



STATE OF WASHINGTON
COMMISSION ON HISPANIC AFFAIRS
COMISIÓN DE ASUNTOS HISPANOS

Sunnyside Meeting Minutes
October 19, 2007

Roll Call:

Commissioners present: Jorge Chacón, Víctor Chacón, Ty Córdova, Henry Cruz, Ninfa Gutiérrez, Félix Negrón, Rosalba Pitkin, Lourdes Portillo Salazar, and Gabriel Portugal

Staff Present: Uriel Iñiguez and Alicia Luna

Chair Portillo Salazar called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Chair Portillo Salazar welcomed and thanked the panel and the public for their presence. Self-introductions by Chair, Commissioners, and staff proceeded.

Chair Portillo Salazar covered the following:

- CHA's Mandate and Accomplishments
- WA State Distribution of Latino Population by County
- Yakima County and Sunnyside's Latino Population

Education Chair Victor Chacón and Education Committee shared the following:

- ELL, Bilingual Education, and other Education funds
- Projected growth of minority school-age population
- Parental Involvement
- WASL Scores and Latino High School graduation rates

Justice & Equity Committee Chair Lourdes Portillo and Commissioner Cruz shared the following:

- Statewide sentencing rates for minorities
- State Recidivism rates for both girls and boys
- Juvenile State Detention Population
- Comprehensive approach in combating gang activity involves prevention, intervention, and suppression

Commissioner Córdova shared with the panel the presentation process and the time allotted for each presentation.

Commissioner Gutiérrez, host Commissioner introduced the panel which included:

210 11th Ave Suite 301A PO Box 40924 Olympia, WA 98504-0924
Toll-Free: (800) 443-0294 Olympia: (360) 725-5661 Fax: (360) 360-586-9501

www.cha.wa.gov hispanic@cha.wa.gov

- Miguel Angel Lugo, Student
- Luz Balderas, Parent
- Sonya McDaniel, Migrant Bilingual Director
- John Hughes, Safe Schools Director
- Mark Kunkler, City Attorney & Interim City Manager
- Edwin Radder, Chief of Police
- Bill and Diana Erickson, Walla Walla Residents

Commissioner Gutierrez also acknowledged Yakima County Sheriff Ken Irwin, Marc Brenman, Executive Director of the Washington State Human Rights Commission, and Ricardo Garcia, Radio KDNA.

Panel Presentations

Miguel Angel Lugo, student, is President of MeCha. His recommendation for preventing kids from joining gangs and using drugs:

- Parental support and maintaining kids active
- Provide more activities in the community

Luz Bazan, parent, provided the following comments:

- Very difficult to learn English at an older age
- Many people still not aware or knowledgeable of the Gang ordinance
- Parents are willing to help but also need help; they don't need gang experts; they need to be educated
- Kids as young as 6 years are on drugs; she has asked Dr. Cole to stop suspending kids from school

Sonya McDaniel, Migrant/Bilingual Director provided the following comments:

- Has many years experience as a Teacher
- School District has monthly Migrant Parent Advisory meetings
- Have launched programs to help teachers teach migrant kids
- Have hired a teacher (Leopoldo Pavon) from Spain to teach Math
- Dr. Cole has designated the building across from the SEMY Board Room as a special center/resource center for migrant and bilingual parents

Ed Radder, Chief of Police shared the following:

- Success of the ordinance is not the number of youth detained
- The focus will be on the number of youth that are not detained

Mark Kunkler, City Attorney and Interim City Manager shared the following:

- Stated that it was a pleasure to welcome the Commission
- Gang Ordinance is not based on race; it's simply based on addressing a given need in the State of WA and in the city of Sunnyside
- Gang Ordinance is modeled on a State Statute from California that has been in effect for 20 years and proven to be effective with gang related issues
- CHA slide presentation included the 3 key elements to an effective approach with gangs; prevention, intervention, and suppression
- City and the school district have a long history of working collaboratively
- For the last 15 years they have not had a suppression law thus the ordinance which is intended to suppress gang related crime not meant to suppress people

Commissioner Portugal asked Mr. Kunkler if the city and school had a history of working with the Hispanic community.

