

BHRC Public Meeting
July 16, 2020 at 5PM via Zoom due to COVID-19

Meeting Minutes

Present: **Chairwoman:** Margaret McKenna
Commissioners: Reyes Coll-Tellechea, Ben Goldberger, Leslie Harris,
Robert MacEachern and Anne Rousseau (Commissioner Leonard Lee
absent)
Staff: Executive Director, Evandro Carvalho and Executive Assistant, Susan Helmy
Guests: Yusufi Vali, Director of the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement
Nailah Freeman, Law Department Attorney
Others: Approximately 10 individuals from the public attended this meeting

1. Introductions

A. Commissioners and staff introduced themselves.

2. Yusufi Vali, Director of the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement

A. Yusufi started his segment with naming the three biggest and current issues in the immigrant community.

B. These issues were:

- 1. Consumer equity issues**, such as internet deserts, food deserts and check cashing vs. banks. All of these have directly and disproportionately impacted immigrants and low-income communities.
 - a. Internet deserts:** Director Vali stated that Anne Schwieger in DoIT (City of Boston's Department of Technology) has been working on a map and compiling data to illustrate the digital divide in the city of Boston.
 - b. Food deserts:** This refers to the location of supermarkets, restaurants and take out establishments. There seems to be a divide in where healthy and reasonably priced food and where fast food is located. The divide in the accessibility of healthy food is one that is not talked about much but is very much real.
 - c. Cash Checking vs. Banks:** Unbanked individuals are accessing cash checking places because banks are charging too high of a fee that some individuals can simply not afford.
- 2. Wage Theft**
 - a.** Wage theft is most common in the restaurant and cleaning businesses.
 - b.** Could the city play a bigger role in eliminating this is the big question right now.
- 3. Access to public goods**
 - a.** Certain departments work with agencies that provide public goods; however, this is not enough. Forming a partnership with these agencies that provide public goods will help ensure that public goods are provided and available to access by all.

3. Nailah Freeman, Law Department Attorney

- A. Attorney Freeman gave a brief overview of the three separate laws that will impact all Commissioners. These laws are: Open Meeting Law, Public Records Law and Conflict of Interest Law.
 - 1. The **Conflict of Interest Law** is a law that promotes integrity. It prevents conflicts between private and public individuals.
 - 2. The **Public Records Law** states that any document that is introduced in a public meeting or in anticipation of a public meeting is a public record.
 - 3. The **Open Meeting Law** was made to eliminate any secrecy in deliberations. There are some topics that may be made in an executive session so that they are not public, however, meeting minutes are still kept.
 - a. Open Meetings are required to be open to the public and they are to be given a 48-hour notice. Meeting minutes are to be kept for these open meetings.
- B. Executive Director Carvalho announced to the Commission that each attorney in the City of Boston Law Department are assigned to a specific Commissions to help advise the Commission in legal matters. Attorney Nailah Freeman is assigned to the Boston Human Rights Commission.

4. Chairwoman McKenna and Executive Director's Remarks

- A. Chairwoman McKenna began her remarks with a question. She wondered: how much knowledge do city agencies and representatives have on immigrant rights? Additionally, Chairwoman McKenna spoke about the numerous city or government agencies that are responsible for certain things and have certain duties but how well are they trained are they? Is there any sharing or learning from the different departments? Have there been any attempts to bring them together?
- B. E.D Evandro Carvalho updated the Commission on his recent interaction with MCAD. He spoke with Chairwoman Sunila Thomas George, who stated that she would gladly be a guest at one of the Commission's meeting to answer any questions about MCAD and see how both MCAD and the BHRC could work together. Executive Director Carvalho also mentioned the FY21 budget of a little over 500,000.

5. Discussion of Mission and Priorities

- A. Chairwoman McKenna
 - 1. We do not want to be a Reactive Commission and wait for complaints to come in. We should employ skilled researchers, analysts and writers to help us figure out where issues are starting and help eliminate them before they become a problem.
- B. Leslie Harris
 - 1. The topic of food deserts is one that the Commission should look into.
 - a. "We need to work into making sure that all communities are getting reasonable priced healthy food."

C. Reyes Coll-Tellechea

1. Immigrants will not come forward. They are untrusting of government agencies and law enforcement. We need to hear from organizations or broad coalitions that work with immigrants. This is the closest we are going to get in learning about the current and pressing issues for immigrants since many are fearful of coming forward.

a. During discussion with Yusufi Vali, Commissioner Coll-Tellechea made a point that BPS has shared information with other agencies such as ICE which further prevents immigrants from trusting any kind of authoritative agency.

D. Ben Goldberger

1. The Commission should do a fair amount of listening. We need to listen before we act. The Commission needs to employ a skilled writer and researcher to help us listen.

E. Executive Director Evandro Carvalho

1. Communication is critical. How do we brand ourselves? BHRC should look into possibly doing a press release so that more people are aware of the Commission. There are many individuals that are interested in our work, but we are not reaching them, there is a disconnect.

F. Anne Rousseau

1. A priority should be of rebuilding trust with the public. The Commission needs to relay the message that we are not only here, but we are here to listen.

6. Public Comments

A. Haroon Rashid tried to make a comment but had technical difficulties.

7. Next Steps

A. Look into have either having Fair Housing and/or MIRA to guest speak at our next Commission Meeting – this guest speaker will speak to the current immigrant issues, further expanding on the conversation we had today.

B. Follow up with Anne Schwieger on the map for internet deserts.

C. Reach out to MCAD and learn on whether there are certain patterns or practice of complaints in Boston.

D. Look into research that has been conducted on the food deserts located in the city of Boston

8. Votes

A. Two votes were taken during this meeting.

1. Unanimous vote of approval of the June 30th Meeting Minutes pending Commissioner Goldberger's suggestion that the time and a note be made that the meeting took place over Zoom due to COVID-19.

2. Unanimous vote to adjourn at 6:30pm.