

Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

November 5, 6:00-8:00 PM

City Hall, Room 360

Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Habtamu Abdi, Michael Neguse, Shree Ram Dahal, Tsegaba Woldehaimanot, Roxana Norouzi, Mohamed Sheikh Hassan, Devon Abdallah, Simon Khin

Commissioners Absent: Maru Mora-Villalpando, Jeniffer Calleja, Mariya Kochubey, Dori Cahn

OIRA Staff Present: Sahar Fathi

Guests: Treasure Shine

Call to Order: 6:00 pm

Welcome and Housekeeping/Approve November Minutes (Co-Chairs)

Devon opened the meeting and asked if there were any changes to the minutes. Seeing none, there was a motion to approve by Shree and a second by Mohamed. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Co-chairs: Devon indicated that her last day is January 31, 2014. She noted that the commission will need a new co-chair. This will happen at the December meeting. She suggested that potential candidates might need flexibility to respond to meeting requests and emails. Nominations will be taken at the December meeting. If anyone wants to talk with Devon or Shree – they are more than willing. A couple people have already talked with them about the potential role.

The group decided to have their December meeting at a restaurant. After some discussion, the group suggested a Nepali restaurant. Shree will take care of the reservation. He will also send the menu to the commissioners in advance.

Commissioner Report (Sahar)-

Sahar reported that there are currently two vacancies on the commission and an additional three people leaving because their terms are ending. Mohamed stated that he didn't think his commission appointment was over and Sahar said she would check in again with the legislative council appointments person.

Devon noted that it was a good time for folks to start thinking about annual retreat. Several commissioners agreed with Roxana that it would be good to have a training on meeting facilitation so that people could use the time effectively.

OIRA Report (Sahar)

Sahar provided the report for this meeting. She began with a budget update – she explained where the council was in the process. She thanked the commissioners for their work in testifying at the community meeting at Garfield. Commissioners asked the status of the refugee women’s pilot. Sahar indicated that funding would likely be housed in the Department of Neighborhoods, but that it would be allocated through an MOU to OIRA. Some commissioners asked why this was the case, Sahar stated that there was similarity in “civic engagement” goals that both programs offered. Mohamed wanted to have a letter to the council staff to explain the difference between refugees and the unique needs they have because he didn’t feel they understood adequately based on the reports to council. He moved to have a letter written. No one seconded. Simon asked if we had a mission statement. He wanted one paragraph to explain who we are and what we are doing. He moved to create the mission statement. No one seconded.

Shree indicated that for someone to understand the refugee situation, it would be easy to resolve the confusion by doing a simple Google search. He was concerned that more people didn’t understand the special difficulties faced by refugees.

Roxana noted that whatever is done by the commission, it has to be about the process. Simon stated that his impression was that people are confused about difference between immigrants and refugees. He felt there should be a document telling them who immigrants and refugees are and who the commission is and what they do. He felt that many people have different perspectives of what an immigrant is and what a refugee is, and he wanted to make sure that everyone was operating under the same definitions.

Sahar asked that the group decide what their goal was – and, with reference to the mission statement, to look at what the legislation that created the commission might say.

Devon suggested that it would be helpful to have terms on the website for people to look at i.e. an FAQ about immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, dreamers and other terminology. She noted this would help the public understand that there are differences, stories, and people connected to these different things.

Sahar continued her report. She indicated that the office has continued to sign up ethnic media to be WMBE certified. She also announced that the office has been involved in the Career bridge expansion to ELL students and the domestic violence prevention council. She noted that the office is still actively engaged in trying to find ways to be supportive to applicants for low power FM. She noticed that SEED has been looking for more immigrant and refugee folks to serve on their advisory board. Several commissioners were interested and she will send a follow-up email to the commission with more information.

Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

November 5, 6:00-8:00 PM

City Hall, Room 360

Sahar shared with the commission that the Immigration 101 training for city employees is complete. The purpose is to get the vocabulary into the city community and get folks to think about immigrants and refugees and their unique barriers in accessing city services in conjunction with RSJI. She briefly went through the presentation and its components. Shree asked if it could be made into a webinar. Tsegaba indicated that there is software to make the training into a webinar. Shree noted that if there would be more additions to the training and there was only one staff person conducting the training, using a webinar would free up the staff person to work on the next iteration of the training.