John Hughes, Safe Schools Director shared the following:

- We identify and document the key issues that are challenging kids at school and at home; a survey is completed every two years and the survey results are used to develop strategies and ideas
- We recognize that laws and policies are not the answer and that “all” need to be involved in addressing the gang issue
- CHOICES is a special program in partnership with the city to retain children who are suspended for gang activity in schools
- Kids are provided counseling, social life, and academic skills; the commitment is to get them back into school
- Early use of drugs and alcohol (5th and 6th grade) a real problem and a contributor of gang activity
- Need to celebrate that every year our kids are doing better academically

Bill and Diana Erickson, Walla Walla community members shared the following:

- Walla Walla shares the same gang issue problem
- Actively working on a trial and error program
- They have built an alliance that includes community presence, leadership and citizenship training for students

Alicia Cardenas-Short, Employment Security Department shared the following:

- ESD programs for youth involving one on one contact; contract with youth so that they stay in school
- Jobs for youth; geared at keeping youth out of gangs
- Ex-Offender program; works with employers to hire these individuals
- Offers resources for housing and mental health
- Agricultural Unemployment Program; basic eligibility

Marc Brenman, Executive Director, WA State Human Rights Commission shared the following:

- We enforce the Washington Law against discrimination; broadest of civil rights in this state
- Have bilingual staff in their office
- Has written a paper on gang profiling; soon to be translated into Spanish

Public Comments

Hector Franco stated that the Gang Ordinance which was initiated by the City has caused division in the Sunnyside. Other statements by Mr. Franco included the following:

- We need a new attitude; wish I could replace the people in the panel
- Rude and disrespectful that Dr. Cole did not attend
- Expulsion of kids from school is not acceptable; they are always fighting with kids

Jose Leon shared the following:

- Family is the most important thing in this community

- Community Center used to provide activities for our youth; however, it is no longer available – don't know if we ran out of funds, administration issue, etc.
- We need CHA to seek money from the Governor
- Foster care homes are not available
- Need more opportunities for Hispanic families; programs such as “De Familia a Familia”

Ricardo Garcia, Radio KDNA shared the following:

- No doubt that there is a big issue with our youth; gangs, drugs, and violence
- Hispanic families are in crisis; we need resources to address this issue
- There is no coordination; the community has the desire but we can't open the doors
- Resources are available and we as taxpayers are entitled to them

Maria Fernandez shared the following:

- Acknowledged the work of the local Commissioner
- Asked if the Commission represents the Governor or does it represent the community

Bengi Aguilar shared the following:

- Paul Garcia, candidate for City Council in Sunnyside
- Tom Gehlen, candidate for City Council in Sunnyside
- Ramona Fonseca, candidate for Mayor of Granger
- Maria Osorio, Candidate for Toppenish School Board

Mr. Kunkler stated that the Gang Ordinance was reviewed by the School Board and that two public hearings were held. He also stated that council meetings are always open to the public. He added that the ordinance was adopted and that they are taking the necessary steps to implement it. Parental responsibility was a concern; however, family is the key to enforcing gang related crime.

Chief of Police Radder stated that there was interaction with the public prior to drafting the ordinance and that the ordinance had been translated into Spanish. The training portion, however, has not yet been translated. They do try and reach out to the monolingual community.

Brian Galvan shared the following:

- We feel abandoned and we don't think we are being supported; let's not forget that we are the majority in the schools
- EPE, Radio KDNA, and the City need to work together on this issue
- Not enough soccer camps in the City; thanks though to Dr. Cole for removing the locks at the existing soccer camps
- As parents we are responsible for our kids, therefore, we have to find a way to work with them

Jose Velasquez shared the following:

- Gangs and drugs are a big problem in Mabton
- There are families that run drug and who have police radios
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Maria Birroeta stated that drugs are accessible in schools and what is the city doing to address this issue.

