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CULVER CITY EQUITY AND HUMAN RELATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
CULVER CITY EQUITY AND
HUMAN RELATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

February 25, 2025
5:00 P.M.

Call To Order & Roll Call

Chair Bano called the special meeting of the Culver City Equity and Human Relations Advisory Committee to order at 5:22 P.M. in Rooms B45 & B47 at the Culver City Senior Center.

Members Present: Samia Bano, Chair
Denice Renteria, Vice Chair
London McBride, Member
Haifaa Moammar, Member
Benicio Mora-Fattorini, Member*
Carlos Valverde, Member

*Member Mora-Fattorini arrived at 6:16 P.M.
and exited the meeting at 8:21 P.M.

*Member McBride arrived at 5:22

Absent: Jezenia Aguirre, Member
Ifunanyachukwu Nweke, Member
Rebecca Rona-Tuttle, Member

Staff Present: Michelle Hamilton, Senior Human Resources
and Equity Manager
Jeannine Houchen, Human Resources Equity
Analyst
Monica Kilaita, Deputy City Attorney
Janee Prieto, Human Resources Technician

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Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Bano led the Pledge of Allegiance.

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Receipt of Correspondence

Chair Bano reported that no correspondence had been received.

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Public Comment – Items NOT On the Agenda

Chair Bano invited public comment.

The following member of the public addressed the Committee:

Dr. Nicole Yates, Keen Independent Research, provided an update on the Equity and Inclusion Plan, formerly the Racial Equality Action Plan (REAP); discussed review of City department policies, programs, and budgets; initial ideas on how to support equity and inclusion; addressing disparities in current workforce demographics given availability and the local market; staff interviews, group conversations, and a virtual survey; the need for community input; outreach and engagement opportunities; and she indicated that she could be contacted at: nicoleyates@keenindependent.com.

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Presentation

Item P-1

Community Conversations: Spark Healing Through Conversation: How the Middle East Crisis Affects Me

Chair Bano introduced the item and noted that the lead facilitators would provide training for those who have volunteered to be support facilitators.

Ben Ginsburg, NewGround, provided background on himself and received clarification that everyone had received a copy of the facilitation guide and read it.

Zahra Sakkehja, NewGround, provided background on herself and discussed meeting format.

Chair Bano discussed group assignments.

Ben Ginsburg and Zahra Sakkejha, NewGround, discussed instructions for facilitating small groups; Follow the Meeting questions; demonstrating understanding tools; the 10 minute break before moving into breakout groups; assignment reflection and journaling; amount of time to share reflections; encouraging people to reflect on what the previous person said before sharing their own opinion; ensuring that people respect the time limit for speaking; identification of common things that came up for people; prompts to facilitate conversation; and encouragement to follow the Yes, And structure.

Discussion ensued between NewGround representatives, staff, and Committee Members regarding the number of people expected to participate in the meeting; number of facilitators; the ability to ask questions that seem relative in the moment; follow up questions; going deeper into the reflection; differences of opinions of definitions; reactivity; keeping the tone of the conversation in mind; community guidelines; the intent not to have a debate or fact-check exercise; focusing on what is meaningful to the person; avoidance of a discussion of the specifics of the ceasefire resolution; crosstalk; letting people know of other opportunities to be heard; opportunity for the public to address the EHRAC or the City Council to express their views; tools built on listening to focus on what has the most meaning for the speaker; statements about identity; body language; ambiguity; absolutes; listening for the main focus of a statement, repeated sentiments, and the last thing said; asking someone to say more; clarification; and ensuring that everyone has time to share.

Additional discussion ensued between NewGround representatives, and Committee Members regarding reactions to untrue statements; asking Follow the Meeting type questions; not debating the truth of statements; using language such as "Did I get that right?"; letting the other person have a chance to respond; ensuring that not too much time is spent on just two people going back and forth; allowing a second chance before stepping in to help; demonstrating understanding; capturing the essence of what was said and reflecting back the meaning in one short sentence; the worksheets; dealing with differing or competing facts; asking people what is important to them; changing the tone of the conversation; acknowledging that things are received

differently; different values; things that feel challenged; and avoiding getting bogged down with a debate about the facts.

