



Regular Meeting Minutes

Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs

Date: Monday, **August 26, 2024**

Time: 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

Location: Hybrid Tacoma Municipal Building

747 Market Street

Conference Room #220-A

Tacoma, WA 98402

Zoom (Click the following link to join the meeting):

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82877122622?pwd=FbHmsjwJibWTHM79AB3QEJztWETK.utpPpGgtC8SsX7Bk>

Meeting ID: 828 7712 2622

Passcode: 98402

Call Meeting to Order/Roll Call (5:37 pm) - Chair Ghayoumi

x Maricres Valdez Castro, *Vice Chair*

xlulia Didkivska

x Natalie Ghayoumi, *Chair*

x Eunice Kalemba, joined late

x Maurice Lekea, joined late

Andy Mejia, *Youth - excused*

x Hugo Nicolas, *Second Vice Chair*

Linus Nyaga - excused

x Thierry Ruboneka, joined late

Alicia Sands - absent

x Emmanuella Shasha

x Nixon Tenga

x Lydia Zepeda

Also present: Nancy Shattuck, Vicky McLaurin

Statement of Purpose – Commissioner Tenga

We convene this meeting to advance the City of Tacoma’s mission to “reducing barriers to access and participation in Tacoma’s economic, cultural, and civic life for immigrants and refugees.” This Commission aspires to help “make the City more vibrant, inclusive, and welcoming for all.”

Land Acknowledgment – Commissioner Tenga

The Commission acknowledges that the meeting is being conducted on Indigenous lands of the Puyallup People, who cared for their ancestral lands before the Medicine Creek Treaty of 1854 removed native peoples to clear way for colonial settlement. It is

important to this Commission as settlers here, aspiring to care for immigrants and refugees in this place and to call it home, that we acknowledge and send gratitude to the Puyallup Tribe of Indians who continue to be leaders for justice in our community today.

Consent Agenda - Chair Ghayoumi

a. Approval of August 26, 2024, Agenda (Aye/Nay Votes)

Lydia moved and Maricres seconded. Approved unanimously.

b. Approval of July 22, 2024, Meeting Minutes (Aye/Nay Votes)

Lydia moved that accept meetings as ammended and seconded by Maricres. Approved unanimously.

Correct that Maricres was marked absent, she was just late to meeting.

Public Comment - Chair Ghayoumi

All written public comment must be submitted in writing at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting. None

Commission Affairs

a. Nomination of Chair - Chair Ghayoumi

Samantha Le resigned as a Commissioner due to a promotion at work, so unable to serve as CIRA chair, so need a new election. Would encourage September 1 because of medical issues.

Castro nominated Emmanuella Shasha. She declined the nomination.

Chair Ghayoumi nominated Hugo Nicolas and Zepeda seconded. Hugo accepts the nomination.

Ruboneka nominated Castro for chair. Castro declined the nomination.

McLaurin states that the bylaws do not allow a vote at this meeting, that the vice chair will run the next meeting and we will vote on chair at next meeting.

b. Review of Resolution 39892 and July 22 Meeting

Chair Ghayoumi stated that several commissioners expressed concerns that we were told we could not set our agenda or invite organizations. City Legal stated that we can determine our own bylaws. We have drafted a letter of opposition because Resolution 39892 contradicts what we were told.

Commissioner Zepeda indicated that Resolution 39892 stated our duty is to advise the City on policy which contradicts what we were told at the last meeting.

Commissioner Ruboneka did anyone from the City Council contact us about the changes stated at the last meeting?

Chair Ghayoumji clarified that these changes are not coming from the City Council but from the City staff.

Commissioner Tenga why do we have commission if we cannot access to meaningful program? We are not given access to make an impact.

Commissioner Castro agrees with what was said, the directives is in conflict with why the commission was created.

Commissioner Shasha: whatever was said in the meeting does not supersede what is in writing.

Commissioner Zepeda: we volunteer to make an impact We volunteer to do substantive work and there has been no response or accountability regarding the

TIP

Blue cards and reporting crime cards in

Civility Campaign

Budget requests

Outreach to the NWIPC

Chair Ghayoumi: we do not expect council to agree, but we do expect a response

Commissioner Nicolas: The first year I was a commissioner, I thought that CIRA does not do anything, but after being on the Governance committee I realized there is no response, no clarification from the City. There is miscommunication. We have done the work, we need to hear from the City and Council. We are eager and we want results.