Carlina Lobos shared the following:

- Has been a teacher for 31 years; her kids were educated in Sunnyside and were successful in spite of being invisible
- School districts are taking authority away from parents; they are also making kids assimilate and asking them to forget their language and culture; parents on the other hand accuse kids of turning their backs on their culture and language
- Kids are caught in a quandary and often than not turn to drugs

Berta Navarro from Yakima shared the following:

- Most kids in her school district are Caucasian; Spanish teachers are also Caucasian and telling her kids that their Spanish is not correct
- What is Sunnyside school district doing that is successful; why not share with Yakima School District
- Grandparents have stories to share that can be passed generation to generation and thus sustain our culture

Madeline Alviso shared the following:

- This is an issue that affects the community
- She was present at meeting when the ordinance passed; what the newspaper printed was not what happened
- Plans to be a Drug Counselor and start a non-profit because of the great need for one, particularly for our youth

Adolfo Alvarez shared the following:

- Educating parents on how to work with their kids will prevent them from joining gangs; the whole community needs to work together to resolve it
- Most families do not know the school rules and police laws; 100 people in Yakima alone do not know these rules/laws

Carlos Dias, Executive Director of the Washington State Migrant Council shared the following:

- We are limited to the families we serve; work with kids birth to 5 years
- We need a massive campaign to educate parents

Yakima Country Sheriff shared the following:

- County Sheriff works outside of the city and serves 90,000 people
- We work on criminal offenses not immigration; if you are a criminal you are our enemy; however, if you are not a criminal you are our friend
- We work closely with KDNA; we are here to help so don't be afraid
- Block Watch; get together as neighbors and report criminal activity

Maria Mora thanked the Commission for coming to Sunnyside. She stated that they need a stadium, soccer fields, and other activities for the youth.

Chair Portillo Salazar stated that the Commission does not approve the Ordinance; however, it has passed so what do we do now. Is the City ready to take the next step and work collaboratively towards a solution?

Commissioner Chacón recap to the City Panel: There is a crisis and panic point; a huge gap in the main stream culture. If is an “us” and “them” solution that we seek; it will be short in coming! It is of utmost importance to keep the kids in mind; the 9-11 year olds that are desperately straddling a fence; a culture fence influenced by peer pressure, media, etc. This community is reaching out to you. These families and kids are human and at their wits end. They have little or no education. Think of their kids as your kids. As long as they are someone else’s kids the sense of abandonment will continue. The message to take back to your organizations is that there is a huge communication gap between the community and you. Data and numbers, rather than people with beating hearts and kids that have not attention at home or no connection with parents is not the answer. Think of all the problems you have had in your own families and how your heart has gone out to them!

Chief of Police Radder responded saying that the city will have another meeting by next Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. He added that by the end of next week the city would have a firm date.

CHA Official Business

Commissioner Portugal made a motion to approve the Walla Walla August 10, 2007 public meeting minutes; Commissioner Jorge Chacon seconded the motion.

A vote was called to approve the minutes of August 10, 2007. Ayes were unanimous. **The motion carried.**

Commissioner Henry made a motion to send an official CHA letter to the WSBA President, BOG & RPC Committee of WSBA indicating CHA’s concern over the lack of an ethical rule or formal opinion on immigration retaliation tactics by attorneys to gain leverage in civil cases, and urge them to create a rule or formal opinion prohibiting such conduct; Commissioner Gutierrez seconded the motion.

Discussion: Chair Portillo Salazar asked why criminal cases were not included. Commissioner Cruz explained that prosecutors would not want to report them to immigration if they want a conviction, because court cannot proceed against a defendant without the defendant present in court (although if case is lost prosecutor may report defendant to ICE, but that does not interfere with justice in the criminal case)

A vote was called to send an official letter to the WSBA President and the BOG and RPC Committees. Ayes were unanimous. **The motion carried.**

Action Item: Commissioner Cruz will draft letter and share with Commission staff for edits; Chair Portillo Salazar to sign final letter.

Commissioner Negrón made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Commissioner Victor Chacón seconded the motion.

A vote was called to adjourn the meeting. Ayes were unanimous. **The motion carried.**

Meeting was adjourned at 9PM!