

Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

March 5, 2013, 6:00-8:00 PM

City Hall, Norm B Rice Room, 7th Floor

Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Shree Ram Dahal, Tsegaba Woldehaimanot, Michael Neguse, Mohamed Sheikh Hassan, Devon Abdallah, Maru Mora-Villalpando, Jeniffer Calleja, Roxana Norouzi

Commissioners Absent: Justin Chan

OIRA Staff Present: Sahar Fathi

Guests: Wes Gonzalez, Office of Councilmember Harrell

Call to Order: Call to order at 6:10 PM

Welcome and Approval of Minutes

Devon opened the meeting with a basic introduction to the commission, a quick round of introductions, and an explanation of how the commission works administratively.

The minutes were reviewed, Shree moved to approve and Michael seconded. Minutes – Shree moved to approve. Michael second.

Minutes were approved by Shree, Michael, Devon, and Tsegaba. Maru, Roxana, and Jeniffer abstained.

OIRA Report – Sahar Fathi

Sahar spoke on behalf of the office. Leno has been out of the office and could not be present. Sahar mentioned current efforts around college bound and handed out background information. She discussed the February Community Tea held by the Office and that Leno had gone to Olympia to testify on the Washington Trust Act, which ended up dying in committee.

Sahar also spoke out about ethnic media efforts, being more culturally competent to accommodate their needs and translation. She affirmed that many departments have been accepting of the Office's role in assisting with effective communication to the immigrant and refugee community. Most recently she has been assisting on getting the word out around wage theft.

Sahar discussed some preliminary agenda items for the Immigrant and Refugee's Commission Retreat on March 31. She reiterated that RSJI training would be required of commissioners. Shree, Devon and Tsegaba were blown away by the training and provided comments that supported the importance of the training. Jeniffer wanted to bring guests.

New Commissioner Report – Sahar Fathi

Sahar reported that Council had 6 vacancies that were pending and would hopefully be in committee soon. She was asked to go over, in precise detail, the process for appointing new commissioners, the legislation that created the commission and the requirements instructed by that legislation.

Commission Meet and Greet – Co-Chairs

Devon reported on the commission's creation and the office's creation. She then explained that there had been an unprecedented number of vacancies on the commission because people became employed by the city, moved, were "Termed out" by the legislation, etc., all at once. As a result, the past few months had been a large effort to get new commissioners and the work plan had not been finalized. It would take the bulk of the retreat to finalize the work plan.

Devon also spoke about term limits and basic commissioner rules. It was decided to finish announcements and then adjourn early so that the rest of the meeting time could be spent by the commissioners to get to know each other better.

Announcements Adjournment

Mohamed reported on his meeting with the Five Commissions. He thoroughly enjoyed hearing about the work of the other commissions and felt that the issues were universal across the commissions. He thought it was very healthy discussion. The meeting included a discussion of women's issues and announcement that someone had been hired to the Office of Civil Rights to specifically work on this. The meeting also focused on the costs of programs, the way things were funded by the city. Mohamed lamented that big organizations were getting money and smaller organizations were being left behind. Project managers and reviewers were putting language into RFPs and by default disqualifying smaller organizations. The Five Commissions wanted to express this sentiment to the Council and the Mayor in a unified voice. Resolution was that OCR will spearhead this issue and that they need feedback and support from the community. Devon asked that Mohamed continue to monitor this with OCR as the Immigrant and Refugee Commission representative. Mohamed added that he was impressed with HSD's leadership on this particular issue.

Also at the Five Commission meeting, Mergitu, a member of the women's community, followed up on an Immigrant and Refugee Issue with the Somali community (See Footnote from last month's meeting notes)¹. The Women's Commission extended an invitation to Mohamed and the women who had been impacted by this event to attend their meeting. The Director of Harborview also asked for a personal meeting with Mohamed. Mohamed expressed his intent to take this to King County Executive Dow Constantine. Mohamed agreed to be the Immigrant and Refugee Commission representative to the Five Commission meetings.

¹ Leno reported on the untimely death of a Somali youth in the community and mentioned that Mohamed Sheikh Hassan was very helpful as a community member. Some issues were discovered as a result, including the fact that Harborview was not culturally competent and ready to deal with immigrant and refugee deaths. Leno noted that OIRA's new administrative assistant, Thao Tran, will be working on this particular issue. He will have a copy of an emergency card for distribution to medical professionals and community organizations by the end of the week.

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Michael Neguse spoke about the new hire to the Office of Civil Rights and a recent event organized with immigrant women. He was very encouraged by the meeting and thought it was a good start.

Mohamed's mother is in critical condition and he will be traveling until June and will be accordingly missing Commission meetings.

Devon provided an explanation of announcements versus agenda items.

Jeniffer passed out flyers about women's only swim.

Shree gave motion to adjourn at 8:05 pm.