

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY
OBSERVER REPORT**

Tacoma Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (CIRA)

CIRA Annual Retreat

November 14, 2020

LWVTPC observer: Lydia Zepeda

Members Present: Jefferson Mok (Chair), Patricia Flores, Perla Gamboa (Vice Chair), Sandra Sych, Rime Oujdi, Rafael Saucedo, Emily Calhoun, Hieu Nguyen, Alma Vargas, Saiyare Refaei, Diana Parra joins at 10:45am.

Note: Commissioner Jason Gamboa resigned a couple months ago.

Meeting started at 8:30am with check-ins - Ready to take action, hopeful about 2021. Members discussed how hard this year has been because of the pandemic and difficulties in how immigrants and refugees are being treated. Also talked about Zoom fatigue that has limited the interactions among commission members, during, before and after; there is a need to reach out to other member outside meetings.

Klarissa Montero, from the City Office of Equity and Human Rights, is planning on bringing Latinx voices into equity issues, which have been largely invisible to the City. She was involved in Schoolhouse Washington to end homelessness for students: 8 out of 10 homeless students in Tacoma are people of color. Homeless immigrants are going to school and receiving healthcare services, but are not showing up in homeless statistics and using other services. Klarissa wants to add more to Equity 101 to have Latinx voices. She wants to reach out to the immigrant community more.

Nick Bayard - City staff liaison - logged off around 9:00 am.

Meeting formally called to order at 9:14am by reading of Commission's Purpose and Land Acknowledgement.

Chair noted: Incoming President promises change, e.g. increase in refugee admissions, but it is important to remember he was part of the Obama administration that was anti-immigrant. One of the people to join Biden's transition team is Cecilia Muñoz, who defended family separations.

Language Access Committee (Perla Gamboa)

2020 highlights: support for communication about pandemic in different languages; language interpretation support at community events; research collaboration with UW Tacoma.

Priorities for 2021:

1. Analysis of current city language access services and programs. Identify gaps in service and propose solutions because data on immigrants and refugees is undercounted and not disaggregated to City level (information is State level). Improve feedback to hear from community members.
2. Develop a language access policy that is culturally and linguistically appropriate for different communities, it is not just translating materials. There is a lot of emphasis on Spanish, but not doing enough for other languages. Policy draft should be available in December. Advise City on which positions warrant bilingual skills.

Community Engagement Committee (Rime Oujdi)

Welcoming week was the big event for 2020 in September.

Challenges: Publicity, no assistance from City public relations or media. Did not have a space to share the event. We had to get our own funding for the event. City's membership in Welcoming Cities had lapsed. While we had some assistance, the City is not living up to its stated commitment.

Meeting with John Gaines, Community Relations Manager of Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU) to talk about how CIRA can collaborate. A lot of the discussion was about language access. He had not heard about CIRA before and asked how long it had been around. He mentioned that there are a lot of assistance programs offered for utilities and they are trying to reach more people who are not aware of them. Need to know more about the criteria for the different programs because they may exclude immigrants. They may need to change criteria and definitely need to improve language access and its application in different languages and simple. Want to invite John Gaines to CIRA and Klarissa noted TPU is part of her portfolio and she can facilitate the meeting. Collaboration with TPU could be a model for other departments (rental assistance, etc).

Resource list/pamphlet/manual with resources for immigrants and refugees about medical services, registering for school, and other services; where can they go and get translation. Need input from everyone on the committee to provide different cultural perspectives.

Break from 10:40-10:50 am

Community Safety Committee (Diana Parra)

Started to get information about who to communicate with Tacoma Police Department (TPD). The committee has been working hard on behalf of CIRA to work on new Police Chief. Had to take a day off without pay to do this. Finished interviewing 12 to come up with a list of finalists. As CIRA rep, was able to ask questions and meet candidates. It will be helpful to build relationship with new police chief from beginning. The Council will interview the shortlist during the week of November 30.

Asking for priorities for next year.

Comments: There are barriers to immigrants: by the time there is translation, it may be too late to sign up for events or services. Police need cultural training.

What is the community safety office, the new office? Diana learned about it in the interview process. There is so much going on in the city that we are not told about. Diana is part of LUSS Latinex of the South Sound.

Remember to tell friends about CIRA and need more representation from different communities. CIRA has had limited input into commissioners. The City decides. Have tried to provide input on unrepresented communities. Some of Commissioners attended the last interviews but not part of the decision making process.

Tacoma community survey:

https://www.cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/cms/Finance/Budget/Community_Survey/Community_Survey_2020_Results.pdf page 30 and following has information on community safety.

