



**City of Bellingham**  
**Immigration Advisory Board Meeting Minutes**  
January 16<sup>th</sup> 2024, 6:30 PM

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**Board Members**

*Board members present:* Daniel Cruz, Homero Israel Jose Garrido, Jian He, Imanat Kang, Tara Villalba, Alfredo (Lelo) Juarez Zeferino

*Board members absent:* Gabriela Montenegro, Holly Pai

**Staff and Others Present:**

*City Council Liaison:* Jace Cotton

*City of Bellingham Mayor:* Kim Lund

*City Council Legislative Staff:* Jackie Lassiter

*City Council Member:* Hannah Stone

*City Council Member:* Skip Williams

*Russian, Punjabi, and Spanish Interpreters*

***To submit an application to serve on a City Board or Commission, please visit the following webpage: <https://cob.org/qov/public/bc/Boards-and-Commissions-Application-Process>***

**Tara Villalba called the meeting to order at 6:33 PM**

**Equity Reminders**

Tara made a land and border statement, acknowledging the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe, and that the border between the US and Canada is not part of the traditional lands of the peoples who were here prior to colonization.

Tara announced that January 22<sup>nd</sup> is Treaty Day and that there will be a Treaty Day film festival at the Pickford Movie theater.

Tara went over best practices for speaking while interpretation is occurring.

**Roll Call**

**Approval of minutes**

*Homero Israel Jose Garrido moved to approve the December minutes. Lelo Juarez Zeferino seconded the motion. Motion passed with no opposition.*



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#### Public Comment

Members discussed the importance of public comment and at what point during IAB meetings members of the public should be able to speak.

Four members of the public gave comments:

Ashley D. Moncorro read a statement from Vamos Outdoor project board members opposing the proposed ordinance to suspend the IAB.

Candice stated that she hopes that a compromise can be found and that she feels that the voices of immigrants are important. She also sees that the ordinance has fair points as well.

Maya stated that she does not think the Board's work should be paused and, as someone who works with immigrants, she appreciates the work of the Board and wants to see it continue without stoppage.

Edgar Franks of Familias unidas por la Justicia stated that their union has taken a strong position to support the work of the IAB, which is one of the only places that community members can go to have their voices heard.

#### City of Bellingham Updates

Council Member Hannah Stone thanked members of the public for being at the meeting and for all the e-mailed comments as well. She went on to offer explanation for her ordinance proposing a suspension of the Board, highlighting:

- Her intention is not to end the IAB or silence the voices of immigrants.
- She feels a pause is necessary to determine what the differences in perspective between the Board and the City are and to outline a path forward
- The City's immediate concerns are centered around the issues over which it has purview to address.
- The City has failed to meet some of the expectations of the Board as well.

Council Member Stone acknowledged Council Members Jace Cotton and Skip Williams and Mayor Lund, who were all in attendance. Council Member Cotton introduced himself as the new liaison to the Board.

#### Community Updates

Each Board member in attendance spoke in opposition to the proposed ordinance suspending the IAB. Each member emphasized the importance of the work and their wish to continue without a pause.



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- Lelo Juarez Zeferino said that members have been asking for clear next steps and the office of the previous Mayor did not follow through with their commitments. He summarized the Request for Proposals process that they have been working through.
- Daniel Cruz said that he's been here for a few months and that nobody from the City ever approached board members to say that they were out of line. He said that being a Board member feels like a waste of time because of the lack of communication from the City. He thanked the Mayor and Council Members for being at the meeting.
- Imanant Kang said that when she joined in September, the same concerns were coming up. She said the biggest thing that needs to be worked on is communication. She was looking forward to the retreat to find out more about where the tensions were coming from.
- Homero Israel Jose Garrido said that communication is key, but if you do not speak the language, it is difficult to bring your ideas forward. He pointed out that the ordinance didn't reflect any of the work that they had accomplished. He said that outreach work was essential in order to gather ideas and to know what the community needs. He emphasized the importance of involvement from City elected officials and staff.
- Jian He expressed appreciation for all who were present. He acknowledged that yesterday was MLK day and that today in Bellingham we are still trying to make people's lives better. He said that the Board can set an example for other jurisdictions on how to establish communication between underrepresented community members and elected officials. He wants to bridge the gap between the Board and the City. He pointed out that no specific actions are stated in the ordinance and no accountability is built in. How can they ensure that community members can keep an eye on the happenings of the City, that they can have their voices heard, and that the ordinance will not be a de facto shut down of the Board?
- A [statement from Holly Pai](#) was read out loud.
- Tara Villalba passed out printed information to Board members and elected officials. She read a letter aloud expressing opposition to the ordinance and proposed to members that they officially send it to the City Council and Mayor.

*Lelo moved to adopt the letter and deliver to the Mayor's office, City Council, and to have it posted on the website. Homero seconded the motion. Motion passed with no opposition.*

#### **Summary of Asks from the Immigration Advisory Board to City of Bellingham**

Tara asked what the next steps would be if the Board is suspended. Mayor Kim Lund responded that the work of the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission would have representation from the immigrant community. She added that the City will be spending a significant amount of money on that group and she wants to make sure that members of the IAB are a part of that work.



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Council Member Stone said that she felt that the narrative that the pause is due to disfunction is inaccurate. She said that there is responsibility on all sides – she has witnessed the City’s lack of response and engagement. She said the work the IAB has been taking on has great value to the community, but there hasn’t been a City component to the work. She also envisioned having a working group to examine what is needed and resolidify the commitment to the work.

Tara opened the meeting up public comment again. Six members of the public spoke:

- Eduardo said that the ordinance lacked substance and showed that the City didn’t know enough about the work of the IAB. He said that an investigation in to the accusation of the ordinance should be made, but it lacks foundation for a suspension.
- Joel Johnson, organizing director of OneAmerica, said he was here in support of Board members and in solidarity with Community to Community Development. He said they are all in opposition to the ordinance. He highlighted that the intent of the ordinance is different than the impact it will have.
- Malia said that she was opposed to the suspension and said that the IAB is a direct tie to the immigrant community. It is a beautiful opportunity to sit with discomfort and ask how we can all show up and create a new and better version.
- Tally Jones said that she appreciates all the work of the Board members and their sacrifice. She sees the suspension as disregarding the work.
- Sunida said that she is disappointed because the ordinance would also shut down the talks of the Immigrant Resource Center. She said that the IAB is the only place for her to come and gather information to bring back to her community, such as information in Spanish about winter shelter options.
- Von Ochoa, former IAB Board member, said that language about this being a shutdown or a halt is a misrepresentation of what the ordinance said. He spoke to a culture of contempt in the Board and said that when he was a board member and tried to recruit other members, he would encounter hesitancy from community members when they found out who comprised the Board. He said that they are all in favor of migrant rights, but the space has devolved into insults and accusations. He said he was in support of a pause in the work.

Lelo thanked everyone for attending. He stated that he wants the Immigrant Resource Center to be for everyone, not just farm workers. He said that the IRC would not represent overlapping work, but would be a new establishment that reflects what the community wants.

He went on to say that the statement regarding the conflict at meetings was not true, as evidence by the number of people who were attending the meeting tonight.

Tara opened the meeting up to public comment again. Three members of the public spoke:



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- Dena Jensen thanked Board members for their work. She said that it is difficult to believe the City when they say they do not intend to dissolve the board or replace it entirely because it seems that the City does not know the work that has been done.
- Ian thanked members for their service and said that they fill a unique roll that wouldn't be filled by the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission.
- Michael said that he has been following the work of the IAB since before its official creation. He said that he felt the Ordinance was insulting.

**Adjourn 8:46 PM**