Further discussion ensued between NewGround representatives, staff, and Committee Members about asking what people wish others understood; the ability to flag the facilitators down for assistance; facilitators introductions; having people introduce themselves as part of their timed comment period; timing methods; the importance of speaking from your own experience and how it relates to your life; not speaking on behalf of anyone else; agenda; the schedule; the importance of presuming good intentions; guidelines for speaking; protocol if people are not following the guidelines; the waiver required for participation; the legal definition of disruptions; the right to free speech; impeding the event; response in the event of consistent refusal to abide by the guidelines; goals of the conversation; framing; what is expected of the conversation; giving people an opportunity to be seen and understood as they wish to be seen and understood; allowing people to say out loud what may be obvious to them but is not obvious to the person they are talking to; making it clear that this is the first step; and numbers for breakout groups were distributed.

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Recess/Reconvene

Chair Bano called a brief recess from 6:07 P.M. to 6:15 P.M.

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Item P-1
(Continued)

Community Conversations: Spark Healing Through Conversation: How the Middle East Crisis Affects Me

Chair Bano introduced herself; provided background on the event; discussed the focus of the Community Conversation; goals; those feeling unheard and dismissed; divisiveness and frustration in the community; providing a safe space to be heard; addressing frustrations; engagement in true dialogue; awareness of biases; creating safety and healing for everyone in the community; improved relations and compassion for each other; next steps; resources; things that the Community

Conversation will not focus on; consequences for violating established boundaries; the consent and registration form signed as a requirement of attendance; Civil Discourse Guidelines; and she introduced and provided background on the facilitators.

Ben Ginsburg, NewGround, thanked everyone for coming; acknowledged the courage needed to be in the space together; discussed recent painful conversations; choosing to listen even when it is hard rather than to erase differences; and the goal of understanding, not agreement.

Zahra Sakkejha, NewGround, discussed finding common ground in the Culver City community; thoughtful engagement; deepening understanding rather than division; she invited everyone to lead with themselves as a human being; noted things still happening in the Middle East; and recognition of the fragility of human life.

Ben Ginsburg, NewGround, discussed things that are weighing on him and others; recent events and the experiences of individuals in Gaza; and the violations of values for Judaism and Islam.

Zahra Sakkejha and Ben Ginsburg, NewGround, discussed community agreements that participants were expected to uphold in order to have the most productive meeting possible; engagement, not debate; curiosity over assumption; dignity for all; holding complexity; multiple truths; multiple interpretations; multiple narratives; Community Conversation dialogue tools; speaking from one's own experience; focusing on how things made you feel; reflecting back the most important statement that the person speaking said before sharing your feelings; seeking clarification; friction; the Yes, And attitude; instructions to write questions down during the modeled conversation; neutrality; and instruction for people to take a moment to write why they are at the meeting, what is at stake, and what is important to share.

Member Mora-Fattorini joined the meeting.

Zahra Sakkejha and Ben Ginsburg, NewGround, modeled a conversation discussing why Israel/Palestine is important to them.

Zahra Sakkejha, NewGround, discussed identity; politics; family experiences; being forced out by violence; starting a

new life as a refugee; the core family wound; the family story; not forgetting where they come from; the responsibility to keep the family safe; the desire to live a normal life; acknowledging the good or bad; and things that are a part of her whether she likes it or not.

Ben Ginsburg, NewGround, discussed feeling connected to Israel as an abstract idea when he was growing up; the place where core stories happened; Jewish identity; being able to spend time in Jerusalem; the real place with complicated people living there; the connection felt; what is felt vs. what is expected to be felt; getting used to the rhythms of Jerusalem; deep religious challenges and fulfillment; the conservative area; the sense that he was not Jewish enough; the feeling that Israel is a safe place to live the Jewish life if things get bad; conservative practice; tension; frustration; and politics.

