Mayor's Special Advisory Committee on Neighborhood-Based Resiliency

25 April, 2017 (notes taken by Craig Kelley who often did not record the speaker but did report what was said).

Specific risks include food security, water resources, heat and climate relief, trees. Did we miss things? We also don't want to duplicate what other people are doing via the Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment.

How do we define risk?

- A bad thing triggered by an event….
- Stress

Communication is critical, that could be both a topic and multiple sub-topics.

Taking territoriality and egos out of issues is important. CPD and CFD seem to model that. We would like to see that sort of communication across the board.

How might neighborhoods develop that level of inter-neighborhood communication?

"As a step towards…." is good language to use in trying to set goals.

We might want to use the risks we listed on our stickies and the white papers as examples for problem solving.

And we need to make sure our great ideas, while globally great, have a Cambridge-specific aspect.

Not all neighborhoods are the same. Maybe this resiliency building effort is about building community within neighborhoods.

There is some concern that maybe city services are not that well-connected with each other or with neighborhoods even if City staff think they have it "covered."

Mr. King noted that bandwidth is an issue. If communications break down and people get overwhelmed, what's the back up? We need bigger/better hardware. It's a big issue because communications are key if troublesome things happen simultaneously.

Mr. Seidel said that the Committee was formed somewhat on the model that this resiliency building effort is not top-down, central command stuff. It's been flipped on its head. So- how does that moment when City and Citizens intersect happen and is what we have now what we want in the future?

Through the lens of social cohesion, all else is addressed. Which may be why some specifics such as rats did not come up when we all listed our issues and thoughts on stickies on the wall.

It's tough to be omniscient enough to rank specific issues and agencies, so Ms.Harrison went for cross-cutting issues.

Mr. Seidel noted that we're looking for new tools. And with a different world coming our way, being more cohesive at a local level will help us better handle new stresses.

So- social cohesion is our end state, but how do we make that happen? We only had Courtney talk about that. Eight months ago, it wasn't even something we brought up to further explore when we kicked subjects around. And if we, with our focus, missed it, what about everybody else?

Mr. Seidel noted that intentionality is important. So what is the question we are answering with this report?

A focusing goal for the report could help us train our minds to think about it.

Ms. Kubik said she wrote more about actions and suggestions rather than observations about problems so for her, it's more about getting various people in the community to do stuff. Maybe make suggestions about how the City can move that along.

Mr. Wineman asked what steps could the City take to be neighborhood resilient in terms of social cohesion and effective communication. We can't *make* people communicate but we can make it easier for them to communicate.

Libraries as community centers. You can put structures in place to make that happen easier.

Mr. Seidel noted that we need to benchmark against things that are already going on, such as the North Cambridge Family Opera or Somerville's Porchfest.

Mr. Kelley asked how does social cohesion get built out of this?

Mr. Wineman asked that given what's already in place, how do we build on it? We don't have to answer the question, we just have to ask it.

Be we do have to say what's already in place, as well as where do we seem to fall short?

We do not want too much writing in our report about our presenters but could maybe put more information in the appendix.

We heard from all sorts of professionals. But we still have the "know your neighbor" issue.

"Do you have at least one person you can talk to about problems?" is a variation of the question we've been asking.

Any neighborhood is constantly changing. How do you work with them to help them be resilient?

Maybe ask people, "Would you reach out? Do you feel reached out to?"

There are all sorts of different subcultures that can give people a sense of belonging.

Urban planning at the City level transcends neighborhoods.

Are you a provider or a receiver of services? We are all both.

But the City is generally just a provider.

A 25 year old could help me who could help an 80 year old person.

The City also relies on people to do certain things

The City could say we want to take the initiate to build more resilient neighborhoods, but you need to be on board to make that happen. The City can't just say so and it's done.

The City does not necessarily have it all "covered."

What is it that the City could do to get us up to knowing 15 neighbors apiece?

Maybe something like a neighborhood week at local restaurants could help build those connections.

What has sticking power?

DPW threw cookouts during the Western Avenue project and set up committee of neighbors to help smooth things out. That was an avenue of connections in its own way.

Having/doing something "often enough" to have an impact is important.

And does this stuff have sticking power? What happens when the little old lady at the hub of communications dies, the Western Ave project is done and so forth? Did the previous efforts truly build lasting social cohesion or do they stop without this driving force?

Do the people in the Western Ave neighborhood consider the communications efforts a success? Some do, some don't.

Mr Wineman noted that shifting group of neighbors at monthly meals he attends is way better than nothing but it is not the end all. He would like this conversation to continue post-Committee.

People intersect at different places and different points of interests.