



City of Bellingham
Immigration Advisory Board Meeting
January 19, 2021, 6:30 PM

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 PM

Board Members

Present:

Liz Darrow
Maria Isabel Cortes-Zamora
Bridget Reeves
Danielle Siedlecki
Katie Winkelman
Monika Cassidy

Absent:

Ramon Barba Torres
Jahn Zuniga Escobar
Ada Rumford

Liaison to the City Council: Councilmember Hannah Stone

Spanish Interpretation: Marcela Rey

City staff: Mark Gardner, City Council Legislative Analyst

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 Board Business [00:00]

- Councilmember Hannah Stone welcomed the group
- Hannah Stone facilitated this meeting
- Minutes for the December 15 meeting were approved as written.

Reports from impacted community members [04:42].

Australia Hernandez Cosby works as a Promotora with Community to Community. Promotoras work in both Whatcom and Skagit counties and in urban and in rural areas. There was a recent incident where a worker who was employed doing construction was not being paid for the full value of his work. The homeowner doing a remodel hired a number of undocumented workers

and did not pay them all that they were owed, and the owner threatened the workers with a harassment charge if they did not accept the pay offer.

Some statewide organizations that could potentially help were not able to do so in a timely way. Legal representation from local attorneys or Law Advocates could help. People are entitled to pay for the work they do regardless of immigration status. People can present such complaints to the board to document patterns of abuse and the board can discuss whether a remedy might be possible.

Edgar Franks works with the union Familias Unidas por la Justicia (United Families for Justice). Many workers are put in a tough position by landlords, especially during the offseason. The union is also monitoring the transition from Trump to Biden and what that might mean for farmworker communities -- in particular how it might impact the number of immigrant enforcement agents within our community, and also policy on detention and deportations. The union is also participating in the state legislative process to monitor and influence things that impact immigrant and farmworkers.

The Bellingham Tenants Union has been a great resource on landlord issues. Different laws regulate farmworker housing and the farmworker union is working with other groups to see what can be done to improve protections. There is often intimidation and fear about housing problems.

Presentation and discussion on revised ordinance [35:41]

Council member Hannah Stone presented the ordinance, which has been reviewed by the City Attorney and the Mayor's office, and it is scheduled for consideration next Monday. [Subsequently the ordinance was delayed until February to incorporate the changes recommended by the board]. Changes will allow for alternates for each board member. Not every position would require an alternate but it will be an option. Alternates would ideally come from the same sector of the community as the primary member. Board members could recommend alternates. Members would be required to be residents of Whatcom County for one year, and applicants not living in Bellingham would need to be employed in Bellingham. Two co-facilitators for meetings would be identified, rather than chair and co-chair. A Council member will be appointed as Liaison but does not have to be Chair of the Council's Justice Committee.

There was discussion on whether the ordinance could be revised to eliminate residency requirements entirely to maximize flexibility. There is no absolute requirement that people be City residents to be on a board but that is the default choice for the City. Indicating a wider geography in the ordinance helps ensure that this remains an option in the future. The provision requiring those not living in Bellingham to work there could be dropped. If the ordinance requires Whatcom County residence, the application could include a question allowing people to identify their connection to the City of Bellingham, rather than meeting a specific criteria such as working in the City.

There are a number of board vacancies, and filling the positions has been delayed during ordinance revision. The City will work to expedite filling the vacancies as soon as the new ordinance passes.

Discussion on Municipal Immigrant Program Presentations at the Dec. 15 meeting [1:13:02]

At the December meeting representatives of immigrant assistance programs in Seattle and San Antonio presented information about their programs to the board. Some of the ideas discussed could be appropriate for Bellingham. The Board could encourage the Mayor to join Action Cities for Citizenship. Having a physical building where people could go for services, such as ESL and citizenship assistance, would be good. Could there be funding for a paid convenor to coordinate this effort, perhaps working with the County? Could funds be reallocated in the 2023-24 budget, or sooner, to start this process? This topic will be added to the next meeting's agenda for further discussion.

Discussion of December WHAT-COMM presentation [1:26:00]

The Board discussed the presentation from WHAT-COMM supervisors at the December meeting. Right now the 911 director reports to an assistant chief in the Bellingham Police Department. There is concern that people may not want to call knowing that their calls go to an agency supervised by the police department. The Emergency Management program under the Fire Department is one possible alternate location for this service.

Board members expressed concern that the state law regarding collaboration with federal agencies is not always being followed. Also, since the Bellingham Police Department is seeing funding increases over the rate of inflation, why are there no interpreters? There is a BPD policy in place indicating that using ICE or CBP for interpretation is not permitted. The Board could form a working group to investigate issues regarding WHAT-COMM and law enforcement interpretation capacity, and bring back the findings from that investigation to the Board for further discussion. Having four or fewer members on this work group would be important to avoid a quorum of the board.

Additional follow up will occur to see what can be provided to the board on the outcomes of the federal contacts indicated by the data. There are a number of mentions of military equipment in the contacts data -- can the board get information on what this equipment is and who has it?

Public Comment [1:56:12]

Members of the public provided comment and posed questions to the board. Questions and comments were:

1. The board should recommend to the mayor the creation of an office of immigration so undocumented people could bring forward complaints about violation of their rights and have them addressed, especially the exploitative practices of employers.
2. If more incidents are brought to the board and board members see a pattern of violation, will the board be able to respond to these violations? Also, some people were having difficulty finding the link for the meetings – can this be improved?

3. We need an office of immigration to help document and respond to labor and other issues. Does the board need more authority to solve problems?
4. The IAB should be encouraged to move forward with big things that have been discussed, esp. regarding police accountability. It is concerning that the police budget was passed without dissent from City Council.
5. The Transitional learning office at Whatcom Community college provides ESL for immigrants and refugees, and also high school diploma courses. What are the needs of the immigrant community, what classes should be added, and which processes can be changed to improve access?

Old/New Business [2:12:56]

There have been some changes to the IAB board web pages to put more information on line. Links to resources, both City and external, have been added as has a new FAQ page for responses to questions asked at the IAB meetings . See <https://cob.org/gov/public/bc/immigration-advisory-board> for the resources and a link to the FAQs. Spanish language content will be continue to be added.

There was a request to start public comment earlier as it really important.

The meeting adjourned at 8:53.

Recordings of this meeting with additional details of discussion is posted at:
<https://cob.org/gov/public/bc/immigration-advisory-board-materials>