Commissioner Ruboneka: If you keep making suggestions and there is no response and then we are told we cannot make recommendations, why is this happening, is it because the City cannot deliver? Are we here for show? I am angry and frustrated with the limitations being put on the commission.

Chair Ghayoumi: we have lost several passionate members who are frustrated with CIRA's recommendations not being responded to.

Commissioner Tenga: We have great ideas. Is there are record of what CIRA has achieved?

Chair Ghayoumi clarified that we have an annual report.

Comissioner Ruboneka: It is very clear that we feel like a toothless dog. I thought CIRA would have more access and support from the city. I heard the budget is only \$1500 which is nothing. Why are we here if we cannot get things done.

Commussioner Lekea Is there a way to write a letter to ask why there is a commission?

Commissioner Ruboneka: It is very clear our job is to highlight the voices of our communities. My biggest annoyance is that we build a community with an amazing

group of people with amazing connections, and while I understand government is slow, we need a response so we do not look like we are making false promises to our community. There might be things happening in the background, so at least tell us. Otherwise, I feel I am not being heard. Refugees already have fear in engaging and speaking, and then we are muted. Rather than wasting our time, listen because it may be of value to the City.

Vicky McLaurin: NCS has only had CIRA for 2.5 months, we just want to know what you do. I did send the TIP to the TPD and asked for a response. The budget ask was sent to Community Vitality and Safety and Council member Rumbaugh will contact the new chair. All the requests that she has seen have been sent to the appropriate departments.

Chair Ghayoumi - I am meeting with Council member Rumbaugh this week.

McLaurin I think the new chair should meet with her.

Chair Ghayoumi I already scheduled a meeting.

McLaurin: We are trying to understand your mission. You are always welcome to reach out to Council individually. I feel that City has failed you and we are trying to fix it.

Chair Ghayoumi I want to clarify, it is not that the City has failed us, it is that every time we have new staff we are told new rules. I was told we cannot set agenda, meet with groups. We were told at last meeting that we could have election. I feel that all these rules are to delay our work. We have lost many amazing commissioners because of these delays. It was not about finding out what we do.

McLaurin: The intent is trying to understand the purpose of CIRA. The City normally writes the agenda, but we can negotiate that. We talked about a retreat last month, to do your work plan and find out what support the city can provide.

Note: Apparently McLaurin and Nancy do not have access or have not seen CIRAs annual work plans or achievements.

Commissioners Ruboneka: We take this platform very seriously. Not all friction is bad, but what I am hearing is that there is a lack of communication.

McLaurin the proposals I know about have been sent to the appropriate departments. Don't want to let in nonprofits because do not want to give them an unfair advantage.

Commissioner Tenga there are many organizations not getting city fundings, the city has established CIRA.

Commissioner Shasha: We only have 5 minutes left until the presentation. We feel as if we are restrained. (Interrupted by Tenga.) I would like to see the proposals from the City in writing and that they are negotiated with a different attitude.

Interrupted by McLaurin: The statement came from my leadership, so I pushed back, because you pushed back. I took it back to leadership and told them why.

Commissioner Zepeda: TIP is supposed to get to Council on the advice of TPD officers otherwise it will not move forward because of all the training requirements TPD already has; however if it is mandated by Council, they will do it. Working with nonprofits is in our mandate in Resolution 39892.

Commissioner Nicolas: We need more transparency, we need clear communication with some anticipation, we need more training, we need more information about budget, the documents need to be more accessible.

McLaren: Nancy has been working with IT to make records accessible so as not to violate Open Records rules.

Chair Ghayoumi suspended the rest of meeting items given the time. See below for items not covered.

Presentation from NWIRP - Malou Chávez ED

Thanks us. We have been recipients of funding that was supported by CIRA. NWIPC is one of the biggest detention centers in the US with a capacity for 1500, and about 800 currently. She comes to work as an immigrant and has been part of NWIRP for 16 years. Alone, we are not able to do the work; partnership and collaboration is how we do the work. There are four sites: Seattle, Tacoma, Wenatchee and Granger. They have represented people from 100+ countries, in 60+ languages, and NWIRP staff speak 25+ languages. We have served more than 60,000 clients in the last year. We do community education because sharing correct information is crucial. We also do legislation advocacy and legal challenges, currently we have 34 cases, and 8 or 9 are class action suits.

