



SOUTH BAY FAITH ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING (5-14-10)

ATTENDEES

Kay Stuckhardt (COI), JuliAnna Arnett (COI), Erica Salcuni (COI), Elizabeth Pastrana (SDSU/Cambios con Fe), Elva Arredondo (SDSU/Cambios Con Fe), Mariaelena Aguilar (HEAC), Tanya Rovira-Osterwalder (HEAC), Lucia Olivas (Cambios Con Fe/The Most Precious Blood Church), Irma Rodriguez (Cambios Con Fe/Fruto de la Vid), Erika Denis (Cambios Con Fe, Fruto de La Vid), Fr. Patrick Thompson O.M.I. Pastoral Associate (The Church of Most Precious Blood), Fabiola Moreno (Cambios Con Fe/The Most Precious Blood Church), (Lorenzo Rodriguez Senior Minister (Cambios Con Fe/Fruto de la Vid), Juan Ramirez (WALKSanDiego), Andy Hamilton (WALKSanDiego), Leah Ostenberg (WALKSanDiego), Isabel Madrigal (Our Lady of Guadalupe), Gabriela Meza (Our Lady of Guadalupe), Aramita García (Cambios con Fe/Our Lady of Guadalupe), Jolene Espinosa (Cambios Con Fe CVPC), Deacon Margarito B. Lozoya (Our Lady of Guadalupe), Javier Garcia (Our Lady of Guadalupe) José LaMont Jones (CVPC), Nelson Ustman (Cambios con Fe/St. Rose of Lima), Alma Bibiano (Cambios con Fe/Our Lady of Guadalupe), Diego Garcia Jr. (Cambios con Fe/Our Lady of Guadalupe), , Karyna Castellanos (SDSU Research Foundation), Council Member Steve Castañeda (Chula Vista City Council), Linda Wagner, Assistant to Council Member Castañeda (City of Chula Vista), Carla Blackmar (City of Chula Vista Redevelopment), Angela Gaines (Chula Vista Police Department)

WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

(Kay Stuckhardt)

OVERVIEW OF FAITH ADVISORY COUNCILS

(JuliAnna Arnett)

- The San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative (Initiative) is a public/private partnership whose mission is to reduce and prevent childhood obesity in San Diego County by creating healthy environments for all children and families through advocacy, education, policy development, and environmental change. In other words, the Initiative is working with its many partners to make the healthy choice the easy choice. The Initiative engages stakeholders from the seven domain areas with the most influence on developing environments that support healthy choices and behavior change (i.e. Government; Healthcare; Schools & Out-of-School Providers; Childcare & Preschool Providers; Community Organizations; Media and Business) to implement strategies for childhood obesity prevention and reduction and work together to improve nutrition and physical activity opportunities for all kids.
- JuliAnna explained that faith-based communities play a key role in childhood obesity prevention because faith communities are already involved in social issues. JuliAnna mentioned that this is the only sector in partnership with the Initiative that addresses the whole person (in terms of physical, spiritual and mental wellness). Having a partnership to work on childhood wellness will be important for the South Bay faith community, especially in light of the statistics, which show that Chula Vista has higher childhood obesity rates than the national and regional averages. She explained that this discussion convenes all of us in order to share resources and best practices to resolve this issue together.
- JuliAnna also provided a little bit of background on the two faith advisory groups that have been convened; there is one in North County and this group, representative of the South Bay area. The Initiative is also looking to create similar faith advisory councils in East County and the Central San Diego area. The Initiative is here to give the faith advisory councils whatever resources it is able to provide in order to help them do work within their faith communities and with one another.

- Before the discussion transitioned, Kay brought to the group’s attention that this meeting is being filmed for use by the SDSU Research Foundation. They hope to include footage of the meeting in a promotional video that can educate other communities about this type of work. Kay asked everyone to fill out the forms that indicate permission to film.

ROLE OF CITY LEADERS AND COMMUNITY

(Steve Castañeda, Chula Vista Council Member; Carla Blackmar, Chula Vista Redevelopment; Angela Gaines, Chula Vista Police Department)

