



City of Bellingham
Immigration Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
December 21, 2021, 6:30 PM

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM

Board Members

Present:

Danielle Siedlecki
Liz Darrow
Holly Pai
Australia Tobon
Ada Rumford
Monika Cassidy
Jagwinder Gill
Marciano Sanchez Lopez
Sierra Green (Alternate)
Tarnjot Brat ("TJ")

Absent:

Bridget Reeves (excused)
Maria Isabel Cortes-Zamora (excused)
Homero Israel Jose Garrido

Spanish Interpretation: Martha Sabalsa

Russian Interpretation: Alfia Logunova

Punjabi Interpretation: Piku Dhillon

City Council Legislative Staff: Nalini Margaitis

City Council Liaison: Council President, Hannah Stone

There is an audio/ video recording of this meeting. Times in brackets [] indicate the start time on the recording for each section. See <https://cob.org/gov/public/bc/immigration-advisory-board-materials> to listen to the recording.

Welcome, and New Board Member Introduction [3:07]

- Danielle Siedlecki welcomed the group.
- Nalini Margaitis and tri-facilitators facilitated this meeting.
- Minutes for the November 16, 2021 meeting were approved as written

Review of Agenda [3:13]

New Board member Introductions [4:16]

- New member, Tarnjot Brat “TJ”, introduced himself stating that he lives in Lynden and is originally from Punjab, India. He joined the Board because he is in the medical field and wishes to help others of his community.
- Alternate, Sierra Green, introduced herself to the Board, stating that she is a student at WWU studying Human Services and works at C2C as a Promotora. Green stated that she is also a community researcher involved in the flood response.
- New member, Homero Israel Jose Garrido, is in Oaxaca until January
- Alfredo Jaurez shared that he has applied to serve on the IAB. He also shared a personal experience of being stopped by the Bellingham Police and being turned over to Border Patrol, where he ultimately spent time in a Tacoma Detention Facility. Juarez shared that, after this experience, he filed a lawsuit against the Bellingham Police Department and eventually settled. He is also a member of C2C and Familias Unidas.

Public Comment/Community Reports [11:25]

- Australia Tobon provided a report out via a pre-recorded video on behalf of Whatcom Promotoras. Displacement issues in Sumas continue to compromise housing – very few families have gone back to their housing units (currently overcrowding and living with other family members in the community, others living in their cars, some with children). The families need shelter, culturally appropriate food, appliances for cooking food (mini-fridges, stovetops), non-perishable food items, washer/dryer, and clothing. Often there was no communication from their local government to evacuate. COVID-19 continues to run rampant in these communities, because they prefer to stay with their families. A lot of information is predominantly in English. The community needs information on tenant law rights. The Promotoras also lost homes during the flood. This groups advocates for the largest racial minority group in Whatcom County. Tobon’s team has been providing audio updates in Spanish. An Immigration Resource Center would be beneficial for this community. Also, language access for emergency response is critical. For more information, please reach out to Danny Gonzales, Australia Tobon, Sierra Green or Liz Darrow.

Flood Response Update (Sierra Green) [21:48]

- Sierra Green shared an update regarding the C2C flood response. The main items included: dignified housing, creating a taskforce (Promotoras program (impacted community members) and movement team (allies)) to respond to the issues seen in the community, food, and other essential needs. In partnership with the Opportunity Council, they have been processing ERAP (eviction rent assistance program) applications (assistance with rent and utility). They have also been in partnership with the Bellingham Food Bank to provide food carts for families in need. Other partners include: Northsound ACH, Whatcom Strong, and Community. C2C still needs to identify what to do in the long-term (defining what dignified housing looks like and create a

preventative plan).

Immigration Resource Center Update (Danielle Siedlecki) [29:25]

- Danielle provided an update on the Immigration Resource Center. The subcommittee had another meeting with Mayor Fleetwood. The City Council has requested another letter further explaining the need for the center and the committee has submitted that, along with the list of organizations that were interested in partnering with/supporting in some way the resource center. Mayor Fleetwood would like another meeting at some point, to see if the County is also interested. The committee is waiting to hear back on when the next meeting will be held.

