



City of Bellingham
Immigration Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
April 20, 2021, 6:30 PM

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM

Board Members

Present:

Ada Rumford
Bridget Reeves
Australia Tobon
Danielle Siedlecki
Holly Pai
John Baker
Liz Darrow
Monika Cassidy
Maria Isabel Cortes-Zamora
Marciano Sanchez Lopez (alternate)
Ramon Barba Torres

Absent:

Jahn Zuniga Escobar
Katie Winkleman

Liaison to the City Council: Councilmember Hannah Stone

Spanish Interpretation: Marcela Rey

City staff: Nalini Margaitis, City Council Legislative Assistant

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 [00:38]

- Nalini Margaitis welcomed the group.
- Nalini Margaitis facilitated this meeting.
- Minutes from the March 16, 2021 meeting were approved as written.

Introduction of New Board Members [3:52]

- Holly Pai [4:35]
Immigration attorney for 5.5 years, studied at WWU, practiced law in NY until 2016
- John Baker [6:16]
From California, worked in Mexico with refugee shelters (literacy and asylum preparation) and will soon be deployed to Texas to work with displaced children
- Australia Tobon [8:14]
Resident of Bellingham, supporting community organizing efforts with C2C as well as a role at BTC, supporting immigrants, refugees and agricultural workers
- Marciano Sanchez Lopez, alternate [10:05]
Comes from a farmworker background in Whatcom County and Union organizer for Familias Unidas por La Justicia (~500 indigenous farmworkers, 80% Mixteco speakers)

Reports from Impacted Community Members [13:45].

- Hannah Stone clarified that this time is set aside and separate and apart from general public comment for those community members whose voices are not always elevated have opportunity to speak
- Liz Darrow added that as the board membership becomes more equitable and diverse, this separation between impacted member and general public comment will be reduced

Subcommittee Reports [18:36]

- Immigration Resource Center Report, Danielle Siedlecki [19:10]
- Reading of Ordinance [19:58-28:22] & screen share of interested organizations [28:34]
- Liz Darrow reminded the Board that this is a draft and would welcome Board feedback
- Ada Rumford had a question regarding employment report section (how many employers there are in Bellingham), is it focused on independent contractors?, concern that it's a sector for workers that don't have good avenues, it should be an avenue for those who aren't being represented
- Liz Darrow replied indicating that the section was in place per request from an undocumented worker – urges Board that there needs to be labor support regarding the Center. Immigrant and refugees suffer workplace grievances and have nowhere to put them - labor issues are immigrant issues. Later, Liz Darrow added that it is difficult to capture the number of undocumented residents due to the nature that they are undocumented.
- Australia Tobon clarified that it is not just independent contractors, but any immigrant that is having trouble working things out with their employer (e.g.: Nooksack Casino worker, had a hard time communicating with their supervisor due to limited capacity of

English proficiency; labor in Bellingham related to house cleaning – without formal contract or lack of contract) – many of those places do not have representation from a Union, and the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center is not good for labor issues (lack of trust, unknown processes for many, they do not understand the concept of mediation because they are not experts in labor). The Dispute Center requires advocates for mediation and that does not work for immigrants. There are workers who are represented by major companies and they do not feel supported at work (for all workers) and provide an avenue for support that Union mediation cannot assist. Ideally, the Center should be a place for immigrants by immigrants. Later, Australia mentioned that these immigrant communities reporting something that we do not see, creates a picture of what is really going on in the City of Bellingham. It is a democracy pathway for them to actively participate even though they cannot potentially vote, this is civic engagement. Later, Australia Tobon indicated that the US Census Bureau keeps track of the following data: place of birth, citizenship, year of entry into the US.

- Hannah Stone would like more feedback on the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center as the City continues to develop partnerships (it would be good to know what is benefiting the community and what is not). In the ordinance “Bilingual services” – hope to expand to provide additional languages (e.g. School District with 46 languages – add an additional whereas clause that addresses the fact that there are 46 languages represented). Later, during the discussion of non-citizen immigrant, Hannah Stone explained that this might include naturalized citizens, DACA recipients and other immigrant groups who have received citizenship. Hesitant to separate people out, because it might become less inclusive.
- Holly Pai: To clarify, is this a partnership to encourage mediation of certain issues? And a question regarding the inclusion of “minority owned businesses” (differentiation between immigrants and minorities).
- Danielle Siedlecki: there needs to be a safe place for immigrants and refugees to be able to make that report.
- Bridget Reeves: Do we need to specify a specific category of immigrant in those lines? (the 2nd Whereas) Are there different protections that those groups need? If the Center is for any and all immigrants, then the ordinance should include all. In support of the ordinance after reading it, because it is very helpful to have something like this locally. The Mission would be willing to be included on the list to support – doing research, staff stopping by, getting the word out about shelter options.
- Nalini Margaitis asked Danielle Siedlecki what she needs from the Board or staff going forward, and Danielle Siedlecki responded that she will update the draft with the discussed changes and it would be nice to send it out in between meetings, so that it would be ready to sent out at the following meeting. Liz Darrow agreed and informed the new members that there is space on this subcommittee, as there are currently only two members. Nalini reminded the new members to complete their OPMA training once the information is distributed via email.

