

Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

March 4, 6:00-8:00 PM

City Hall, Room 370

Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present: Michael Neguse, Tsegaba Woldehaimanot, Simon Khin, Jeniffer Calleja, Mariya Kochubey, Dori Cahn, Shree Ram Dahal

Commissioners Absent: Roxana Norouzi

OIRA Staff Present: Aaliyah Gupta, Sahar Fathi

Call to Order: 6:10 pm

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

Shree opened the meeting and welcomed the guests: Abby, a MSW first year student and doing her internship at Lutheran Community Services Northwest, and Maru who is shadowing Jeniffer and is a senior in high school.

Shree asked for a motion for the February minutes. Dori moved to approve the minutes and Mariya seconded.

Jeniffer reported on the Five Commission meeting. There are three commissions – LGBT, Women’s and Human Rights -- that are working on homelessness and housing. They would like to work with the Immigrant and Refugee Commission and compare notes. In particular, the Women’s commission has one person looking at undocumented youth who become homeless when their parents become deported. They are thinking of creating a super subcommittee on homelessness. Sahar will follow up and help coordinate the meeting, and Tsegaba will be the Commission representative. In addition, OCR has shifted their work load so that Marta is supporting the commissions, and there is a dedicated policy analyst to each commission. The Human Rights Commission is looking at voting rights and ice detainers. Sahar will follow up with Annie Benson to have her do a briefing, she is an immigration expert. She also suggested the One America staff.

Legislative Look ahead – Sahar prepared a three month look ahead at Shree’s request. These will be provided on a regular basis so that the Commission can have regular visibility of what is happening in the Council. At the moment, the Minimum Wage discussion is something the Commission should begin discussing. Concerns are raised around people losing their jobs and of what that cushion means for people’s subsidies. There are immigrants and refugees who run small businesses and they are struggling. The Commission would like to balance this perspective, make sure that big business doesn’t get out of the work and that Seattle can be friendlier to small businesses. There is also a new select committee on parks funding that the Commission would like to monitor and see if there are any gaps for immigrant and refugee communities and provide input. Sahar will find out the input process and where the best

place is to advocate. Jeniffer will draft some preliminary points. The Commission will be looking for funding for bilingual positions.

Emerging Trends and Issues in the Community (Shree)-

Jeniffer reported that she became aware of an issue at Harborview with their custodians. She alerted Sahar and Sahar has gotten in touch with Councilmember Sawant's office on behalf of the Commission. The issue has also been brought before the Mayor and he has agreed to talk to the UW and look for a resolution. It seems like there are some workplace and language training issues that are missing. The Commission expressed concern around adequate training in the workplace, the demographics of the workers, and the ability of the workers to communicate.

Mariya reported on the Ukraine crisis and her personal history with the country. She agreed to send more information to the rest of the Commission, and emphasized in particular the ongoing tension and corruption that has led up to the crisis.

Michael reported on a meeting he had attended with other community activists and leaders, to hear from and discuss ongoing issues with the Mayor and his staff. The Mayor had promised during his campaign that he would talk to the community and was very generous in answering the questions of the community. He was particularly impressed with the work of Rahwa and the expectations of future work with the youth.

Director's Report (Aaliyah)

Aaliyah continued speaking about the Mayor's community meeting. She thought it was beautifully facilitated. She had Sahar put together a compilation of all of the weekly briefing memos for the Mayor, these will be provided to the Commission at the monthly meetings. She also mentioned that OIRA had been called out in the Mayor's State of the City and that he would be funding the Office further. She told the Commission that the Office has had an additional hire, Mohamed Sheikh Hassan, as the Community Relations Advisor.

Taxi, For Hire, and Limousine Regulations Committee Recap and Next Steps (Shree, Jeniffer, Roxana)

Shree reported on the quick turn of events around this topic. He had been contacted by Councilmember O'Brien to see if the Commission would issue an opinion on the Taxi Committee's upcoming legislation. The Commission had initially written a letter asking for more time while they assessed the situation. The Committee hearing had been postponed and, simultaneously, Councilmember Harrell had asked for a meeting with representatives from the Commission. Shree and Jeniffer met with both Councilmembers two days before the hearing, and the Commission ultimately decided that a pilot study with caps was the best solution, given the history of the taxi drivers. Roxana and Jeniffer attended the Committee meeting to testify, but unfortunately were not heard before the comment period closed. They sent their prepared comments via email to the Council. Councilmember Clark had responded, with regards to the Commission request to be included in the data collection process. The Commission deliberated and decided they wanted to gather demographic data, driver data, and general information around driver requirements and limited English speaking populations. Once the pilot has been created, they will ask for a briefing on the process, to make sure that there is good access for immigrant and refugee populations.

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2013 Work Plan Subcommittee Reports (Mariya/Tsegaba)

Mariya reported that they are really happy with the ACA taping and that Daphne and Brad did an excellent job of answering questions without jargon. The Commission brainstormed on next steps, they decided to upload the video to YouTube, send out to ethnic media, and send formal requests to Council, community based organizations, and the Mayor to share the video far and wide. The hope was to make the video viral for the community.

Announcements (All):

Sahar and Aaliyah discussed the recruitment process for the commission. Sahar announced that Farhiya would be appointed in March.

Adjourn

7:55 pm.