



City of Bellingham
Immigration Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
July 18th, 2023, 6:30 PM

Board Members

Board members present: Homero Israel Jose Garrido, Von Ochoa, Sophia Rey, Tara Villalba, Alfredo (Lelo) Juarez Zeferino

Board members absent: Holly Pai

Staff and Others Present:

City Communications Director and Interim Deputy Administrator: Janice Keller

City Council Legislative Staff: Jackie Lassiter

** City Council Liaison Kristina Michele Martens was absent*

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/gov/public/bc/Boards-and-Commissions-Application-Process>

Sophia Rey called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM

Language Justice Process

Jackie Lassiter, Council Staff, went over best practices for speaking while interpretation is occurring.

Roll Call

Review and Approval of May Meeting Minutes

Sophia Rey moved to approve the June minutes. Lelo Juarez Zeferino seconded. Motion passed with no opposition.

Announcements

Janice Keller announced that Sam Quinones will be visiting Bellingham for a free event on August 1st at 6:00 PM focused on solutions to the opioid crisis.

Homero Israel Jose Garrido stated that he made contact with a group that gives free surplus food from farmers to the community in the Birchwood neighborhood on Saturdays.

Public Comment

Lelo Juarez Zeferino asked City Staff to explain the decision to not re-appoint Liz Darrow. Janice Keller stated that the Mayor decided to not re-appoint Liz in order to make room for more



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membership from directly impacted communities. She added that we have a number of applicants that fit that description.

Homero stated that the decision to not appoint Liz was surprising and it should not be taken lightly. He stated that when someone joins the IAB, it takes quite a long time to learn how to be effective. Liz was a key member of the board and she is now being left out of the decision making process. He expressed concern that the membership is shrinking and that the lack of re-appointment reflected a lack of trust. He said that he and other members would be writing a letter to the Mayor.

Community member Shawn Hops stated that they have been part of the IRC campaign since it was started. They said that they wonder why the board is still meeting as they see poor leadership from City Council and the Mayor. They said that the IRC has community buy-in and is low hanging fruit and they see the Mayor as having an adversarial attitude towards the Board and their work.

Community member Misha Blackburn said they thought it was a huge mistake not re-appoint Liz. They said the Mayor's reasoning feels disingenuous and urged the Mayor to reconsider his decision.

Community member Dena Jensen agreed with previous commenters and reflected on times in which the Mayor had attended meetings and the retreat. They said that they see communication and trust are both big issues between the Board and the City. They said that the decision should have been announced much earlier and should have been up for discussion.

Community member Miale Jose stated that they have seen Liz make many contributions to the Board. They said that meeting facilitation should be able to solve some of the communications issues and that the decision not to reappoint should be reconsidered. They referred to a previous Board member who they saw as having good communication with the Mayor.

Community member Ian Schaffer Lorenz stated that the situation reminded them of a situation at their workplace, in which a critical member of a bargaining unit who was trying to unionize workers was fired. They said that the timing of these incidents are rarely coincidental and that the decision was made in bad faith. They urged the Mayor to reconsider and added that having people with different communication styles on boards is a good thing.

Sophia Rey said that Liz was integral in her understanding of how to make contributions to the Board. She said it brings her a lot of anxiety and fear about having a Board without any founding members. She said this will be a Board made out of new members and it will be very difficult to provide any continuity of direction or purpose. She said that she still leans on Liz to



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understand how processes work. She pointed out that every IAB member voted unanimously to recommend Liz for reappointment and to have the Mayor not honor that felt contradictory. She went on to say that the IAB valued lifting up those with lived experiences, but it doesn't mean anything without leadership on the Board.

Community member Storm Sealove said that they have heard from Board and community members tonight that they trust Liz and that they also feel a lack of trust of the Mayor because of this decision.

Community member Sunita said they agreed with all the comments about Liz. They said that they live in Everson and work in Sumas and Nooksack picking blueberries. They live and work with a lot of other immigrants. They said that Liz has been a great contributor to their community who has helped people learn about their rights. Liz opens their eyes to their rights and things that they don't know. Liz let them know about the IAB meetings and nobody else is telling them about these things.

Community member Maya Morales said that Liz is a connector in the community who many people in the community respect. She said it was very odd for the Mayor not to renew an appointment who the members have voted to approve. She said it feels political to her. What matters to the IAB should be what matters to the Mayor. The IAB exists so that there can be a body who can bring different kinds of voices.

