

SeaTac Community Coalition Meeting with King County

Date: Wed, Feb. 20, 2019

Location: SeaTac Market, 15221 Tukwila International Blvd, SeaTac, WA 98188

Participants: King County Executive and Staff; Immigrant & Refugee Commissioners; SeaTac Businesses; Supporting Organizations

Proposed (Draft) Agenda:

5:00pm King County Immigrant & Refugee Commissioners, KC Staff and other Guests Arrive

5:00pm – 5:30pm Introductions and Sharing of Background/Stories

Attendance and Introductions

Immigrant and Refugee Commissioners in Attendance:

- Seyanet Negusse, Issa Ndiaye, Fo-Ching Lu, Mohammad Jan Ofuq, Andrew Kritovich, Monserrat Padilla, Medard Ngueita, Mohamed Bakr, Hamdi Mohamed, Miguel Duncan-Galvez Bravo
- Absent Commissioners: Nimco Bulale, Minal Ghassemieh, Lalita Uppala

Main Facilitator: Aneelah Afzali – Executive Director of MAPS-AMEN, SeaTac Community Coalition Member

Other attendees introduced themselves, including King County employees and community representatives (among others not listed):

- Rich Stolz – Executive Director, OneAmerica
- Matias Valenzuela – King County Office of Equity and Social Justice, Director
- Hamdi Abdulle – African Community Housing and Development, Executive Director
- Michael Ramos – Puget Sound Sage President, Board of Directors
- Andrea Akita – Communities of Opportunity, King County
- Aden Hussein – African Community Housing and Development, Board President
- Paige Shevlin – King County Economic Development Policy Advisor
- Dylan Ordoñez – King County Director of External Relations
- Jenn Ramirez Robson – Director of Resident Services: King County Housing Authority
- Several tenants, sub-tenants and customers of SeaTac Center, with many of the shop owners closing their businesses early to attend the meeting

Attendees and SeaTac Center business owners share personal stories:

Rich Stolz – Executive Director of OneAmerica- (Paraphrased)

- We are in the middle of a crisis now, with this property being sold out from underneath us. We are trying to build this community, but now we are being evicted and replaced.

There is a troubling relationship with the city council and the community. This is the perfect situation for the KC Immigrant and Refugee Commission to dig into, especially since there is no countywide strategy yet. It is now past time for the County to really dig into this issue. We need to know what kinds of resources can be made available to immigrants and refugees, and what the county can do to support the businesses that are being displaced. Because of the importance of this mall to the immigrant and refugee communities, we have to do everything we can to try to preserve this property. I urge the commission to do everything they can to aid this community.

Attendee shared her mother's story

- When they first arrived in the US, her mom could not go to a regular job, due to cultural/ language barriers. She started a small business at home and then eventually opened up a small shop in Ohio. They then moved to Washington and she became a lease owner. Her mother has done a lot to be here and to be independent. If the market closes, she will lose her independence, financial stability, and it will only set her back to square one. Her mother is not unique in this feeling; they are all feeling this way.

Attendee Fatima (sub-tenant of Bakaro Mall)

- She came to the US in 1997. First settled in Michigan and then moved to Minnesota. She moved to Washington because she had a lot of family there. She started working at airport, working 16 hour days for 8 years. She stressed that she does not take handouts from the government and does not need housing assistance. She has worked so hard to save enough money to start her own business. She later opened a business within the Bakaro Mall and wanted to keep growing her business. She feels that she will have to start from the bottom again. Because of all of the uncertainties, she currently works another job. She believes in working hard and hates to depend on someone else.

Attendee (Business owner)

- She has been at SeaTac Center for 6 years and stressed that it is very hard to build up customers. She spoke about how everyone at the SeaTac Center is a family; they help each other out, through good and bad times. "Take us anywhere, but don't separate us. Everyone here has a family, we all struggle to survive."

SeaTac business owner- Pizza restaurant

- She emphasized that the tenants are not being seen as human. They have been fighting for over a year now and they have children to take care of. So many of these women have said their livelihoods are based off their businesses. It has been a tough battle and they are still getting evicted and no one is listening. "We just want to be looked at as humans. We are a family and no one is seeing that, they are just seeing us as businesses. So many people are being affected."

Hamdi Mohamed of the King County Immigrant and Refugee Commission noted that they are a newly formed commission and are still in the planning stages. This is their first issue they will be tackling.

5:30pm

KC Executive Constantine Arrives and Welcome by Host

Owner of SeaTac Market welcomed and thanked KC Executive Constantine for coming.