Zahra Sakkejha and Ben Ginsburg, NewGround, discussed acknowledgement that one person's safe place is the place that someone else had to flee; not feeling safe in America; racist and offensive remarks that make people feel they do not belong; feeling misunderstood; the sentiment that Palestinians have a problem with Jews; things that happened while the state of Israel was being established; things that are connected and cannot be separated; being Jewish as a religion and culture; what being pro and anti-Israel means; what feels like it is at stake; the feeling of safety; deep family trauma; the cyclical nature of history; the sense of always looking over your shoulder; feeling unsafe in the community; whether the government will consistently protect your rights; uncertainty; the feeling that there is nowhere to go to be safe; feeling unaccepted by society; acknowledgement of Palestinian identity by the mainstream; wearing items that identify your religion or culture; the assumption that if one is Jewish they must support everything Israel is doing or has ever done; scrutiny; being triggered by symbols; affirmation of identity; the privilege of being able to visit; passport control; feeling helpless and angry; assuming that people are bad based upon one's ethnicity; the need to comply to be allowed into the country to visit family; the tentative ceasefire; wanting to move on; lack of opportunity to have a conversation; consequences to speaking about issues; feeling like it is not possible to move on because things are not over; loss; death and destruction; and the fact that the absence of fighting doesn't necessarily mean peace.

Ben Ginsburg and Zahra Sakkejha , NewGround, discussed the constant reality for Palestinians in Gaza; the disaster on October 7, 2023; consistent suffering for Palestinians living under siege for 70 years; chopping up the West Bank; checkpoints; daily humiliation; the inability to ignore that the status quo is not peaceful for Palestinians; the feeling that the status quo does not feel peaceful for Israelis either; different experiences; the need for the status quo to change; the tangled nature of the situation; frustration; anger that Hamas speaks in the name of the Palestinian cause and uses horrific tactics that Palestinians oppose; concern with reviving the Palestinian cause through violence; wanting to enter spaces without having to immediately assert opposition to Hamas; the need for people to understand that Palestinians are suffering; acknowledgement that people are afraid; allowing space to be seen as an individual; acknowledgement of the common goal of people deserving to live in freedom, dignity, equality, and safety in their homeland; assumptions about politics and values; and appreciation for being able to have the conversation.

Chair Bano expressed gratitude to the audience for listening; discussed the goal to hold space for each other; splitting up into small groups after the break; thinking about what was said that resonated or challenged opinions; things left unsaid that might need to be said; speaking from the I; asking each other questions about the other; building upon what was heard from each other; identification of common threads in each other's stories; acknowledgement of common ground; she encouraged people to reflect on what is important to them and what they might want to say; discussed breakout groups; support facilitators; small group discussions; and she indicated that paper was available to write questions on or to take notes on.

Ben Ginsburg, NewGround, indicated that it was time to turn in any questions.

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Recess/Reconvene

Chair Bano called a brief recess from 8:02 P.M. to 8:12 P.M.

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**Community Conversations: Spark Healing Through Conversation:
How the Middle East Crisis Affects Me**

Chair Bano invited everyone to find their facilitator and join their breakout groups.

Ben Ginsburg, NewGround, discussed one-on-one conversations; people who were able to articulate how the other side felt but doubted that those who held differing views would be able to do the same for their point of view; listening; and he encouraged people be patient with each other, to hold grace, and to set aside their doubts.

Chair Bano instructed people to stay with their groups and find a spot to put chairs in a circle to have discussion.

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Recess/Reconvene

The meeting recessed into breakout groups from 8:17 P.M. to 9:00 P.M.

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**Community Conversations: Spark Healing Through Conversation:
How the Middle East Crisis Affects Me**

Chair Bano called the meeting back to order; discussed the question and answer portion of the meeting; recommended resources; recommendations for the EHRAC and Culver City; ensuring that everyone is heard; and next steps.

Ben Ginsburg, NewGround, thanked the facilitators; discussed different experiences of attendees; the fact that there is always more that needs to be said; next steps; connecting with people who may have said something that was challenging to address what they have said; and the value of taking the extra time for dialogue.

Zahra Sakkejha, NewGround, discussed benefits to practicing the dialogue skills used at the meeting in other areas of your life.

Discussion ensued between NewGround representatives and facilitators regarding moments of connection; terminology; misunderstandings; questions asking for clarification that resulted in greater dialogue; common ground found; adding richness to one another; tangible examples of the pain and cost of silence; challenges; wanting to understand; the difficulty of finding willing partners for discussions; complexity and tragedy of stories on the news; the inability to solve issues; resilience of the people involved; the importance of supporting one another at the community level; the psychological phenomenon of empathy getting in the way of sympathy for others; practice and skill needed to put a gap in the response to enable consideration of the other side; the deep commitment and care for the community; willingness to continue the conversation; negotiating feelings; keeping each other safe; and different meanings.

