

Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

December 3, 6:00-8:00 PM

Offsite, Annapurna Cafe

Meeting Minutes

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

Commissioners Absent: Habtamu Abdi

OIRA Staff Present: Magdaleno Rose-Avila, Sahar Fathi

Call to Order: 6:00 pm

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

Devon opened the meeting and thanked Shree for organizing the special location. She asked if there were any changes to the minutes. Seeing none, there was a motion to approve by Shree and a second by Simon. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Co-chairs: After some discussion Devon nominated Jeniffer. Dori seconded the nomination and Jeniffer was unanimously elected as the second co-chair. Devon suggested amending bylaws to have some rules around co-chairs to include RSJI training, etc.

Commissioner Report (Sahar)-

Sahar reported on the candidacy of Farhiya, a Mayoral appointee. She had been interviewed by two commissioners and Leno, and was wholeheartedly submitted for an appointment. Her paperwork has been given to Council.

Sahar also mentioned that Michael Neguse has been nominated for a third appointment. This will be Mohamed Sheikh Hassan's final term as a mayoral appointee.

OIRA Report (Leno)

Leno reported on the creation and progress of the Immigrant Voting Rights taskforce. He mentioned that Abdullahi Jama is temporarily back on contract with the City to do outreach. He has been coordinating the work done around the Interfaith Taskforce.

Leno reported that OIRA will be starting to talk about an outline for a three-year plan around what OIRA might/could be doing, on December 13.

Leno emphasized that the Commission has been at its most productive this year. He noted that the CIR Committee brought an impressive Resolution before CM Harrell's committee and that this is a great benchmark of the work being done.

Maru spoke about the resolution, indicating that this was the most progressive resolution so far in the nation and asked that people come to City Hall to testify in support. She mentioned that CM Licata planned on sending the resolution to the National Association of Progressive Cities, so that they could influence next year's debate on immigration reform. Leno added that the important piece was that it set a standard across the nation.

Sahar reminded the group that there would be a meeting on the "State of ELLs in the School District" for the Levy Oversight Committee on December 10 at 4 pm in the Norm B. Rice Room. She also reminded commissioners that they needed to compile and submit a report of their 2013 accomplishments. Finally, she commended the commission on their contributions to the passage of the King County detainer ordinance. Leno added that the commission had put a lot of work into the ordinance and that the King County folks were going to set up an Overview Committee. He asked that good people volunteer for this committee.

Jeniffer asked for clarification on the ordinance oversight committee. Maru gave additional details that it would be reporting back within a year. She noted that CM Lambert had actively outreached to ICE, and that no one had proactively reached out to ICE in other jurisdictions. It was important to have the grassroots community members be a part of this committee.

Leno reported that OIRA has provided transition documents to the Murray transition team in SMT to explain the work of OIRA to date. The Mayor-elect will be meeting with each department head to decide who he wants to keep and how he will not want to keep.

Sub-Committee Updates (All)

Education subcommittee – Roxana reported that there had been some issues around the World School. The Committee was getting ready to re-write a letter in support of a permanent home for the World School and the School Board called a last-minute meeting in which they voted to move the school to TT Minor as its permanent location. There has been a bit of transition in the Seattle School District and they are still working on wording for a Resolution for Bilingual Education. They put together a memo to share with the Commission. The committee is also continually involved with Universal Pre-K. OFE is hiring a consultant and the committee is continuing to be in constant contact with OFE and CM Burgess's office.

Homelessness/ACA – Mariya reported on the ACA Q & A. She had spoken with the Women's commission on questions to send to Mathias. She reported that she hadn't heard from the Disability Commission or the LGBT Commission, but that the Human Rights Commission had indicated that they didn't want to be involved. Mariya will continue to move forward.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform – Maru had already reported during the OIRA report.

General Discussion (All)

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The group began a discussion of the impact of the recent elections on the commission. Mohamed reported that he is on the transition team and it is the first time for the East African community to have two people on this team. He has emphasized that the Office should not be a skeleton and the Mayor Elect promised him that he would do more. The expectation is to have more voices in OIRA, the Mayor Elect will have real immigrants and refugees in his office.

Leno explained that all three positions in OIRA are exempt and that the Mayor-Elect has thus far kept some folks and let go of others. Maru reported that the Mayor Elect has said he would change OIRA and that he was working on a plan. She expressed her concern that she wanted to know what it will look like. Mohamed explained that it is a three person office and that there will be more people. Shree pointed out that expansion and change are different things. Mohamed stated that he had advocated for expansion. He explained that there are passionate and strong people advising the Mayor Elect.

Devon noted that her concern was about district elections in three years. Mohamed asked her to explain the districts and who was represented by them, which she did. Leno advocated folks to register and educate voters in the districts that were largely represented by immigrants and refugees. Mohamed noted that organizations in the South End do not have naturalization funds. The organizations that have funding are not in the South End. Michael Neguse agreed, people doing naturalization do not know the community. Devon suggested that this be something the commission could collaborate with the Immigrant Voting Rights Taskforce on getting folks on the route to citizenship. Maru stated that she wanted the Voting Rights Act at the State Level to be added to the City's Legislative Agenda.

Devon asked if there was a way to encourage opting out of registration for voting rather than opting into voting registration. Maru noted that the introduction of a bill two years ago would have preregistered 16 year olds, but it did not pass. Mohamed applauded One America's efforts to register people to vote, but they are no longer doing it. Maru noted that local people had problems with the County – she had registered people in Spanish and was told not to register people. Every county is different and a lot of the problems come back to the funding issues because people don't have the capacity to register voters. Leno stated that OIRA is working with USCIS to do more naturalization in communities. They can do voter registration right after the swearing in oath at naturalization events. Leno is doing his second naturalization event on December 10.

Announcements (All)

Shree noted that he will miss the January meeting because he will be traveling. Maru reminded folks of the December 10 Human Rights awards ceremony. Her daughter will be receiving the youth award.

Leno announced that on Friday there will be a march from SeaTac to Seattle for \$15 minimum wage.

Devon asked that people bring their calendars in preparation for retreat scheduling in January.

Michael announced that on Friday the seniors he works with in the community will be interviewed by a delegation from South Korea.

Leno announced that he and Abdullahi and Michael Neguse have been meeting with young Eritreans. They are going to gather money/gifts for East African families who don't have gifts for the holidays.

Adjournment

7:20 pm.