

# October 17, 2023 Bellingham Immigration Advisory Board meeting discussion of a potential presentation by City Planning Director Blake Lyon on the topic of housing

*[No City recording of this meeting was posted on the Immigration Advisory Board Meeting Materials webpage on the City of Bellingham website. I had made a screen recording of the meeting for that date from which I made the transcription below. Here is a link to the portion of the meeting recording which contains the conversation that was transcribed below: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/12-sRvYZAILPTbJi4u3iaKwBhaD9lxAtx/view?usp=share link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/12-sRvYZAILPTbJi4u3iaKwBhaD9lxAtx/view?usp=share_link) - Dena Jensen]*

## Discussion begins at 01:03:32 in the meeting recording

### **City Communications Director and Interim Deputy Administrator Janice**

**Keller:** “I have an action item from last time about asking someone to give a presentation on housing. And I had our Planning Director lined up to come tonight and there was a question about whether it was the right presentation, or person at the right time.

“So, I want to make the offer again. But if you’d like sort of a high level overview about City housing, affordable housing, homelessness programs, or other housing-related programs, we’re very happy to provide that.

“I - and we’d be happy to provide presentations on just about anything, as long as we can line up the right people and have them available on the dates that you wished it.

“I think the journey back to trust and collaboration will depend on continued information. And I’m eager to help bridge the gap between the City and the Immigration Advisory Board and help you learn about City government and help us learn about you better. So I wanted to make that offer again.”

**IAB Member Tara Villalba:** “So the last bit of conversation on this was last Wednesday, when I had sent an email that said we would love to make a decision on when and - when we can put that on the agenda once we know who’s presenting, how long it will be, what they will be presenting about, and a copy of the presentation, so that we know if the presentation is actually going to address the questions that have been brought up in the IAB meetings previous to this.”

**City Council Office Manager and Legislative Assistant Jackie Lassiter:**

“Janice actually responded on Thursday. Should I read what was sent?”

**Janice Keller:** “I think we - it sounds like we need to have more conversation about how to accomplish this, because I am reluctant to ask my very busy colleagues to provide a presentation in advance for something you might decide not to do.

“So let’s figure out a successful way to do this together.”

**Tara Villalba:** “Well, my main issue is that it doesn’t - that the piece, I mean the - your response to it doesn’t address immigrants at all, and how housing policy impacts immigrants in our City at all. And that’s what we - that’s part of what’s un-useful to us, is to use the time in this meeting to talk about policies that, in the end, after a 20 minute presentation, we have to ask a question to people about how does this impact the immigrant community.

“So that’s why we’re screening. It’s not to be mean. It’s not to be whatever, but it is to make sure that the people who are presenting here are not giving us a general thing that does not address the situation that we have already shared about the housing of the immigrant community. That’s what that’s about.”

01:07:08

**Jackie Lassiter:** “Would it be helpful to, rather than have our staff create a presentation ahead of time and then, kind of, submit it - you know what I mean? - would it be more helpful to say, here’s some questions ahead of time? Would it be more helpful to have this group come up with questions and submit them, so that we’re not trying to have somebody guess at what might be useful and then - ?”

**Tara Villalba:** “I think the first step is that the City needs to think about how their housing policies are going to impact immigrants. And once they give us that - like, this is how we see the intersection already - from the City, then we can have a place to be like, okay, cool, that’s where the City is. This is then, what we need from the City, because now we know where the City has considered or not-considered immigrants in their - in this example - in their housing policies.”

**Janice Keller:** “So as I noted in my email, it would be great if you could brainstorm a list of questions and maybe there’s a plan on the agenda when we talk about potential upcoming presentations and what questions you might have

and I think that's a perfectly - if - your interest in having a focus on impacts on the immigration community is a perfect example of how we can do that."

**Tara Villalba:** "We've gone that route. That means we have to wait until the next meeting to draft up a list of questions and we've raised questions in the last few months of our meeting, and so I feel like [pause] it would be great if the City could comb through those already - they already exist, they just have to look at our minutes or our meeting recordings.