Emily Dibiny identified herself as a Palestinian and stated that "from the river to the sea" meant freedom for her Palestinian family to be able to move around outside their cities.

A speaker provided background on herself; asserted that she and her family were being erased; and indicated "from the river to the sea" meant that land would be free for everyone.

Another speaker indicated that when he hears "from the river to the sea" he hears that the state of Israel is not a valid state and needs to be erased.

Zahra Sakkejha and Ben Ginsburg, NewGround, noted that one statement meant different things to different people; acknowledged the emotionally charged statement; discussed the feeling of threat; powerful desire for freedom; aspirations for equality; one statement with three different explanations and reactions; describing what you see and what you want; and finding connection through values.

Chair Bano requested public feedback on what the Committee or Culver City should be doing to help create more equity, inclusion, and better relations in Culver City.

Jim provided background on himself; expressed appreciation for the process; noted the importance of coming together with neighbors and those outside the community to hear different perspectives with facilitation; and he wanted to see events like this one more often.

Rida Hamida provided background on herself, discussed impacts of the occupation on her family; thanked the EHRAC for their work; discussed her work with residents; length of time to put on the event; the ceasefire resolution dismissed by the City Council; and next steps recommended as a collective.

Members of the audience expressed opposition to discussing the topic of a ceasefire resolution as being outside the parameters of the conversation.

Rida Hamida discussed disrespectful silencing Palestinians; she asked that the EHRAC create a subcommittee to ensure that resolutions presented to the City Council go through an equitable and inclusive process, along with events for the City; discussed the anti-hate resolution condemning the Muslim ban; the biased October 23, 2023 resolution; working with communities to hear voices and ensure that one community is not uplifted over another; and the importance of ensuring that antimuslim, anti-Palestinian, and anti-Asian issues are included, not just those represented in the past.

Ruth Brody Sharone provided background on herself; proposed reflecting what they want to see over there; setting the example of constructive respectful conversation and teaching that in middle school and high school; publicizing the conversations so that people can see that it is possible; and she expressed gratitude for the event and wanted to see more.

Chair Bano thanked everyone for their participation and asked those interested to reach out to share additional feedback.

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Recess/Reconvene

Chair Bano called a brief recess from 9:20 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. to allow for the transition from the Community Conversation to the EHRAC meeting.

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Member Requests to Agendize Future Items

Member Valverde discussed the Soccer Signage Ad Hoc Subcommittee; communication with Dani Cullens; and he requested agendizing an action item, receipt of an update from the Diversity Awareness Projects Ad Hoc Subcommittee, and receipt of a report from the Youth Advisory Board Ad Hoc Subcommittee.

Discussion ensued between staff and Committee Members regarding staff agreement to investigate what is needed in order to make a recommendation; Committee bylaws; agreement to agendize an item on the process to make a recommendation; and the need for an update from the 2025 & 2026 Public Events and Budget Ad Hoc Subcommittee.

Chair Bano requested a report from the Community Conversation Ad Hoc Subcommittee and a report on the Bystander Awareness Document.

Member Rona requested a report from the Equity Awards Ad Hoc Subcommittee and an update on the Civil Discourse Guidelines.

Committee Members agreed to agendize the following items.

- Receive a report on the process to make a recommendation regarding soccer signage prohibition
- Receive an update from the Diversity Awareness Projects Ad Hoc Subcommittee
- Receive a report from the Youth Advisory Board Ad Hoc Subcommittee
- Receive an update from the 2025 & 2026 Public Events and Budget Ad Hoc Subcommittee
- Receive an update from the Community Conversation Ad Hoc Subcommittee
- Receive an update on the Bystander Awareness Document
- Receive an update from the Equity Awards Ad Hoc Subcommittee
- Receive an update on the Civil Discourse Guidelines

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Adjournment

There being no further business, at 9:35 P.M., the Equity and Human Relations Advisory Committee adjourned to March 25, 2025.

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Dana Anderson
SECRETARY of the Culver City Equity and
Human Relations Advisory Committee
Culver City, California

APPROVED

Samia Bano
CHAIR of the Culver City Equity and Human Relations
Advisory Committee
Culver City, California

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that, on the date below written, these minutes were filed in the Office of the City Clerk, Culver City, California and constitute the Official Minutes of said meeting.

Jeremy Bocchino
CITY CLERK

Date