Continued discussion of IAB letter to Council [1:2:43]

- A discussion led by Bridget Reeves related to the comments received from Board members to include updates and changes to the letter. They are as follows:
- First paragraph: change “protecting” to “safeguarding”
- Top of page 3: “consider” to “request” & “rebuild” to “build”
- Removed quotes from “materials information” and “evidence”
- Removed statement #3 altogether (appointing liaison between CBP and IAB)
- Last paragraph: removed “willing to collaborate with BPD or another COB Dept”
- Questions and discussions included: Australia Tobon inquired whether the group has met up with the Border Patrol Chief. Bridget Reeves replied that they have not met with the Patrol Chief directly and have specifically not had these members at the Board meetings.
- Bridget Reeves also added that this was one of the reasons behind suggesting a liaison position in the letter and referenced a time an ordinance was developed by the City and CBP that violated practices of social work and HIPPA. (A consensus occurred only after all interested parties sat down to discuss the topic in depth, that resulted in an ordinance with necessary changes that did not violate laws).
- Australia Tobon agreed that any involvement with CBP would hinder the work of this group. Tobon urged to collaborate with this organized and recommends that the Board take a field trip to CBP.
- Liz Darrow thanked Bridget Reeves for removing item number three. Darrow disagreed that people experiencing houselessness have been treated with dignity by the community. Regarding number 2: there is a state law prohibits partnering with CBP with BPD. Instead, it should read, “create a procedure or policy for complying with the Keep WA Working Act, which prohibits partnering between CBP and BPD”. To increase community safety by always drawing that line between local law enforcement and federal law enforcement and they should not be working together is the objective of this Board.
- Bridget Reeves proposed meeting twice a month beginning in June.
- Hannah Stone: The City is exploring options that will maximize time during these meetings (simultaneous translations, etc.) and encourages individual committee work.
- Liz Darrow moved that the Board votes to approve pending the last change to present the letter to Council before the May 10, 2021 meeting. Darrow also posted a link to all panelists to a website displaying a timeline by which public feedback to the Governor was accepted relating to the Keep WA Working Act (last year). The BPD has an immigration policy that is violated nearly monthly.
- Australia Tobon agrees that it is important to have this acknowledged at a City level.
- Bridget Reeves reread the 2nd request: *create and publish a procedure or policy that aligns with the Keep Washington Working Act that draws a line between local Law Enforcement partnering with federal agencies, such as CBP.*
- Liz Darrow requested it state, “a policy and procedure”
- Ada Rumford suggested to remove capitalization of Law Enforcement
- Monika Cassidy (via chat) expressed agreement and would like to send this letter ASAP

- Liz Darrow moved that they send this letter to the City Council ASAP, Australia Tobon 2nd – passed unanimously.
- Hannah Stone will bring forward this letter during Old and New Business during the next scheduled City Council meeting.

Review of the Federal Contacts Data [1:36:40]

- Liz Darrow stated that there were two consecutive months where there was a domestic violence involvement from the CBP to the dispatch and a language interpretation request from CBP to dispatch. Follow up in conjunction with the field trip and getting in touch again with WhatComm to let them know that this needs to stop. March 11 (second to last) “CBP has called the Blaine PD to report a driving with a license suspended” – there are two problems: WhatComm is City funded and the prosecutor has been very vocal about not processing misdemeanors. The result is much more detrimental for a non-citizen than it would be for a citizen. Also, there is evidence of racial profiling as one of the primary ways to identify individuals in the community. The interim Police Chief has gone on record saying, “a person with a cracked windshield is most likely driving with a license suspended” and so that has resulted in poverty profiling. These are the deeper stories of peoples’ lives – where have these human beings ended up?
- Hannah Stone: The Council is looking into addressing pretextual traffic stops. Regarding data collection and the need for more information, this should be discussed as a group.
- Nalini Margaitis reached out to neighboring municipalities regarding the federal contacts data.
- Australia Tobon stressed the importance of maintaining contact with the neighboring municipalities and referenced an incident where undocumented community members were followed by the Police before they turned on their lights and stopped for a DUI infraction. Due to a language barrier, they are a target for immigration proceeds (working with Public Defender). The community member stated they were stopped based on the way the car looked and were unable to communicate properly with the Officials. Because of this, it is important that the group becomes subject matter experts on the practices of local municipalities.
- Liz Darrow suggested to have a public disclosure subcommittee to follow up on items on the federal contacts data. Hannah Stone stated that it would be appropriate for a small group (no more than 4) to meet separately about this topic and to report back to the group during the following meeting.

Old/New Business [1:53:37]

- Nalini Margaitis suggested the group create a mission and vision statement and an “About Me” section on the IAB website (for each Board member)

Public Comment Period [1:58:00]

- Comment 1 (Maddi Parvankin) advocated the idea of a mission and vision statement and urged Board to stay focused on immigrant safety and wellbeing

The meeting adjourned at 8:33 PM.

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

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