"And I understand you guys are busy too. We're busy too. I just don't, you know - basically we have to wait until November and we're not going to meet in December, so we're talking about January or maybe February, having somebody come to talk about housing if we do this model of, like, come and come up with questions."

"Can the City just tell us, this is how our policies have been impacting the immigrant community?"

**Janice Keller:** "If that's the primary question, then yes, we can work on that. We can give that a try for November. I was concerned that you were interested in, I mean, housing is a very huge issue, and I wondered if you were maybe interested in rental-related issues, or issues of affordable housing, or about consolidated plan process. I thought you were interested in a sub -"

**Tara Villalba:** "All of the above. All of the above are of interest - are interesting and necessary and relevant to immigrants."

**Janice Keller:** "I agree."

**Tara Villalba:** "But it's also un-useful for someone to come and tell us about a plan that we have no ability to impact or that we have - we can't give feedback if it is not impacting us, or it is impacting us and we can't give feedback now."

**IAB Member Imanat Kang:** "I think, personally, another concern is, without acknowledgement of how the housing policy impacts the immigrant population in Whatcom County is kind of like, how can we ensure that following - even if we sent questions, and those questions would be answered or it would it just be kinda swept, not swept under, but kind of like, sidetracked to a different conversation about it. And how can we ensure that we can get the answers that we want?"

**Tara Villalba:** “And that’s what this screening is about. That’s why we’re asking for the presentation, who’s doing it and what is it about, so that we can say cool, this is going to be exactly, or close to, or you know, if you left out this piece, can you make sure you adjust this piece.

“Us having to give an agenda to the City, so the City can prepare something would - “

**Jackie Lassiter:** “I think that my - when I - sorry, I apologize, but my idea of asking for feedback ahead of time wasn’t appropriate, but what I was intending was that - to actually save time in a way, because to have somebody prepare something and then, you know, have it be completely off-base - so I think just the guidance that you’ve given just now is really helpful.”

“And I think that to Janice’s point earlier, not to have, you know, our planning director create a presentation and then, you know, not end up having that be what - not end up giving it, basically, not end up coming to a meeting would be difficult.

“So if it’s more of, ‘let us know when you all know what he plans to speak to,’ and then you, kind of, can give feedback if it’s on the right track, or if you want more of this, more of that, rather than, ‘no, don’t come to the meeting,’ like, I think that would be - that sounds reasonable, I don’t know. I can’t speak for everyone, but yeah.”

**Janice Keller:** “Another way you could approach it is, if you are able to have a retreat in January, maybe at that retreat you can pick out some - pick out and prioritize some topics that you’d very much like to hear more about and give us those with the guidance that you want to hear about those topics from the perspective of any impacts on the immigrant community, and then we could go off and just click through - “

**Tara Villalba:** “I think you could take it for granted that we will always want whatever policy to address how it has been reviewed on how it impacts immigrants in Bellingham and in Whatcom County. I think you can assume that is what we’re asking for.”

**Imanat Kang:** “And I don’t not like the idea of sending people and sending questions, but it’s the fact that we meet once a month for such a short time and that we spend November, for example, thinking of stuff that we could have with the potential of we won’t meet of see that presentation until February, maybe even March, and it’s just like, it would be so - we’d rather it almost be, like,

sooner than later. That's what I'm getting, what I personally feel."

Jackie Lassiter: "What we - I think that we can have him here. I mean, there was a possibility for him to come to this meeting. So it's not - we're not trying to push this out, necessarily, until next year."

**Imanat Kang:** "I think even him being present, and available for questions that we may have, is already such - so much, you know, about the presentation. We've allowed them to have a place talk or for us to have a place to ask those questions, you know -"

**Tara Villalba:** "And it allows them an opportunity to listen. If they listen to last month's meeting, a two hour meeting, they will hear all the questions that our board asked about it. They could already get the guidance that, you know, that would be useful and point their attentions in that specific direction."