Lelo stated that he wanted to ask the Mayor to reconsider his decision and that Liz has knowledge that a lot of the current members lacks. All members of the board voted for her reappointment and it worries him that they learned of the decision today, right before a meeting and when they are at a very important part of establishing the IRC. The current members, who are volunteers, will have a difficult time helping new members to understand how the IAB functions and how it interacts with the City.

Tara Villalba stated that the Mayor's decision is deeply disappointing and discouraging and shows that the City doesn't understand or care about the work of the IAB. Liz is a champion and community members trust her. The IAB is trying to follow the process that the City has set up. Announcing the decision was bad process. She also wants to protest the Mayor using the Immigrant community as the reason for his decision. She expects the City to show in action, not just words, a commitment to Immigrant Communities.

Jian He said that, as an applicant to the Board, they have had conversations with Liz and Tara about the origins of the Board and how they can be an effective member of the Board. They said that they needed to stand up and speak up.



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Homero said that he had a statement for the public: Liz has proven to be a great asset as a leader in the community. She has volunteered for years without financial compensation and has taken time away from her personal life to work for the community. He said that you cannot lean that kind of character, you are born with it. There is a lot of work that needs to be done and the IRC is just the beginning of what the Board can do. They need leadership and doers, not just thinkers, to accomplish those things. He is disappointed that Liz has shown this kind of leadership but is not going to be able to continue on the Board.

Homero introduced his friend Mary Burgess. Mary said that she owns the Lynden Birth Center, where she moved in 2017 to help serve the migrant and immigrant community. She said that she knows of three farmworkers associated with a certain church in Lynden who recently gave birth and all were given C-sections. The woman who knows them felt that the decision to have a C-section was made due to the language barrier. She said if you don't speak English, you don't get the same opportunities as English speakers regarding birth and healthcare. Her clinic is set up with language access and her goal is to offer the same kind of care that English speaking patients receive.

Community Member Moonju Cho stated that she has taught refugee children whose parents do not speak English. She said that the Bellingham School District does not do enough to teach those children. The teacher is in charge of 152 students. She gave an example of an Afghan 5th grader whose native language is Pashtu. His language skills are at about 1st grade. He did not receive proper education in his home country and couldn't read to standards in his own language. The School District is sending him to middle school anyway and she fears that this student will do nothing but sit in his desk because she has seen this before. If language skills are behind, it is very difficult to catch up in education and kids like these are destined to be excluded from society.

Members and Moonju discussed what the Board could do about this problem and how other school districts handle these issues.

Subcommittee Reports:

Immigrant Resource Center Subcommittee: Committee members said that they were waiting for the City to move forward with the Request for Proposals (RFP). Janice Keller said that she was asked to extend the deadline for the RFP at the last meeting. She did that and proposals are due at 11 AM on July 26th. Submissions are not reviewed until the deadline and she does not know how many, if any, submissions they have received. If the deadline comes and we have no submissions, we can again extend the deadline. We can see that some people have viewed and downloaded the document and City Staff have also fielded a number of questions about it.



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She also clarified some language regarding IAB member advisement in the decision making process. She said she wanted to work with the subcommittee to decide how they will evaluate the proposals, rate them, and share and compare ratings.

Janice and members discussed an addendum to the RFP that contains the agreed upon language; why the language wasn't included in the original RFP, where the addendum can be found, why meeting requests haven't been answered, the purpose of Janice's proposed meetings after submissions have been received, timelines involved, what kind of questions are being asked by interested parties, accessibility of the RFP and who it has been sent to, systemic issues with that exclude access to certain potential respondents, and who will be on the committee tasked with evaluating the applicants,

Process Subcommittee: Janice Keller reported that four of the five applicants recommend by the Board are being appointed by the Mayor and will go before the City Council for confirmation at the next meeting. Members asked why the fifth recommendation was not appointed. Janice stated that the fifth person is still in process. Tara asked what happens if an applicant is recommended by the Board but not appointed by the Mayor and if he reports out on that publicly. Janice said that each Board and Commission has a slightly different process and recommended that the Board decide on a process to give feedback when appointments are not made. Discussion was made about whether or not Council can appoint a member without a recommendation from the Mayor.

Communications Subcommittee: Sophia stated that she is working with former board member Ada Rumford to get a version of the flyer that is editable.

Federal Contact Data Subcommittee: No report was given.

Adjourn 8:48 PM