5:30pm – 5:40pm

Introduction / Story of SeaTac Center / Current Situation

Aneelah (paraphrased)

- As you know, SeaTac is one of the most diverse cities in the Washington State. SeaTac Center is home to Bakaro Mall and over 50 immigrant businesses, mostly women-owned. Some businesses have been here for 20 years. Here today are direct tenants, sub-tenants, and customers and many have closed their shops early today to be here. Many here are immigrants and refugees who have survived war and violence to find a better life in America. They started from the bottom and worked so hard to be where they are now. Their stories are so inspiring. Now, their American dream is turning into a nightmare.
- The \$1.2 million from the state that was supposed to be used to create an international market will be lost and we cannot obtain other grants. So many other creative solutions could have been discussed but were not. We have talked to the city in several meetings and they said they would work with us but now we are being evicted. This is hurting individual business owners and the community.

5:40pm – 5:45pm

Personal Impact Stories

Personal Impact Stories

SeaTac Pizza Owners Daughter (Paraphrased)

- Both of my parents work here. They immigrated to the U.S. in the 1980s and worked 2-3 jobs for a long time. We are a community of international individuals and we are all being directly affected. It's a racist tactic that has been used against us. All of SeaTac is being affected by this. My parents have done an amazing job here, started from nothing, and built a future for their children. Please help us stop the city, so our businesses can flourish and can continue to grow.

Subtenant

- She has been here for 10 years and started from scratch. She scraped together money from family members and worked 2 jobs for 16 years. She came in 1993 with nothing, wanting the American dream. Her community opened this beautiful market, her family came together and opened a store. We have worked so hard. Why us? We are American citizens, please help us.

Sahra Abdulle (interpreted by her Brother, Abshir Mohammed) owner of SeaTac Market

- Came here to America and worked 3-4 jobs to start her business. She was the first Somali to open a business in SeaTac/Tukwila. She used she entire life savings to start

SeaTac Market. A year ago, they got a letter with a formal notice to leave in 9 months. She said the city did not want to listen to them.

5:45pm – 6:00pm

King County Executive shares brief words and Conversation on “Asks/requests” and Creative Solutions

Conversation with KC Executive

Executive was asked to commit for the following items:

1. A commitment to the idea of an international market or other proposal for the existing immigrant-owned businesses in SeaTac – either at the current location or a nearby location, and a way forward to ensure the sustainability and viability of the immigrant-owned businesses and the larger immigrant infrastructure in the Greater Seattle area.
2. Assistance securing King County Housing Authority as a development partner to explore the idea of an international market or other proposal (and possible affordable housing), and to partner in providing expertise and financial modeling along with other skills and support.
3. Financial Commitment (most important/top priority)
 - Support for redirecting the \$1.2 million in Washington State funds away from the City of SeaTac and toward an ally like King County Housing Authority, to use as seed money for financial modelling, architectural planning and planned input from impacted stakeholders (immigrant-owned businesses) for an international market or other proposal
 - A match by King County of \$1.2 million to complete the preliminary process for exploring and assessing an international market or other proposal.
4. Assistance building long-term financial support by bringing together allies/corporate leader/investors/etc. to provide for an effective public/private partnership toward an international market or other proposal.
5. Commitment to Follow Up
 - King County Executive: A scheduled follow up meeting within three weeks with King County Executive Staff (including Economic Development Policy Advisor Paige Shevlin and Immigrant and Refugee Policy Analyst Bookda Gheisar) to strategize and build a work plan to engage the right private and public sector leaders to realize a vision of a thriving international market or other proposal for the immigrant-owned businesses.

KC Executive Constantine committed to working with all of the above asks.

Q from KC Executive: What was the original excuse for buying the property?

A: Redevelopment

Q from KC Executive: What was the plan for the businesses during the interim?

A: The RFP for the property did not include the incentives to keep businesses on site

KC Executive noted that even if SeaTac would be paying for relocation, these businesses need to be in an international center to be successful.

Attendees urged KC Executive to use his platform to speak for the support of immigrant and refugee communities and their issues.

KC Executive talked about how he used to practice landlord tenant laws and has represented East African tenants. He said that we want to be a county that is mindful of immigrant and refugee issues and that the county has to be willing to stand up to issues like this. There clearly is not adequate involvement from the government and this whole situation is unacceptable. This is tragic and outrageous and there are many outside pressures. It is the county's job is to help buffer these changes. Many places in the state are required to help tenants relocate. He admitted he didn't know all of the facts, but that we need to recognize the needs to support small immigrant and refugee business owners and we need to live up that commitment.