Northwest Detention Center Committee (Saiyare Refaei)

This past year, we have developed a stance on NWDC that we do not want it to exist. We have collaborated with La Residencia to push forward [Resolution No. 40636](#). The resolution calls for an end to private detention, support for detainees unable to protect themselves from COVID-19, foster communication channels to report to the Tacoma Pierce County Health Department, explore oversight by City over private detention center, end to transfer and release of those at risk. Committee advocate for end of transfers, end of use of harsh chemicals in nWDC. Standing meetings with council members about the

NWDC, some of those council members are on board of health. They have direct access to fire and health departments.

Plans for 2021: Direct access people to file complaints to Tacoma Pierce County Health Department. They cannot call. TPCHD says they can only take food complaints. Release highest risk detainees. Support legislation to end privatized detention.

Comments: Jefferson wants to identify specific problems the City Council can help with, e.g. how to facilitate communication to Health Department because there are many groups working on this, and we need to focus on concrete pieces we can take on. Current strategy at federal level is to let the clock run out on private prisons; is there a way to use executive orders to end contracts or make it so costly that they give up?

Jefferson recommends putting together an analysis of the cost of PPE and other practices to keep people safe and maybe they will see that it is too costly to keep open. Need to get Dr. Chen (Director, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department) to work with us to come up with a policy that would include NWDC.

Council member Ushka's response is that NWDC does not have to comply with health department regulations. Ushka and Block are both on Pierce County Board of Health.

The City owns the land that NWIPC is on. It leases the land and gets about \$1 million a year. If it is local jurisdiction, the City has stronger oversight. But the federal government says that it is used for federal purposes so the detention center contractor argues that the federal government has jurisdiction.

Court just ruled that DHS chief was illegally appointed and therefore his proclamations are not valid.

Personal Note from Observer: ACLU has filed a lawsuit in California that has resulted in releases from private prisons. Personal communication from AIDNW is that that many detainees have been released and they are less than 200 detainees in the facility currently (that holds over 1500).

Governance Committee and Wrap-up (Jefferson Mok)

2020 Highlights

- Welcomed 5 new commissioners, refreshing and necessary. At end of 2019, people felt burnt out because there were only six commissioners.
- Clarified the leadership structure, need to rotate but have stable leadership. Will be finalized in December. Will change the bylaws, new chair at end of year and vice chair mid-year
- Increased visibility of CIRA, e.g. town halls and Diana Parra's participation in TPD chief hiring, speak before council. Important for communities we represent.

2021 Priorities

- Need to expand capacity of CIRA, voted to increase from the group from 11 to 13, were told to fill vacancies first before expand. Now that all but one position has been filled, it would be good to reiterate the request to go from 11 to 13 to increase representation.
- City is trying to improve input from Commissions.
- New Commissioners have still not received all the training for how Commissions work and how City works
- CIRA now has a budget, how can these funds be used efficiently. We have talked about a full time staff to work with CIRA and address immigrant and refugees. Currently we have a large City budget item for consulting which are very cost ineffective because they are not engaged and have no knowledge about ongoing issues and relationships with other City offices.
- Expansion of immigrant defense fund; we have the ability to fundraise for this, but there is a lack of transparency about how we can influence the use of funds. There is a carryover, only about half was

spent last year. Need to learn more about where the money is going. It does not seem cost effective to throw money on one case here or there, it could be more cost effective to hire an attorney to deal with

- Communication support, ongoing challenges with media and communications in the City. There are issues about quality and accuracy of their efforts. The website is not updated. There are a years worth of minutes that have not been posted. It is a minimum requirement that the City address this and post public minutes.
- Need to incorporate CIRA in public community calendar. CIRA needs more direct information about opportunities to collaborate and participate in City government.
- Need language access policy and resources
- Community safety and language access: need to focus on community
- Resolution of 40362 on anti-racism: our values are in line with this, the aspiration is to expand the concept of anti-racism to include more than one community to collaborate to fight white supremacy. CIRA is uniquely situated to address this because by definition it is a diverse community.
- Within CIRA we do not talk much about education and schools, right now we do not have anyone under 18. Children are the people who pass on information to family. How does Tacoma Public Schools work with the immigrant and refugee community?
- Develop skills of Commissioners. CIRA has a role in leadership development and understanding the City government and who to contact.

Jefferson asks for work plans for 2021 and what dates work for December meeting, need a quorum because need a Commission chair and will be updating the bylaws and have an approved work plan.

Jefferson received notification of vandalism against murals that depict immigrant heritage. There are at least five incidents. This needs to be kept track of.

Heal the Heart initiative by Mayor Woodards to fight racism. At first it was described to provide someone to serve on the committee. Patricia Flores is willing to serve. There is not a better way to have CIRA input than to have a CIRA member on the committee. Motion by Perla, seconded, passed unanimously. Not clear what the initiative will do, but Mayor says she wants action. Jefferson will let Mayor know about CIRA's nomination.

Meeting adjourned at 12:45pm