NWIPC opened in 2004 and the NWIRP office in Tacoma opened in response. In 2015 NWIRP started a non-detained unit in the Tacoma office, there are other needs, representation in immigration cases. All the services are free. The number of people not detained placed in deportation proceedings is 10,000 in the Seattle Court in just the first 4 months of 2024.

We are celebrating 40 years. We started by supporting asylum seekers and we are full circle supporting asylum seekers now. There is so much need, so we set priorities.

AIDNW is a very valuable organization for those leaving detention. The accompaniment and housing is very valuable. She encourages supporting AIDNW.

Legislative advocacy is needed.

We could double or triple our staff and still we could not meet our need.

Vanessa Gutierrez introduces self deputy director. She oversees work in Tacoma office, specifically the NWIPC, NWIRP is only able to serve a fraction of detainees. It is life changing to have representation. We cannot put detainees on wait list because the cases move so fast.

Deportation defense fund created in 2017.

Commissioner Lekea: Your work is priceless. How can someone get involved? What kinds of needs do you have?

Chavez: showing up, attending events, language translation,

Commissioner Zepeda: Please speak about the importance of representation in success of cases.

Gutierrez it makes all the difference to success, especially if they are detained, they do not have access to records or evidence.

Chavez direct representation takes hundreds of hours, pro se services take less hours, but less likely to be successful.

Commissioner Tenga: What do you think the City should do?

Chavez: One thing thing we know you do is advocacy for budget and about the detention facility. If we close NWIPC, we need to close all detention facilities, otherwise you just move detainees to other states, away from family and support services.

Commissioner Ruboneka: Our Community Safety Committee talks about NWIPC a lot. What kind of access do immigrants have to legal services?

Chavez: NWIRP has access to federal funding to provide information about what court will look like, so all get this information.

Separately with other funding for taking on legal cases, but only a few. We have 10 lawyers to help 800 detainees, we encourage lawyers to provide pro bono services. Legal representation is the biggest challenge. There are other issues, like mental health, but representation is the biggest issue.

Commissioner Ruboneka: we want to have a clear ask, is it true that asylum seekers are getting deported.

Chair Ghayoumi: we appreciate your work NWIRP.

Thanks to commission, it has been an honor serving. Send agenda items to Nancy.

Adjourned at 19:37

Items not covered:

c. Committee Formation

Each Commissioner should be on at least one committee

d. Committee Updates

- Welcoming Week / Recruitment Committee - Maricres Castro
- Governance (of CIRA) Committee - Chair Ghayoumi
- Community Safety Committee, August 13, 2024 - Commissioner Zepeda
 - Script for Pashto Community about calling Police and slides in English - awaiting translation.
 - TPD updates - none
 - CPAC updates - none
 - Policy Priorities - awaiting additions and comments from committee members
 - Other- frustration at lack of response/accountability for our initiatives: Civility Campaign, Trauma Informed Policing initiative, TPD translations of blue cards, additional translations of reporting crimes cards, TPD outreach to detainees at NWIPC, Budget request for legal services for detainees. We are concerned about the City providing tangible services to immigrants.
 - Next meeting Sept 10 4:30

Summary NWIPC meeting August 26, 2024 with Council member Walker, City staff, and La Resistencia.

1. Walker's office is drafting a letter to Kilmer's office staff to make sure the new representative of the 6th district knows about the issues at the NWIPC detention center. The letter covers six different categories of issues: inadequate standard of living; food insecurity; insufficient health care, excessive use of solitary confinement; use of force and sexual assault; lack of access to communication. Added more concerns about reporting crimes, water quality, mental health, and giving pain killers for all medical conditions.

2. Every Wednesday they are meeting to work on the rules about DOH inspecting NWIPC. The question is how will the rules be enforced?

3. La Resistencia has had an encampment for 6 months and winter is coming. Lily is wondering if it is possible to put in a tiny house that is protected? Staff will look into it.

4. Asked about follow-up to the letter sent to federal delegation in March. The only response has been thanks for your letter. They will share the letter to Kilmer's staff with the rest of the federal delegation.

5. Tuesday Sept 10 is the proclamation for Welcoming Week, the events will kick off Saturday Sept 14.