Hamdi Abdulle and Hamdi Mohamed interpreted KC Executive's words for everyone.

King County staff were thanked for attending the meeting. It was also stressed the importance of connecting with other advocacy groups like MAPS and OneAmerica.

6:00pm	KC Executive KC Executive Constantine to Leave
6:00pm – 6:20pm	Introductions and Personal Impact Stories (if not covered earlier)
6:20pm – 6:25pm	Overview of Immigrant Community in King County, and Why OneAmerica Supports the SeaTac Businesses
6:25pm – 6:40pm	Conversation with KC immigrant and Refugee Commission on “Asks” and Creative Solutions (possible ways Commission can help, next steps for KC staff, action plan)

Conversation with KC Immigrant and Refugee Commission

Aneelah asked the Commission to commit to the following statements:

1. A commitment to the idea of an international market or other proposal for the existing immigrant-owned businesses in SeaTac – either at the current location or a nearby location, and a way forward to ensure the sustainability and viability of the immigrant-owned businesses and the larger immigrant infrastructure in the Greater Seattle area.
2. Assistance securing King County Housing Authority as a development partner to explore the idea of an international market or other proposal (and possible affordable housing), and to partner in providing expertise and financial modeling along with other skills and support.
3. Commitment to follow up: Slotted time at the next scheduled Commission meeting for the SeaTac Community Coalition to provide an update of the situation in SeaTac, and continue the discussion to ensure the issues of the immigrant-owned businesses in South Seattle is a priority for the Commission.

The King County Immigrant and Refugee Commission committed to all asks.

Aneelah noted that they have not approached KC Housing Authority yet, since they do not know if they can stay in the building. Once they know that answer, then they can ask how KCHA can help. Currently they do not have a commitment from KCHA yet.

It was suggested that Andrea Akita from Communities of Opportunity should be in the meeting with Bookda, Matias, KC Executive, and other King County Staff as well.

The Commission stated that they will try to see that this fight moves forward, raise awareness, and will put pressure on the city of SeaTac to fix this situation, especially since this is time sensitive; all businesses need to be out by August and some are being evicted before then.

Another attendee spoke (paraphrased):

Is this an economic development or is this something else? It is not really what the city of SeaTac has done, but how they have done it. They have no respect for us. We are not the only community in SeaTac. What will they do to other communities? They show that they do not listen or respect the communities here. What I am asking everyone is that we really need to change something because the city simply does not care. This is more than an economic development; this is destroying and uprooting a whole community. If we do not do something now, when will they stop?

Attendees urged the Commission to make this issue their top priority.

Questions:

Q to Commission: who is the developer?

Response: The developer coming is housed in Chicago and Spokane. They are promising housing and will devote 10% of housing for affordable housing, but that is barely enough. This development is only going to benefit the rich, almost like we are competing with Bellevue. They want housing income more than actually people. This is gentrification.

Q from Commission: Where does the City of SeaTac stand with their agreement with the developer?

A: It is a binding agreement; however, one issue they are exploring is that they did not give proper notice of whether or not to approve this sale to this private developer. They postponed the meeting item agenda for the passing of Amina Ahmed. With less than 24 hours' notice, they had a special meeting and voted to approve the sale. This community has spent \$25,000+ on legal fees so far and it is taking away from their businesses.

Q from Commission: Has a violation of that act happened in SeaTac before:

A: Not sure

Q from Matias: Should we bring anyone from the state to discuss this issue with?

A: We could ask Mia Gregerson for support. She is a former SeaTac City Council Member and currently a member of the WA House of Representatives represented the 33rd Legislative District.

Hamdi (SeaTac Center business owner) noted that they put in a request for a provision with Inland to preserve space for an international market but Inland was not interested. Also, only 2 out of the 7 SeaTac city council members actually came to see the SeaTac Market space.

Q Commission: What was the agreement of the grant?

A: \$1.2 million from the state to develop an international market, but it is going to expire soon. With the \$1.2 million, the city had a comprehensive plan for this property for more housing. Originally, they wanted to work with business owners, but then the newly elected SeaTac City Council redrafted the plan. They are now stating the \$1.2 million is not complementary to the original plan.

Q to Commission: What is the role of the commission with this situation as a political standpoint?

A: They can only take political stances as individuals. Boards and commissions cannot take stands on political issues.

The commission requested more information to address the issues at hand.

6:40pm – 6:45pm

Closing & Next Steps

6:45pm – 7:00pm

Tour of SeaTac Center / Bakaro Mall