



**City of Bellingham**  
**Immigration Advisory Board Special Meeting Minutes**  
May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 1:00 PM

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**Board Members**

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

*Board members absent:* Monika Cassidy

**Staff and Others Present:**

*Facilitator:* Victor Rodriguez, alterNative Consulting

*City Council Liaison:* Kristina Michele Martens

*City of Bellingham Mayor:* Seth Fleetwood

*City Communications Director:* Janice Keller

*City Deputy Administrator:* Brian Heinrich

*City Council Legislative Staff:* Jackie Lassiter

*Russian, Spanish, and Punjabi Interpreters*

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**Victor Rodriguez, facilitator called the meeting to order at 1:30 PM**

**Opening and Context Setting**

Facilitator Victor Rodriguez thanked everyone for coming and the interpreters for their work. He also went over the agenda, giving an overview of the plan for the day.

Each person in attendance introduced themselves, saying their role and how they are feeling.

Victor shared context for the meeting, including:

- Racism is a public health crisis, it is a threat to the health and safety of everyone. Lack of trust in government is a huge barrier. COVID revealed that our government is not set up to respond to the needs of BIPOC communities.
- Climate change is getting worse and we can only expect more public health emergencies.
- Three important teachings –
  - Health, safety, and liberation are interconnected with each other and with the land.



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- The people who are most effected by the problem are in the best position to offer solutions to the problems, but our systems are not always set up that way. We should seek to center and elevate the wisdom of immigrants.
- Government and community collaboration and trust are crucial to addressing racism and other forms of injustice AND crucial to our collective ability to respond to public health emergencies.

### Community Agreements

All participants worked together to come up with a set of community agreements to help guide the work for the day. The agreements the group decided on were:

1. Speak from your heart
2. Listen from the heart
3. Syncretism: Respect, responsibility, and relationships.
4. All participants are just humans, not machines – none of us is better or worse than any other human or the land
5. Center the impacts and context of racism and power structures.

### Listening Session

The group split into two groups; government, board members/members of the public. Each group discussed the following questions:

1. What needs to be in place to help strengthen trust and collaboration between community and government?
2. What do you expect the IAB to be able to do for the community?

Both groups came back together and reported on what they had come up with.

Between report backs from the two groups, there was a discussion on how to modify the agenda in order to continue the discussion, as time was running short.

The board decided unanimously to continue with the current agenda item.

After both groups shared, there was a discussion about the retreat itself – how the original intent was changed, did it get cancelled? Was it taken away?

The role of the Board was taken up as a discussion item, including:

- Victor said part of the work is to re-imagine some of the processes; the current way that



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advisory boards may not work for everyone. Boards help make our policies better by engaging more people, but boards in general are usually white middle class people; that model may not be working for everyone.

- Transparency and trust – it's important for the government to trust the community that they can create policy that works for them. IAB members do not see that.
- Frustration from the City that IAB doesn't acknowledge the items that the IAB has recommended that the City has consented to, such as the changes to the RFP that were accepted.
- Role of the Board: "advisement" vs "collaboration"
  - Victor pointed out that there needs to be conversation about what community engagement looks like beyond advisory boards. There are other models out there such as participatory budgeting. We can't do the equity and racial justice work with the existing structures.

#### Overview and Discussion of City Government Structure

Brian went over a flow chart of the legislative process. He explained that:

- The City envisions the IAB weighing in a number of City-wide topics.
- The City's data collection has gaps that leave out individuals and parts of the community, and they would like that to be filled.
- Adoption of an ordinance requires two meetings and three readings and is effective 15 days after it's passed.

Board members asked questions about the timing and process of Council items and other City policies, projects, etc.

Tara said that she has seen some legislation move through in a month and some takes years. How much discretion is there in each of the bodies/departments? Brian says that ideas may take time while Council Members work amongst each other to get agreement. If it's clear that there is not agreement, there may be no action. Tara clarified that she heard Brian say that not every idea is the same and not everything goes through an advisory committee. She says that this adds to the lack of transparency – there are a lot of small steps that move the process along that boards are never privy to because the Board is not involved. Brian says there is no room for discretion in adopting a Bellingham municipal code item – they meet every other Monday in Council to do this. Tara gave an example of the criminalization of public drug use, which passed too quickly for the IAB to meet and ask for input. There was also no language translation or outreach campaign. That policy didn't go to any boards, yet the IRC idea is stuck and is having difficulty even getting to the RFP.



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A discussion of the status of the IRC took place, with Brian saying that they anticipate a recommendation from a consultant on what the IRC should look like and how much it's going to cost, then that recommendation would most likely come back to a budget work session.

Brian went over an outline of the IAB originating ordinance and amending ordinance. Members and staff discussed, including:

- WhatComm (911)'s contacts with ICE or CBP. Brian clarified that contacts coming from, for example, schools or hospitals, wouldn't be under the purview of the City.
- Potential changes to the ordinance – Brian explained that that if the Council or Administration wants to make changes to the ordinance, that should go to the Board for their input and Council would have the final say on if a change is made.
- Makeup of the Board – Von asked how common it is to have many members of the board be affiliated with one external organization and pointed out that many current and former IAB members are affiliated with Community to Community Development (C2C).
  - Brian answered that he does not know of another similar example and Liz replied that C2C helped write the ordinance and many members were excited about joining.
- Process for workplan – Brian said that there are a number of items the City would like to bring forward for advisement to the IAB and would like to present those to Board chairs. If there are topics that the IAB generates those would go to Kristina as the liaison. Keeping open lines of communications is important.

Lelo asked if there is an idea on the table for which the City says no, is there an opportunity to work together to turn the no to a yes. Brian says it depends. We can't change every no to a yes – sometimes there's laws or policies that would need to change first. When we arrive to a spot where that's not possible, the City wants to have a dialogue, and figure out why things are in place and if they can be changed. Janice says that she can commit to brainstorming on how to get to shared goals. The IRC is a great example of the City and the IAB working together – the Board came forward with a budget proposal, the Council said it was a great idea and wanted to put some steps into place before making a budget commitment. It's not going as quickly as the Board would have hoped, but it went fast in the scheme of things.

Liz asked about the roster and term expiration dates. When a person is appointed, they might get put into a position that expires very soon. Why can't each new board member be elected to a new two year term? Tara agreed that the term expirations were very confusing.



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#### ***Break***

Victor asked the group to talk about next steps.

Tara said that the Process subcommittee has been working with City staff to plan this retreat. Tara and Liz proposed that they do a report back about the retreat at the regular meeting and ask each subcommittee to meet before the June meeting, do as much work planning as possible, and present that to the larger group.

Homero said that trust is fundamental and we have to keep working to move forward with trust.

Victor asked each participant still present to go around and say how they are feeling now at the close of the meeting.

**Set Work Plan for the Future: This item was not discussed.**

**Adjourn 6:49 PM**