



## Regular Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Thursday, September 23, 2021

**Present:** Chair Karin Lin, Karim Razzaz, Commissioners Subandha Karmacharya, Aleksandra Ibrahim, Ashebir Gezmu, Tsamchoe Dolma, Jen Sparks, and Elizabeth Badger

CIRC Staff: Interim Executive Director Jennifer Mathews, Project Coordinator Crystal Rosa and Immigrant Services Liaison Tagesech Wabeto

**Absent:** Commissioner Ana Mejia

**1. Call to order:**

Chair Lin called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

**2. Public comment**

No public was present at the start of the virtual meeting. There was no public comment.

**3. Review and approval of July 22, 2021 minutes**

Commissioners reviewed the minutes of the July 22, 2021 meeting. Commissioner Sparks moved to approve the meeting minutes, and Commissioner Dolma seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

**4. Danehy Park Day**

PC Rosa updated the Welcome sign designs to fix previous typos and formatting errors. The Welcome sign will greet people at the entrance of Danehy Park on the morning of the event. CIRC staff also designed a bookmark & magnet with CIRC's contact information. The bookmark provides general information about the legal clinic and the magnet is a smaller version of the Welcome sign. PC Rosa shared her screen for the Commission to view the designs during the meeting.

**5. Commission Vacancies**

IED Mathews explained that Commissioner Macedo and Badger asked not to be reappointed to the Commission. IED Mathews shared the press release about the vacancies with the Commissioners before the meeting. The members of the Commission are encouraged to share the information with their networks. The deadline for applications is October 13. Interviews will need to be scheduled during the normal workday. Commissioner Dolma volunteered to help with interviews.

Commissioner Badger suggested the Commission consider a new meeting date because there is some conflict with fourth Thursday of the month given that most immigration lawyers would also attend the monthly AILA meeting with the last Thursday night of the month.

**6. Discussion on motivation to serve**

Chair Lin opened the discussion about the Commissioners' motivation to serve to hear about what members are passionate about and where their energy could be fostered.

- Chair Lin stated that she was motivated to serve after hearing the former President's hateful rhetoric against immigrants. Chair Lin wants to be involved in more conversations with City leadership.
- Commissioner Dolma stated that she is a proud Cambridge resident and wanted to know more about what the challenges are for immigrants. Commissioner Dolma acknowledged having lower energy because of life in a time of COVID. Commissioner Dolma is interested in meeting or hearing from City officials.

- Commissioner Razzaz stated he started at the Commission because he was motivated to help others. Commissioner Razzaz stated that before the Pandemic the energy around the working groups was ready to do more.
- Commissioner Ibrahim provided personal examples of what has prevented her ability to engage during the COVID pandemic.
- Commissioner Gezmu gave examples of affirmations he tells his children about belonging and being American. Commissioner Gezmu joined the Commission to be a voice and is motivated by community engagement.
- Commissioner Badger believes in greater access for representation and that more funding is needed to support the efforts of legal services. Commissioner Badger stated that places like San Antonio and New York City fund positions at the city-wide level for community legal services.
- Commissioner Karmacharya explained that in her experience with working at the Mayor's Office, she has seen how immigrant communities are missing out in areas of decision-making. Commissioner Karmacharya explained that she joined the Commission to learn about what the resources are for immigrant families in Cambridge.
- Commissioner Sparks believes that healthcare is a right in any community and is especially crucial in immigrant communities. This was one of the motivating factors for her to serve on the Commission. As a physician in a mostly immigrant community, the Pandemic has absorbed most of her energy and focus.

## **7. Staff Reports**

### **Upcoming Initiatives**

IED Mathews announced the City's participation with the Municipal Support Network, where municipalities of Massachusetts can share ideas on how to best support immigrant communities as a network. The most recent meeting covered topics of language access, supporting Afghan evacuees, and Haitian TPS. IED Mathews will be consulting with the City communication team about how to share volunteer opportunities with Cambridge residents regarding support to Afghan evacuees. Massachusetts is expecting 900-1000 Afghan evacuees. CIRC will be partnering with Central Square Library to host a KYR training. IED Mathews has reached out to Cambridge Police Department for their participation and resources for immigrant communities and other community safety campaigns.

### **Cambridge De Novo Legal Screening Clinic**

IED Mathews announced that the legal clinic will be virtual for the foreseeable future. IED Mathews reported there were 25 clients who called the virtual clinic in August virtual clinic and 23 clients who called the virtual clinic in September.

### **Immigrant Services Liaison (ISL) Wabeto Report**

Immigrant Services Liaison (ISL) Wabeto provided a summary of her efforts as the City continues to reopen. ISL Wabeto attended in-person school events such as Back-to-School potlucks, focus groups with the new Superintendent, and the monthly Community Fairs. Superintendent Victoria Greer gathered families to introduce herself and answer the families' questions. At the same time, Greer explained the new Covid-19 protocols to the families. ISL Wabeto also attended the families' session for the middle school. It was very similar to the elementary sessions. Families shared concerns about the shortage of afterschool slots.

ISL Wabeto informed the Commission that as of October 1, 2021, people applying to immigrate to the United States will have to show that they've been vaccinated against COVID-19. There are exceptions for children who are too young to be eligible for vaccination as well as for people with certain medical conditions, and a waiver process for people who refuse to be vaccinated for religious reasons. The federal government requires immigrants to be vaccinated against a list of diseases including polio and chickenpox and Covid is added.

Commissioner Sparks moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:56 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Badger.

**The next commission meeting will be on Thursday, October 28, 2021, at 6 pm via a Virtual Zoom meeting.**