who don't have regular internet access is vital. Mx. Auer reviewed the 2020 Census timeline and said the Census Bureau is continuing to hire a large number of temporary positions to conduct the count's field operations this spring.

One concern is that Providence County was the only county nationally where the 2020 Census's operations were field tested in 2018, so some residents may feel that, since they responded to that test not that long ago, they do not need to respond again. Mx. Auer said an important part of outreach will be reminding residents that the 2018 effort was simply a field test, and that now they do need to respond again. They also reviewed the fear in immigrant communities regarding the possibility of a citizenship question, and said that, for one, there is no citizenship question on the 2020 Census, and secondly, the data that is collected cannot be shared under Title XIII of federal law – including a strict prohibition on sharing with other federal agencies.

Mx. Auer said that many of the physical pamphlets, promotional items, and advertisements the state Complete Count Committee is preparing will be ready for distribution in a few weeks' time. They added there will also be outreach event trainings in February. While Cranston did not receive a grant in the first round of awards, Mx. Auer encouraged the city to reapply.

B. THE COMMITTEE MAY HEAR FROM U.S. CENSUS BUREAU PARTNERSHIP SPECIALIST DEBBORAH SMITH, AND DISCUSS THE 2020 CENSUS

Ms. Smith reviewed areas of the state where census job recruitment for field staff is falling behind, and said that recruiting staff to work in the hard-to-count communities is something they are focusing on diligently. She said the positions are well-paying and extremely flexible. Mr. Garcia said the Cranston Central Library could be used as a training location. Mr. Lima said the Census had reached out to his office for lists of pollworkers to contact for interest in Census jobs, which he provided.

Ms. Smith also discussed the counting process at group quarters, including group homes, the housing authority, prisons, and educational institutions. She provided informational fliers to the Committee members about the Census counting and recruiting operations, as well as details on how federal funding is allocated to Rhode Island based on the count, making up one third of the state's annual operating budget. She said if we're missing people who may not have been recorded in past census data, we need to find them and ensure they are counted in order for these federal resources to not be jeopardized. Mr. Garcia asked Ms. Smith and Mx. Auer for copies of fliers and census materials for distribution at city buildings and libraries.

Ms. Smith reviewed the logistical operations of the 2020 Census count, support that has been set up for numerous languages, and the timeline of mailings and field operations. Ms. Smith and Mx. Auer answered questions from the Committee. Discussion ensued. Ms. Smith discussed the history of challenges to the legal confidentiality of Census data, and explained the Census has withstood every challenge.

Mr. Hochstrasser-Walsh asked how homeless persons living in shelters are counted. Ms. Smith responded that they are counted as part of the group quarters operation, where the Census Bureau works directly with the shelter's staff. She said enumerators will also visit known locations where homeless persons stay when not at a shelter. The Census Bureau works with homeless advocacy groups to find these locations.

Mr. Barone said the Senior Enrichment Center has a local access television show, and welcomed the Committee members and Ms. Smith and Mx. Auer to visit for taping a 15-minute segment about the 2020 Census. He said he can also add census information to the Center's newsletter, and invited Ms. Smith and Mx. Auer to give a presentation to the seniors. He said one concern is seniors are often warned against scams, so could be discouraged from answering the door or responding to the Census if they aren't sure it's legitimate.

C. THE COMMITTEE MAY DISCUSS AND TAKE ACTION ON STRATEGIES TO ASSIST IN ENSURING A COMPLETE COUNT IN THE CITY OF CRANSTON, INCLUDING OUTREACH, COORDINATION WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, EVENTS, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND A MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Mr. Garcia said the Committee would like to develop a social media strategy but has been waiting on some guidance and coordinated materials from the state Complete Count Committee. He said his staff can help create graphics and content, and he asked the organizations involved in the committee if they could also help spread the word on social media, including the School Department, Police Department, City Hall, CCAP, and the Senior Enrichment Center.

OLD BUSINESS

A. THE COMMITTEE MAY DISCUSS AND TAKE ACTION REGARDING ITS APPLICATION FOR THE RHODE ISLAND FOUNDATION CENSUS OUTREACH GRANT PROGRAM AND DISCUSS AND DECIDE WHETHER TO APPLY FOR THE PROGRAM'S SECOND ROUND

Mr. Garcia said as part of the city's grant application, the Committee was hoping to get some staff funding and laptops to hold several direct outreach events where residents could respond to the Census. He said sending out a mailer and staffing an information table were also considerations as part of the grant application. He asked the Committee's opinion on whether the city should reapply for the grant and adjust the outreach plan as part of the application.

Mx. Auer said Cranston's application was good but could be stronger by stressing plans for active partnerships with community-based organizations as part of outreach efforts. Mr. Garcia said that the YMCA and CCAP are both actively involved in the Committee, and he can consider mentioning more specifics about partnering with those and other organizations in fulfilling the Committee's objectives. Mx. Auer said they felt there would be value in Cranston reapplying. Ms. Champagne said there are several initiatives the Committee would be working with for 2020 Census outreach through the YMCA and CCAP and agreed that can be amplified in the application.

Mr. Garcia asked for volunteers from the Committee in the effort to rewrite the grant application. Mr. Barone and Mr. Hochstrasser-Walsh said their offices could offer feedback on the revised application before it's submitted. Discussion ensued.

Mr. Barone and Ms. Champagne each offered their facilities as WiFi-accessible locations with computers already in-house that can be used for outreach events.

MOTION: By Mr. Lima and seconded by Mr. Barone to fine-tune the grant application based on the feedback received and resubmit it accordingly.
PASSED UNANIMOUSLY – 6-0

Mx. Auer reminded the Committee that the grant-awarding committee sees the most value in direct, face-to-face communications and Census outreach events, as opposed to direct mail or other means, as there is a limited amount of grant funding available. Mr. Garcia said there are numerous agencies the city works with that the Committee can talk to and encourage holding or participating in an outreach event. Ms. Champagne stressed the importance of having local and known connections be part of social media marketing efforts so that people feel comfortable asking for help from a trusted source if they need it.

NEW BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

D. THE COMMITTEE MAY SCHEDULE ITS FUTURE MEETINGS

Mr. Garcia asked what would be a good time for the members to meet again. The Committee members discussed and decided tentatively that Monday, Feb. 24 at 2 p.m. would work for the next meeting. Mr. Garcia said the Central Library would again be the meeting location and thanked everyone for attending today.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Mr. Garcia asked for unanimous consent to adjourn the meeting.
PASSED UNANIMOUSLY – VOICE VOTE

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicholas J. Lima
Recorder

APPROVED by the Cranston Census Complete Count Committee: February 24, 2020