Sahar ended with a brief discussion about the re-branding of the office and the next three year plan. The commissioners responded with enthusiasm.

Restaurant Tipping (Shree)

Shree noted that the topic came up when restaurant employees from space needle came in with United Here! Local 8. He has seen restaurants withhold tips from wait staff. Shree remarked that he didn't know if this is prevalent in most restaurants. He wanted to know if there is there any legalese around tipping. Sahar noted that she would ask. Shree added that there might be a distinction between salaried staff and hourly.

Shree wanted to know what others have experienced and whether others have been upset. Simon indicated that he was familiar and that there are complaints in the community. He wanted to know if anyone collects data on the restaurants that withhold tips.

Habtamu spoke and added that he has had experiences where different restaurants share income across staff. Some restaurants use this justification to explain why some people don't get the tips directly.

Simon wanted to know who is holding them accountable. Devon wanted to know if this happens in a lot of ethnic restaurants. The general consensus was "yes."

Shree explained that the wait staff provides the service, but when it's time to get payment, the owner takes it. When the money exchange happens, the wait staff isn't there. He added that he doesn't know what the rule is around this.

Devon asked whether it was illegal and commented that we don't know enough. Simon stated that tips are taxed and there should be legal ramification.

Michael made a motion that he wants more information and Simon seconded. Unanimously approved.

Sahar said she would try to find out rules and bring an expert.

Sub-Committee Updates (All)

Education subcommittee – Roxana reported – the committee met with the Seattle public schools staff person who leads ELL and bilingual programs. They talked about ways to strategize and working on passing a joint resolution supporting bilingual education in the city. Roxana noted that this would be something we need for economic growth and for the changing demographics of city.

Homelessness/ACA – Tsegaba reported for Mariya on the idea of hosting a panel at the Seattle channel that is Q & A. She noted that it is a challenge to do another enrollment event on top of the hundreds already happening.

Mohamed stated that the issue with ACA is that we have to enroll everyone, and there is confusion among the elderly folks who are receiving SSI (social security enrolls their Medicaid automatically). –Mohamed will send his question to Mariya to add to the possible questions for the television Q & A.

Tsegaba also reported that she met with Share/Wheel to learn more about them – they are self managed shelters and tent cities. Tsegaba described the model and noted that she wasn't sure if it was an option for I/R community. She will look into it and write up what she has been doing for the commission.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform – no one present to report back. Sahar confirmed that the resolution will be heard in December. Sahar will send CM Harrell's email about this to commission.

Announcements (All)

Mohamed reported that he got a call from Leno because Leno came across a video that showed that Mohamed was supporting Sen. Murray. Mohamed also acknowledged that he was stating a political opinion. Mohamed wanted more clarification on this. Devon explained that he couldn't make statements in the name of the commission. Sahar explained that this was likely something that would be considered an improper use of city funds. Michael added that he also can't be doing this in the name of an agency that is 501(c) (3). A discussion followed around the distinction between 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) status. Mohamed explained that the person who interviewed him in MMRTI knew he was a commissioner.

Devon responded that this is an important discussion – she suggested that it be up for discussion at the retreat and for the commission to come up with an internal policy. She acknowledged that it is a difficult thing to ascertain – as a commissioner, you just need to be really clear. Everyone is allowed to endorse – just can't do it as a commissioner. Part of the reason the commission is so strong is because everyone has a voice. Devon reminded the commission that this message should be reiterated every election cycle.

Habtamu wanted to discuss the Translation policies in other departments. He spoke with many departments – all of their policies are inconsistent. People just translate into whatever language they want. They told him it is a city policy that the top six languages by census should be translated. He felt this was confusing and advised that they forget about it or reach out to whole community equitably.

Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

November 5, 6:00-8:00 PM

City Hall, Room 360

Habtamu also announced that CM Harrell/Bagshaw/Burgess came to the Ethiopian community center as part of the budget process and they had a wonderful turn out. He asked that Sahar write a thank you letter on behalf of the commission – and he moved this item. It was seconded by Mohamed. Michael mentioned that he was upset he had never heard about it.

Devon will be out of commission for 10 days, Shree will be the contact.

Devon and Shree reiterated to have the vocabulary on the website – at least the terms “immigrant” and “refugee.”

Devon introduced the guests at the table - international students from UW and iLeap. They observed the meeting. One is working on human trafficking and migration.

Adjournment

7:46 pm.