



City of Bellingham Immigration Advisory Board Meeting Minutes September 19th 2023, 6:30 PM

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: Kristina Michele Martens

City Communications Director and Interim Deputy Administrator: Janice Keller

City Council Legislative Staff: Jackie Lassiter

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>

Tara Villalba called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM

Equity Reminders

Tara Villalba did a land and border acknowledgment.

Tara Villalba acknowledged that not everyone's first language is English, and the City's practice of conducting business in English makes City government inaccessible to many community members. At IAB meetings, interpreters are available. She went over best practices for speaking while interpretation is occurring.

Roll Call

Approval of minutes

Liz Darrow moved to approve the August minutes. Tara Villalba seconded the motion. Motion passed with no opposition.

Announcements

Welcome and Introduction of New Members - Jian He and Imanat Kang: Jian (Jim) He and Imanat Kang introduced themselves, saying a bit about why they joined the board.

Dignity Dialogues Coming Up: Liz Darrow stated that there will be a Dignity Dialogues event on October 2nd at 6:30 PM hosted by Community to Community Development. They will provide an



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update on Federal Immigration Policy as well as an update on what is happening locally at the event. The address is 1295 E. Bakerview Road, Bellingham 98226

Homero Israel Jose Garrido announced that a Lutheran church in Bellingham is closing down and selling the property. He said it would be a good location for an Immigrant Resource Center.

Public Comment

Community member Brenda Bentley stated that she had heard that the board had voted to recommend an appointment and a re-appointment and asked for an update.

Former board member, Sophia Rey said that she sent out an email to Mayor Seth Fleetwood and the Council members regarding reappointment of Liz Darrow and hasn't received a response. Homero said the same.

City of Bellingham Updates

Janice Keller stated that Mayor Fleetwood had planned to come to the meeting today to talk about the appointment and re-appointment items, but was unfortunately too sick to attend.

Janice announced that Climate Action week is coming up at the end of September with several events, including a Climate Action survey to ask community members what action items should come next from the City.

Janice reminded members about the Bellingham Plan (Comprehensive Plan), adding that there are two meetings coming up this month at which feedback will be taken.

Tara asked if the Climate survey would be available in other languages. Janice replied that it wasn't at this time. Tara asked Board members to weigh in on what languages they should ask for in a survey. They discussed the survey, its format, and who it is targeted towards. They agreed that the survey should be translated into Spanish, Russian, and Punjabi. Janice agreed to let the Board know if the contractor in charge of conducting the survey is able to translate the survey.

Tara asked if the Bellingham Plan meeting would have interpreters available. Janice said that Spanish language interpretation would be available at the in-person meeting and that information about the plan is available in five different languages.

Daniel Cruz asked how the City determines what opportunities for engagement offer interpretation or translation services. Janice spoke about the City's ongoing efforts to provide language access.



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Lelo Juarez Zeferino stated that he had hosted a meeting with farmworkers and other immigrant community members during which they compiled a list of the most important issues to them. The top items were rent control, health care, childcare, wages, climate, and immigration. A question that came up during that meeting was how to make their voices heard by the government. Janice said that bringing it to this meeting was a good start to that.

Daniel Cruz asked what the City was doing about the high cost of housing. Janice and City Council Liaison Kristina Michele Martens gave a summary of the City's efforts. Janice offered to invite other City staff to come to the meeting with more details on various City initiatives. Kristina said that she sees solutions in increasing staff in the Planning department or re-considering their current priorities.

Tara added that as part of her work with the Bellingham Tenant's Union, they have been working with the Planning Department and that keeping rent stable or lowering rent is not a possibility. Publicly owned affordable housing is affordable according to the income of the person, but the public-private partnerships tie affordability to the area median income, which means that those on fixed incomes can experience a rent raise when the area median income goes up. Those who are experiencing these challenges often face difficulties in accessing City government and making their voices heard.

Homero asked what the process would be for someone who needs help with housing. Imanat Kang said that it was also important that non-English speakers had access to the people who can help with these issues.

Tara stated that we cannot use our IAB meetings to field service calls, which is why it is very important to establish the Immigrant Resource Center

County Community Updates - Presentation on Community First Whatcom Mini Initiatives

Jace Cotton of Community First Whatcom presented to the group. He stated that mini-initiatives are a way to get issues in front of the County Council. His group has developed a seven part initiative and he gave a brief overview of each section. Once signatures are submitted, the County Council will consider it, however they are still at the beginning stages. More information can be received by emailing info@communityfirstwhatcom.org.

Subcommittee Reports:

Immigrant Resource Center Subcommittee:

Proposal for new member – Jian He: Jian summarized why he is interested in joining the subcommittee. Liz Darrow moved to approve Jian as a subcommittee member. Homero seconded the motion. Motion passed with no opposition.



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Local Resource Update: This item was not discussed, as mentions of various resources had been made throughout the meeting.

Request for Proposals (RFP) Update: Lelo reported that the subcommittee met with City staff in late August to discuss the two respondents to the RFP. They had more questions for both applicants, so Janice is now tasked with getting those questions to the applicants via e-mail and via interviews with the subcommittee.

Process Subcommittee:

Appointment Update: This item was covered during public comment. Janice stated that she does not have answers about the specific appointments, however a conversation needs to take place about the appointment process as a whole. Janice, Tara, and Liz discussed how best to move forward on both the specific appointments and the overall appointment process.

Subcommittee Openings: Tara said that there are openings on the Process Subcommittee. Daniel Cruz expressed interest in joining.

Federal Contact Data Subcommittee:

Proposal for New Member – Jian He: Jian summarized why he is interested in joining the subcommittee. Tara moved to approve Jian as a subcommittee member. Homero seconded the motion. Motion passed with no opposition.

Outreach Subcommittee:

Feedback for City on translation services: Board members, Jackie Lassiter, City Council Legislative Assistant, and Janice Keller discussed interpretation services for IAB meetings and throughout City services. Jian He reported on commonly spoken languages across the state.

Old and New Business

Review Action Items:

Tara and Liz will reach out to Daniel about his interest in the Process and Outreach Subcommittees.

Janice will reach out to other City staff to give a presentation on housing.

Janice will look into having the Mayor join an upcoming meeting.

Janice and the Process Subcommittee will meet regarding the appointment process.



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Lelo will follow up with Jace Cotton for more information about the mini-initiatives and gathering feedback from the immigrant community.

Lelo expressed interest in joining the Outreach Subcommittee.

Janice will look into language access for the Climate Survey and the Comprehensive Plan and will report back.

Lelo asked a question about having an acquaintance of his do interpretation for meetings. Jackie and Janice suggested that the person contact The Language Exchange to become an interpreter with them, as that is the vendor that we use.

City's Response to Re-appointment Questions: This item was discussed earlier in the agenda.

Liz Darrow briefly talked about the RCW prohibiting political activities during City meetings.

Adjourn 8:23 PM