

Ad Hoc Committee on Development of a Commission on Immigrant Issues Meeting Notes: February 15, 2013

Homa Naficy, Director of The American Place at the Hartford Public Library, welcomed everyone and introduced Linda Bayer, the meeting facilitator.

Present were Fernando Marroquin, Diana Ali (Catholic Charities Migration, Refugee, & Immigration Services - CMRIS), Maryse Adonis (CT Haitian American Organization - CHAO), Raimonda Ibrochim (Hartford Adult Education), Mui Mui Hin-McCormick (CT American Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission - APAAC), Janet Bauer (Trinity College), Urania Petit (Hartford Registrars of Voters, St. Lucian community), Joseph Kalapele (Liberian community), and Rafael Pichardo, Homa Naficy, Fiona Williams, and Nancy Caddigan of the Hartford Public Library. Invited, but not in attendance, were Cecilia Chang (Peruvian community), Thuy Le (Vietnamese community), Edgar Johnson (West Indian American News), Letty Cotto and Pramod Pradhan.

Handouts were distributed, including a report of the meeting of the Immigrant Advisory Group held on October 16, 2012, a copy of the letter sent to the attendees asking for their participation in the ad hoc committee, and copies of ordinances establishing five City commissions. Linda reviewed the reason for creation of the Ad Hoc Committee which is to create a framework for a City commission on immigrant issues. She reviewed the discussions of the Immigrant Advisory Group that made the recommendation for the establishment of such a commission and highlighted the three components of the purpose of a commission:

- Legitimize and elevate in importance the issues of new arrivals
- Create a means for immigrant voices to be heard and understood
- Provide a way for immigrants to become civically engaged

Linda also explained the process for creating a City commission which consists of the drafting of an ordinance, submission of the ordinance to the Court of Common Council, a public hearing, consideration by a Council committee, and a vote on the ordinance. She also reviewed the charge to the ad hoc committee which not only includes creation of an ordinance, but involving the immigrant community in the creation of the commission. Linda briefly reviewed the examples provided and asked that committee members read them over before the next meeting.

Fernando Marroquin suggested that the Hartford Court of Common Council be asked to designate the members of the ad hoc committee as a Task Force of the City. The group was willing but did want to delay their work. It was agreed that Linda and Fernando would prepare a resolution for submission to Council. While the Council is considering the resolution, the ad hoc committee would continue its work. The Council will hold a public comment period on the resolution on March 11, 2013 at 6 PM. At the next meeting of the ad hoc committee, participation in that comment period will be discussed.

The group then brainstormed ideas for what the purpose and responsibilities of a commission might be (flip chart attached). Ideas included:

- Advise and inform City government about the needs and status of the immigrant community
- Advocate for the interests of immigrants
- Analyze existing or proposed policies and actions for impacts on immigrants
- Promote the resources that immigrants bring to the community
- Educate the receiving community about immigrants, their resources, and their issues
- Issue an annual report on the "state of immigrants in Hartford"
- Analyze and make recommendations concerning the coordination of services to immigrants and refugees
- Serve as a listening post for both the immigrant and receiving communities concerning issues related to immigration and immigrants and refugees

The group then discussed the criteria for membership on the commission (flip chart attached). Ideas included:

- Members must have a connection to Hartford, e.g. residents or members of groups or organizations serving immigrants
- Majority of members must be immigrants or refugees
- Seats should be made available for non-citizens
- There should be a mechanism for involving non-members in the work of the commission

It was agreed that Linda will take the ideas generated at the meeting and begin drafting a commission framework. The next meeting of the ad hoc committee will be held on Friday, March 1, 2013 from 2:30 to 4 PM in the 2nd Floor Seminar Room at the Library.

Prepared by Linda A. Bayer, Facilitator

Flip Chart

Ad Hoc Committee Meeting – February 15, 2013

Purpose

- Investigate how non-citizens can participate in elections at different local levels, e.g. school board, council
- Connect new arrivals with services
- Advocate for immigrants, e.g. in schools
- Advise City Government on issues particular to new arrivals. Look at impacts of actions on immigrants – unintended consequences
- Equitability of laws and services – by taking into account fairness to all. e.g. I94. There is a 5 month wait but usually takes longer. While waiting, can't work
- Address disconnections between government agencies and different levels of govt.
- Review and assess policies and laws (d) CAPH
- Make government aware of issues
- Tap resources that immigrants bring that benefit community- connections to the world - internationality
- Address perceptions of receiving community about immigrants. Educate the receiving community
- "State of immigrants in Hartford" – data/status – regular reports.
- Arrange for info to be available – refugees e.g. FAQ
- Promote Hartford as a good place to live. Long-term e.g. office, cultural center
- Helping immigrants feel part of the city and community
- Improve the lot of immigrants – Hartford can be a model
- Find out what people need
- Create a "Go-to" place
- Make the dream a reality
- Promote interests of immigrants
- Recommend ways to coordinate organizations that are providing services
- ID leaders in various communities to address issues
- Mechanism to hear from both receiving and immigrant communities
- Public comment period at every meeting

Biggest growth in immigrant population is in 2nd tier communities like Hartford

Membership

- Have a connection to Hartford
- Majority of members: immigrants/refugees
- Resident (all? Pros and cons)
- Immigrant-friendly
- Some service providers
- Seats for non-citizens
- Ad hoc members – non-voting
- Unions
- "May"include or maybe not