- **Steve Castañeda** expressed his appreciation to the religious community for being a part of this work.
 - He explained that local officials such as himself are not often able to connect with citizens, but can increase the connection by working with cohesive groups such as church communities, who have contact with the public and can serve as a representative voice. He said that public health and policy can only improve only if the public communicates its suggestions.
 - He announced that the City of Chula Vista has recently adopted a community gardens policy, which will allow interested community parties to set up community gardens on appropriate land parcels within the community. He explained that although the policy has been established, that in itself is not enough to produce the gardens. The City is relying on the cohesive efforts of organizations like the Faith Advisory Council to work with the city council and to spread the message about the policy and its importance in improving public health. Mr. Castañeda reminded the group that his office is open to whomever wants to make contact to talk about issues, and he introduced his staffer Linda Wagner, who can assist in his absence and on his behalf.
 - Mariaelena Aguilar asked about the actual implementation of community gardens; there is a park near Precious Blood Church that she and her community are considering. She reported that she has spoken with residents that are unsure about the process to apply for land. Mr. Castañeda said that the City is there to work with groups like these during the selection process, application process, and even assistance with resources such as finding and applying for grants.
- **Carla Blackmar** introduced herself to elaborate more on Chula Vista’s community gardens policy.
 - The redevelopment department is responsible for taking community input and working with residents. Community groups can help by organizing themselves and communicating their needs. She reported that the city is working with some residents at the Palomar Apartments—they located plots of land on Palomar Street that are on church properties. Carla said that a situation like this could be an opportunity for people in the community to connect over use of these unutilized parcels.
 - She reported that the redevelopment department is also trying to work with the community to improve other portions of the built environment, including sidewalks, parks, etc. This is also a part of the initiative to improve community health. She explained that her department receives funding to spearhead initiatives of this sort, but the money is only available if a community is declared “blighted.” She explained that even though this is not a nice term to associate with your community, it is a way to get past some of the complicated procedures that come with obtaining community development funding. The city is always willing to work with communities on these efforts. Carla passed around a piece of paper for the group to list their specific concerns.
 - Jolene Espinosa, a promotora with Cambios con Fe, reported that her church (Chula Vista Presbyterian Church) has a small plot of land on their property on which they are installing a small garden. She wondered if the city had any information on whether or not her group might be eligible to apply for a grant, even though the plot is on private property. **Carla is putting together a list of these resources to make available to the community, and said the city is also happy to help people apply for the money.** Kay suggested that a joint application between several faith communities could be a helpful catalyst for funding as well.
 - Deacon Margarito B. Lozoya (Our Lady of Guadalupe) expressed concern about the lack of signage and unsafe pedestrian conditions for the youth in his church community. Carla said that the city is aware of the problems in this area and that this is an example of the kind of input they need from the community in order to move the dialogue forward with public works.
- **Angela Gaines** of the Chula Vista Police Department introduced herself as the first point of contact for the city police.



- Angela reported that most people call with quality-of-life or crime concerns. She has run the Neighborhood Watch program and has worked on a number of other personal safety concerns. She started working with HEAC last year as well.
- In her four years with the Chula Vista Police Department, she said that it became clear very quickly that safety issues are one of the major reasons that people choose not to be active.

PRESENTATION: RESULTS OF THE PARK & WALKABILITY AUDITS

(Juan Ramirez)

- At the last meeting of the South Bay Faith Advisory Council, Juan Ramirez of WALKSanDiego presented to the group the benefits of doing audits of the built environment. A full assessment of a public place’s features can help a community identify what needs to be changed so that they are able to create a plan for addressing the issue(s). At this meeting, Juan presented the results of the park audits.
- WALKSanDiego worked with the Cambios con Fe promotoras to do the park audits. They took pictures and identified park problems and needs. Each promotora focused on the park within the vicinity of the church they represent. There were five Chula Vista parks—Lauderbach Park (Most Precious Blood), Otay Park (Our Lady of Guadalupe), Friendship Park (Fruto de la Vid), Memorial Park (Santa Rosa de Lima), and Hilltop Park (Chula Vista Presbyterian Church).
- Parks were assessed based on activities/uses associated with the park as well as park access, safety, and sociability. Juan presented some of the photos that the promotoras took of the community input that went into solutions for each park. Questions posed to the community included:
 - I. What can this church as an organization and as a community do for this park?
 - II. What can City departments (Police; Parks & Recreation; Public Works) do for this park?
- The process of documenting these events through photo or video is known as photo-voice.
- The conclusion is that every park has different issues, but the main objective is to make it functional for people to be active and healthy, both mentally and physically.