Process Subcommittee Report (Holly Pai) [32:26]

- Pai shared that she expressed shock from the City after the subcommittee had approached the Mayor's Office to schedule quarterly meetings. Specifically, an email response from the Mayor's Assistant, Brooksana Raney, stated that, quarterly meetings with the group would be "inappropriate", but that the Mayor would welcome invitation to quarterly IAB meetings. Pai expressed disappointment on two levels: that the Mayor did not know how frequent the IAB meetings occurred or that he needed an invitation to attend the meeting, as they are his meetings and that he regularly attends other advisory board meetings (such as Parks). Hannah Stone followed up with the Mayor's Office and was informed that the Mayor's schedule is too busy to meet with each advisory Board on a regular basis. The subcommittee followed up with an email to the Mayor's Office inquiring how other Boards perform their advisory function to the Mayor. Raney responded that she did not have time to craft a thoughtful response, and that the Mayor is receiving updates from the Board from Councilmember Stone and maybe Legislative Staff Nalini Margaitis, and that those two members apprise the Mayor on the activities. Pai expressed disappointment and frustration, because she is unsure how the group is supposed to serve as an advisory function if they are unable to schedule regular meetings with the Mayor.
- Hannah Stone added that the Mayor's Office looks at this as a Council initiated Board and looks to Council for guidance on this Board. Stone added that she wants to make sure that the Mayor's Office is engaged with this work. Stone suggested that the Board reach out to individual Councilmembers to schedule small group meetings (with subcommittees and the individual Councilmember) to urge them to attend the IAB meetings. (Pai recognized that Stone has made herself available for this type of meeting).
- Liz Darrow expressed her frustration stating that the only two items that were sent to Council, were squashed by Council, citing the letter in response to the 1/28/2021 events as well as establishing an Immigration Resource Center. Darrow added that these are public meetings, and if Councilmembers of the Mayor had any interested to attend, they could do so at any time, adding that it is outrageous not to take this seriously.

- Jagwinder Gill suggested that the group compose a formal response and have all members of the IAB sign off on it, Ada Rumford and Danielle Siedlecki supported this idea. Pai stated that she could assist in drafting the letter.
- Monika Cassidy mentioned that this letter should be CCed to the Council.

Public Comment [52:46]

- MB stated that she is concerned about what information has been shared with the Mayor. She believes that this is something the IAB should know. All of the work that everybody on this Board, along with community members has been doing should be noted. She is concerned that the updates are just being passed on in passing.
- Mialee Jose: The work that IAB does intersects with other boards. Following up on Stone's idea of networking, might it be possible to form a relationship with the other committees so that they understand the intersection? (e.g., when Parks meetings, they intersect their meeting to include immigration and that way the Mayor hears these concerns). Darrow added that she agrees, racial equity and immigrant justice should be a part of everything that the City does.
- Michael Betz spoke on behalf of how this Board started – with a group of Dreamers at WWU who were concerned about their parents being grabbed by ICE. This is how the community got involved. The Board got started primarily to protect undocumented community members. Betz said that the center should serve the entire community, but that there are certain members of this community that put food on “our” tables and ICE is hunting them and disappearing them. Betz believes this is an outrage.

