

## **Citizen Communication to the Task Force on Community Engagement:**

*Email sent on 9/27/2015 from Paul Schumann, attendee at 9/24/2015 TFCE Meeting*

I liked the metaphor of the bridge. But, for me it meant something different. I saw the problem as a bridge between two different cultures. And, cultures are made up of philosophy, beliefs, values and behavioral norms. For the two sides of the bridge to connect to something, there has to be some shared elements of the culture. And, if the two sides want to work together, they have to first discover what they share. Otherwise, the bridge is not anchored to anything.

In some cases engagement may not be possible at all. As for example in the US House of Representatives there is a group of elected representatives who don't believe in government or the institution of the House. Hard, to find a way to engagement when there's that big a difference in philosophy.

I did not take notes on the meeting, but I believe that what the group provided for the bridge were at the second level above the culture - infrastructure, incentives, information, education and measurements.

Somewhere in the infrastructure, the social technologies have to play a role if we're ever going to engage younger generations. And, you task force might consider mirroring that.

Your task force recognizes that there are language differences. This came out in the discussion of the survey. Its' extremely difficult to have a conversation without a shared language.

The layers of complication emerge quickly as one considers that probably every neighborhood in the city has a different culture and some may have subcultures within them. And, whose responsibility is it to find the bridge? Austin city government has a very distinctive culture, and in my years of interacting with it, the culture is intractable.

Some neighborhoods, like mine, have serious problems within, ranging from a complete disinterest in engagement on any civic issue, to hard liners who know only one way, their way is the right way.

Many in the city have the belief that engagement with the city is fruitless and a waste of time. The decisions are already made before the neighborhood even gets engaged in the issue. All the rest is Kabuki theater. Money and personal relations carry more weight than reasoned attempts at conversation with the community.

I probably will not be able to attend many meetings of the task force - the commute and commitment of time is too great, especially as the task force is structured, I would have no role to play.

If you would like to meet to discuss any of these ideas, I'd be happy to do so.

*(Follow up email sent on 9/28/2015)*

One facet of the engagement process I forgot to mention, is the neighborhood's engagement with the developers. Both cultures tend to freeze their positions early and the end result is conflict. I've seen this happen in my own neighborhood. I'm a proponent of collaboration, and I got the chance to try that approach when an envelopment team approached me to act as their liaison with the neighborhood. The outcome will I think we good, but many in the neighborhood accused me of being too cozy with the developers, and organizations repeatedly went around me.

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Paul Schumann