PRESENTATION: PRIORITIES FOR CHANGE

(Lucia Olivas, Aramita García, Nelson Ustman, Jolene Espinosa, Irma Rodriguez)

- Elizabeth Pastrana introduced the Cambios con Fe promotoras who shared information on the problems and solutions for the parks near their churches.
- Lucia Olivas gave a brief overview of Cambios con Fe and her involvement. She reported that she is working with WALKSanDiego on Lauderbach Park, near her church Most Precious Blood. She reported that after doing the assessment and getting community input, it was determined that safety is the biggest issue for this park. She described the park as feeling “abandoned” and cited litter, drug use and homelessness. Lucia also pointed out that people sometimes let their dogs drink from the water fountains or roam unsupervised. In addition, access is an issue for this park; the entrance is unclear and lacks signage. Lucia and her community felt that these attributes deter families from visiting the park. **Her solution for the park is to increase surveillance. There is an un-used building on the park’s property that she would like to see used as a security station. She asked the City Council for help with this so that people can use the park.**
- Irma Rodriguez reported on Friendship Park, which is located in proximity to her church, Fruto de la Vid. She said that she is here today because she wants her community to have a healthy park. The park is currently unhealthy and unused. She cited some of the larger problems—lack of lighting, no play structures, no restrooms, broken infrastructure, as well as litter and drugs. **Irma feels that because the park is located across the street from City Hall, one solution she had was to invite the City Council to take time to walk around the park on a regular basis to monitor activity.** This will help make families feel safer, and due to its excellent location, the park deserves to be fixed.

- Aramita García reported on Otay Park, located in proximity to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Aramita said that for about a year, she has been working on community issues with 5 churches that have about 25,000 members. She cited a Bible passage about justice and strength—these are the attributes a community needs to use to have healthier communities. She reported that some of the notable issues of the park include a lack of shade and lack of infrastructure. **The solution her community took on was to have members of the church youth group write letters to Council Member Steve Castañeda and the Chula Vista Police that make requests for the changes they want to see in the park. The letters will be sent to these two entities for review.**
- Jolene Espinosa of Chula Vista Presbyterian Church worked on the Hilltop Park audit. She listed the priority issues—lack of signage and lighting, litter, vandalism, and violence. She also mentioned that the community thought it was a problem that there are no rules or park hours listed anywhere for the public’s reference. **Her solutions included asking for more trash containers and signage placed in visible areas. Jolene also had an idea to organize a community park “clean-up” day. As for addressing illegal behavior, she proposed asking the public to report problems to the police department, instead of ignoring it. She also proposed starting organized recreational activities on park property to deter some of the violence/illegal activity.** She cited a mobile recreation program that the City used to operate, but no longer.
- Nelson Ustman of Santa Rosa Church reported on Memorial Park. He reported that this park’s biggest issue is lack of infrastructure; there is nothing there for the community to use. There are safety issues as well. Nelson said he and his community felt that the lack of lighting in the park welcomed illegal behaviors. **His solution was a simple request: to build some infrastructure in the park. He said that some basic additions to invite people into the park could activate this area to become more of an economic center.**

DISCUSSION: HOW FAITH COMMUNITIES AND CITY CAN WORK TOGETHER ON COMMON PRIORITIES

(Group discussion facilitated by Tanya Rovira-Osterwalder)

- Tanya opened up the discussion by reminding the group that questions, concerns, and suggestions can always be directed to City Departments and that communities must reach out. She referred back to Council Member Castañeda’s staff member, Linda Wagner, who was at the table. Tanya said that Linda would be a good contact for community members.
- Tanya asked everyone to brainstorm ideas for making the community healthy.
- Mariaelena asked for advice on an effective way to turn relationships with the City into action. She reported that she feels there has not been much progress with Lauderbach Park. Elizabeth replied on behalf of the promotoras, stating that they have done a lot of work within the parks, but to further the work, there will need to be more collaboration with the police department to address the standing issues such as drug use and homelessness.
- Angela from Chula Vista Police agreed that issues such as homelessness in the park have been an ongoing problem, but one barrier to intervention is that people do not call to report illegal behavior as it is happening. The faith community can have a role in patrolling the park and reporting illegal behaviors; this would strengthen the relationship between the police and the nearby faith community. Juan stressed the importance of surveillance, such as having a police officer on site. Angela said that this would be a great solution but resources are limited.
- **Carla reported that the City is discussing the idea of turning the vacant building into a community center, where the public can gather and possibly engage in volunteer opportunities such as park surveillance. When this plan is on the table, the city will want this group’s input.**
- **Tanya closed the discussion by inviting everyone to continue this dialogue within their own communities, but to also remember that the City of Chula Vista and the Chula Vista Police Department are there for support. She also asked the group to bear the following question in mind: *How can we create policies together that can change not one park, but many?***

CLOSE AND EVALUATION

(Kay Stuckhardt)

- **Kay thanked everyone for coming and echoed Tanya’s sentiments about keeping the dialogue for health improvement open within their communities.**
- **She also reminded the group to fill out their evaluations.**