Ordinance Update (Holly Pai) [58:12]

- Amending the ordinance on how Board members are selected, moving forward, on the selection process, Pai shared that the Board might want to remove the sector requirements and instead make the Board more representative of the community including immigrant stats, persons of color, and the process of application.
- Darrow added that the Board should review the applications (in Seattle, they have a 2/3-member requirement for people of color) and those who are impacted by immigration enforcement to be a priority for the Board.
- Ada Rumford agreed that the way Board members are selected seems a bit arbitrary, but she gets a bit weary to require people of color. Instead, she believe that everybody should have the opportunity to serve on the Board, regardless of the color of their skin, representing the fluid population of the community. (To this, Darrow responded that she strongly disagrees, citing that one only needs to look at the people are regularly being detained and deported. Darrow added that she agrees that the population is growing, but that this only means that the community is less white). Rumford responded that she does believe there should be specific goals tied to ethnicities or skin colors. (Sierra Green added that if there are biases connected to skin color and ethnicities, then why shouldn't there be goals to counteract these biases and the things that are affecting peoples of color daily lives? As a result, Green stated that the Board should specifically target people of color [to join the Board]. Green stated that it is

important for people of color and BIPOC voices to be represented on the Board). Rumford added that she believes the board should represent the diverse population of the community, but that the ordinance should not have that as a specificity. (Siedlecki added that there is a huge population in the community of Ukrainian and Russian immigrants). Rumford added that she agrees, and that there is also a large Vietnamese community – Rumford stated (and later retracted) that the Board has never had any Asian members. It was later clarified that there are Asian representatives serving as Board members of the South Asian diaspora. (Siedlecki added that the Board could reach out to specific immigrant populations – e.g. Russian and Vietnamese to encourage them to serve as Board members and that way get representation from all over the County. TJ supported Siedlecki's idea, inviting specific groups to meetings, instead of requiring a specific minority quota to the Board). Rumford added that the reason the Board had the current makeup, is because it consisted of members who had interest in immigration issues and took the time to research volunteer opportunities on the City website. (Monika Cassidy agreed with Rumford's statement, that the original Board makeup reflected those who had an interest and experience in immigration issues affecting the community, are immigrants themselves, and have the knowledge of what has happened and what may happen to immigrant groups in the community). (Jagwinder Gill added that the employment sector matters more than ethnic background – that the community will be watching *what* the Board will do and how they will act, rather than focusing on the color of their skin). (Marciano Sanchez Lopez added that representatives of C2C should be members of the Board, adding his frustration about the Mayoral selection of Board members).

Department of Homeland Security HSI Office Tour Report Out [1:20:47]

- On December 20, 2021, five Board members (Liz Darrow, Marciano Sanchez Lopez, Jagwinder Gill, Monika Cassidy, and Sierra Green) along with one City staff member (Nalini Margaitis), were provided a Tour of the DHS-HIS Office in Ferndale, Washington by Assistant Special Agent (overseeing Washington State offices), Matthew Murphy.
- Sierra Green reported that Matthew Murphy met the group and presented some generic information about DHS-HSI (information that can be found on the website). Green shared that when she asked Murphy if he could send her the PowerPoint presentation to her personally, he responded that he could not do so because the information is secured. Green added that a lot of the questions that were asked during the Q&A were dodged, adding that Murphy was combative and hostile in his response and that it was not a welcoming environment. When asked how long people were detained, or a maximum amount of time, Murphy was unable to answer. Murphy told the group that people are not detained there. There was much focus on ERO (and not HIS). They call the Ferndale Center the Blaine Center. Murphy stated that his office focuses on the Canadian border and seizing narcotics. There were three holding rooms (with a bathroom). Murphy stated that they target MS13 gang related activity (Guatemalan, El Salvadoran and Mexican region). There was a fully armed SUV that was transported from Mexico that was used when dealing with dangerous community members. Green added that Murphy responded with a belittling tone.

