



Meeting Minutes

Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs

Date: June 26th, 2023

Time: 5:30 PM – 7:30PM

Location: Hybrid
Tacoma Municipal Building
747 Market Street
Conference Room #243
Tacoma, WA 98402
[Zoom](#) (Passcode: 264285)

Call Meeting to Order – *Recording did not include call to order*

Record of Attendance & Excusal of Absences

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Emani Donaldson (Absent) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alicia Sands |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Natalie Ghayoumi | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lydia Zepeda |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Maurice Lekea | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Samantha Le |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hieu Nguyen | <input type="checkbox"/> Vacant |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hugo Nicolas | <input type="checkbox"/> Alternate (Vacant) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thierry Ruboneka (absent) | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Position (Vacant) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maricres Valdez Castro (absent) | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alma Villegas (Vice Chair) | |

A quorum was present.

Statement of Purpose Read by Commissioner Sands

Land Acknowledgment Read by Commissioner Zepeda

Consent Agenda – Vice Chair Villegas

a. Approval of June 26, 2023, Meeting Agenda

Motion made by Commissioner Villegas to approve the agenda; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Le. The ayes have it and the June 26 agenda was approved.

b. Approval of the May 2023, Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Zepeda had corrections to Commission Affairs Part B.

Commissioners

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Natalie Ghayoumi
Stacy Kowalski
Samantha Le
Maurice Lekea
Hieu Nguyen

Hugo Nicolas
Thierry Ruboneka
Maricres Valdez-Castro
Alma Villegas
Leena Vo
Lydia Zepeda

Motion made by Commissioner Sands to approve the minutes; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Zepeda. The ayes have it and the May 2023 minutes approved as corrected.

Public Comment

No members of the public were present for Public Comment.

Commission Affairs

a. Commissioner Spotlight – Commissioner Samantha Le

Introduction: Commissioner Le shared about her passion for her family, food, and pets; expressed tremendous gratitude for her mother.

Personal Journey: Commissioner Le shared her journey as a refugee from Vietnam. She discussed the challenges her family faced, including cultural disrespect from a host family and discrimination she experienced during her professional career.

Advocacy and Community Involvement: Commissioner Le expressed her desire to use her voice and experiences to support underprivileged communities. She uses her voice as an advocate in various organizations including serving as the Executive VP of Seattle South Sound Chamber of Commerce, CEO of the Success Foundation, President of the Sea-Tac Rotary Club, and sits on the boards of the Tacoma Woman of Color Collective, Highline Heritage Museum, Tukwila Career & Technical Education, and CIRA.

Questions & Comments: Commissioner Le was asked:

What languages she speaks, and what are her favorite foods? A: Vietnamese, Spanish, and English. Particularly enjoys seafood.

How do you manage being so active on all those boards? A: with the love & support of her family.

b. Bylaws Language Change Recommendations – Vice Chair Villegas

Discussion

- Commissioners discussed the proposed changes to the bylaws of the commission. The Governance Committee met in advance to make recommended changes, with the aim of making CIRA stronger, and clarifying everyone's roles and responsibilities.
- The changes being recommended included: eliminating the Community Engagement Committee due to inactivity (and because more committees have been added such as Governance, Community Safety, and temporary Recruitment), removing the second vice chair position, and the schedule & timing of the officer appointments.
- Additional recommendations include notifying the chair or vice chair in advance if a motion is to be proposed at a meeting, returning the responsibility of agenda creation to the chair and vice chair, and submitting draft motion and supporting documentation ahead of time to allow for review.
- Another key change to the bylaws is the requirement that commissioners need to have served for a year on the commission before becoming Chair or Vice-Chair, as well a limit of three consecutive terms for

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these positions. The importance of onboarding new commissioners is highlighted, emphasizing the need for support and mentorship.

- Commissioners touched on changes related to committees, such as ensuring balance and setting minimum and maximum number of commissioners per committee. CIRA proposes the addition on a vice chair position within each committee, which could be filled by a committee member to encourage recruitment and participation.
- Commissioners also discussed the timing for the work plan, suggesting that it be developed during the summer rather than at the end of the year.
- Staff Liaison Ware suggested that CIRA look deeper into the attendance component of the bylaws; she was unsure about to address restoring someone back to good standing if they have been absent for a period without notifying anyone.
 - Vice Chair proposed discussing this topic in more depth at the Governance Committee; and that CIRA can move forward with the changes proposed and discussed this evening.

Vice Chair asked if the commission would make a motion to approve language change recommendation in the bylaws.

Proposed Motion: Approval of Language Change Recommendations

Commissioner Zepeda made a motion to approve the Language Change Recommendations to the bylaws; Commissioner Castro seconded the motion. The ayes have it and the motion passes, adopting the changes to the bylaws.

c. World Refugee Day Recap & Discussion – City Liaisons / Commissioner Valdez Castro

- Commissioner Castro reported that she wrote a proclamation for World Refugee Day, and it was on the June 20th, 2023, Council Agenda. Read the full proclamation, [here](#).
- Commissioners questioned why the rest of the commission was not informed or involved in the proclamation writing process; there was concern that if a proclamation is coming from or written on behalf of CIRA, it needs to be voted on and approved by all commissioners.
 - Staff Liaison Ware clarified that the proclamation, while written by Commissioner Valdez Castro, was written and submitted by her as an individual community member, and not a representative of CIRA.
- Commissioners discussed the importance of planning and adding such events and items to the agenda in advance. Commissioner Valdez Castro volunteered to create a community calendar to avoid misunderstandings in the future.

d. CIRA Retreat Discussion – Chair Donaldson

- Commissioner Villegas lead discussion about the possibility of CIRA having an in-person retreat.

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- Commissioners expressed interest in planning and attending an in-person retreat, and asked questions if the meeting would need to be a noticed public meeting.
 - Yes – it would be considered a public meeting under OPMA and would need to open to the public
- Topics that Commissioners would like to cover in the retreat are team building and developing a work plan.

Next Steps:

Commissioners will send their retreat ideas to Chair Donaldson for further discussion in the Governance Committee.

Staff Liaison will research what budget is available for the retreat.

e. Committee Updates

Welcoming Week Committee – Commissioner Valdez Castro

- Commissioner Castro presented a [Welcoming Week PowerPoint](#) on the outline of proposed events and themes for Welcoming Week.
- Commissioners offered suggestions of having more gender diversity in speakers.
- Commissioners had questions about the budget for Welcoming Week, Marketing, and if the Welcoming Week Committee is a CIRA Committee, or if it's a City Committee that CIRA is advising.
 - Staff Liaison Ware clarified that the budget for Welcoming Week is \$20k and is not from CIRA's budget; Welcoming Committee was formed in March but has not been meeting regularly; intention is not for CIRA to plan the events, but to provide framework and input on the event.

Community Safety Committee

- Next meeting: Wednesday, 2023-06-21, 11 am to 12 pm
- Commissioner Zepeda reported that only herself and Officer Ali were present at the committee meeting; they discussed whether TPD had a written policy about jurisdiction over the detention center. Officer Ali had not received an update from his lieutenant due to personnel changes, but would follow up via email,
- Commissioner Zepeda also raised the issue of detainees reporting crimes and the lack of written protocol or training for officers on how to handle such cases. They also discussed the restriction of the detention phone services, which prevents detainees from dialing 911.

Governance (of CIRA) Committee

- Next meeting Wednesday, 2023- 06-14, 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm
- Governance Committee focused primarily discussed bylaws which were covered earlier in meeting.
- Governance Committee also discussed the process for creating agendas and agreed to have presentation and updates go through the Governance Committee for review before being to full committee.

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City Staff Updates – Staff Liaison Ware

Update Presentations to the Community Safety and Vitality Committee (Welcoming Interactive)

- There was a meeting with CVS planned to discuss certified welcoming, but it was canceled due to quorum issues.
- Meeting will be rescheduled to early August.

Upcoming Presentation to the Community Safety and Vitality Committee (TPD Convening)

- Creating a presentation as a recap to the April 26th events, and if they can provide any guidance on next steps and how to move forward.

Items to Consider for Next Meeting:

- a. Budget Form Discussion
 - To address budget related comments and requests, Staff Liaison is exploring the creating of a form to streamline budget requests.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:19 PM

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