- Marciano Sanchez Lopez echoed Green's recap. He also added that the immediate imagery was very vivid – working with other law enforcement agencies. Lopez recalled that Murphy appeared proud of what he did, pushing that narrative that they are the good guys hunting the bad guys. Lopez added that Murphy was hostile when responding to the group's questions, either dodging the questions or answering in broad terms. Lopez added that he didn't learn anything from the presentation – he left with what he already knew. There was a 7 by 9 cell, stainless steel, and a bathroom and a sink and interrogation rooms. In the garage, there was military equipment stored against the wall and a big, armored tank. Murphy said that the tank was used for protection based on someone's history (e.g. if they have been aggressive toward cops).
- Jagwinder Gill added that it was an unmarked building – no sign that designates "HSI" or "DHS". He also shared a photo that he took from the front of the building.
- Liz Darrow added that Robert Hammer (Murphy's boss), mentioned that there is an ERO facility within the same complex, about 1,000 ft from the HSI building. The group asked Murphy about this location and he was unable to provide any information about that complex. Darrow added that the only reason the group learned about the HSI office is because of a recollection from a community member. Darrow added that it is concerning to know that there are two facilities in that complex. Darrow added that, upon departing, Murphy told the group that if they don't agree with him, to tell him what he can do to make them agree with him. Darrow explained that this was a very aggressive approach.
- Monika Cassidy spoke about the imagery that was hung on the walls on the complex, power-striking imagery of men in regular clothing hold guns. Cassidy stated that not many staff members were there, but that there was plenty of exercise equipment. Cassidy added that the garage had temporary barriers (Murphy had mentioned that this was practice area). Cassidy wondered if this separation was also used to separate people as an intimidation tactic. Cassidy added that she was not impressed by the armor. She added that she too felt like he was being hostile. She recalled that Murphy spoke about how he did not appreciate the article circulating around, shedding a bad light on him. Cassidy stated that this facility did not look like a facility where they could store people, instead it appeared more transitional, and she believes there must be another location that holds people for a longer time. Cassidy stated that Murphy wanted to present himself like he was friendly and wanted to collaborate, but she does not believe this is the case. The building is new and has only been occupied since January of this year. They recently moved from another location.
- Darrow shared photos of the outside of the building, showing that there were 50 parking spots (for 50 employees). There was an ongoing standing vigil going on, which occurs every Monday. Murphy mentioned that he did not know why there was a vigil.
- Alfredo Juarez shared his experience. He stated that he was asked what gang he was in. He said all he did was drive on a one-way street. He told ICE that he was not in a gang, that he was a student and works during the summer. He stated that during his detention, it was very difficult for his family members to locate where he was. He was only provided a 30-second phone call to let him family know that he was in an ICE

building.

Federal Contact Data [1:49:59]

- Liz Darrow had one question about, *CBP dispatch telephoned our dispatch to ask a question about a warrant return sometimes they don't know how to read certain warrant returns. Our dispatcher helped.* Darrow stated that this is an example of CBP asking BPD for information and BPD giving it to them. If CBP does not know how to do their job, then they need more training. According to the ACLU, BPD is not supposed to provide any information to CBP that is not accessible to the public via a google search.
- To recap, Bridget Reeves obtained useful information on the entries with reference numbers. If there are no reference numbers, then the Board is unable to follow-up. Darrow added that the Board needs help to gain accountability from BPD. Rumford suggested that the Board compile a list (top ten) of cases to present to the City. Cassidy added that whenever this type of communication is brought forward to the Mayor, it should also be attached to the Council and the Governor. Darrow added that the Governor and the ACLU have been provided with plenty of examples.
- Darrow also drew concern to, *our Dispatch telephoned CBP Dispatch at the request of Suman PD for a cover officer on a security check*, stating that this is another example of BPD involving CBP when they otherwise would not have gotten involved.
- Darrow cited a third example regarding a DUI where BPD provided information to CBP that should not have been disclosed.
- Hannah Stone added that the notes column of the federal contact data varies greatly due to the digression of people – various people are compiling these notes.

Old/New Business [2:00:06]

- Hannah Stone requested that a formal request be submitted to her for the funds to cover a board retreat/training. Darrow responded that she and Pai looked into a training by the Anti-oppression resource and training alliance.

The meeting adjourned at 8:34 PM

Recordings of this meeting with additional details of discussion is posted at:

<https://cob.org/gov/public/bc/immigration-advisory-board-materials>