



Governor Kim Reynolds
Lt. Governor Adam Gregg
San Wong, Director

MEETING MINUTES

COMMISSION OF ASIAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER AFFAIRS (CAPI)

Date: Saturday, March 27, 2021

Time: 9:30 AM – 11:30 AM

Location: Virtual Meeting via Google Meet

Conference Call – Public Access Provided

Commissioners Present:

Ben Jung, Chair – *West Des Moines*

James Suong – *Des Moines*

Michelle Yoshimura-Smith – *Des Moines*

Karlai Thornburg – *Ames*

Peggy La – *Sioux City*

Ritu Gurung – *Davenport*

Suresh Basnet – *Cedar Rapids*

DHR Director San Wong – *Ex Officio*

DHR/CAS/API Staff:

Monica Stone, CAS Division Director/DHR Deputy Director

Tina Shaw, Executive Officer for Office of Asian & Pacific Islander Affairs/CAS

Guest Attendance: Mark Schmidt, Catholic Diocese of Des Moines; Alma Apolonio Bernal, Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission Intern; and Vince Furlong of Council Bluffs with Crime Victims Advocacy.

Public Comment: Guests participated in the conversation throughout the meeting, see below.

I. Call to Order

Chair Jung called the meeting to order at 9:35 AM. All commissioners in attendance. Quorum present.

II. Approval of Proposed Agenda

Meeting agenda was reviewed. Thornburg will report on Ames events and developments under item 5 (V). **Motion by Thornburg, seconded by La** to approve the agenda, as amended. **Unanimous consent. Motion carried.**

III. Past Meeting Minutes

Minutes of the 12/20/20 meeting were reviewed. **Motion by Yoshimura-Smith, seconded by Suong to approve the minutes of 12/20/20 meeting. Unanimous consent. Motion carried.**

IV. Commissioner Reports

1. Commissioner La – *Sioux City*

La announced that the Siouxland Asian Festival will take place in Sioux City on June 19 at Riverside Park from noon to 4:00 PM. Also, in concert with the many vigils taking place around the country, the Asian community in Sioux City hosted one for the six Asian women killed in Atlanta, Georgia. Nearly 100 members of the Asian community attended the vigil held outside La's store to demonstrate solidarity against hate and discrimination targeted toward the Asian community and to mourn the loss of the women gunned down at their place of business. Sioux City Police participated to ensure everyone's safety.

2. Commissioner Suong – *Des Moines*

Suong expressed serious concerns held by Far East Asians as it pertains to Asian elders in the community. He thanked businesses in high-density Asian areas for being alert to the crime wave targeting the vulnerable, elderly taking place nationally. On the pandemic, he remarked that Polk County Health Department and HyVee have done a good job of publicizing vaccine information and clinics in the Des Moines metro.

3. Commissioner Jung – *Des Moines*

Jung reported that he attended the Des Moines vigil hosted by Iowa Asian Alliance and EMBARC where media was present. An earlier vigil took place in Western Gateway Park a day before. Jung plans to host a dialog with the Korean community soon to gauge feelings and increase awareness as a way for the community to stay alert and be allies for one another.

Yoshimura-Smith shared that Iowa Asian Alliance hosted an event in conjunction with the Filipino community at which time Des Moines Police Department Asian Outreach officers advised on general situational awareness and personal protection tactics such as pepper spray. DMPD counseled everyone to let friends, family know whereabouts and checking in regularly as a way to protect and support one another.

Director Wong stressed the importance of including police departments in outreach work, and if there is an interest in state-level conversations, the Iowa Department of Public Safety may be contacted. Police department should be engaged for any trainings and security for large gatherings.

Gurung commented that racial discrimination is deeply rooted and inside university systems. Diversity groups are educating campuses of national initiatives leading in anti-hate efforts. She added that we are all Americans who love this country, and solidarity should exist across minoritized groups to help spread the message of inclusion.

Basnet offered that “Midwestern Nice” distinguishes Iowa, and this can open the door to take on work to combat anti-Asian hate crime. He asked about resources.

4. Commissioner Thornburg - Ames

Thornburg segued to Iowa’s Hate Crime Act – next on the agenda – and provided her report.

V. New Business - Iowa Hate Crime Law

Shaw relayed data from Iowa DPS which indicated zero reported hate crimes against Asians as of the date of this meeting. Shaw also conveyed Iowa figures related to Stop AAPI Hate organization’s national self-reporting database.

Wong added that Iowa’s hate crime law is very complicated, and a conversation with DHR’s Criminal Juvenile Justice Planning Division, which maintains the justice data warehouse, should be consulted. More education on this topic is necessary, and there are things we can do now to aid the system in collecting data.

Jung requested a virtual education session and conversation be included for a future CAPI meeting to be hosted by CJJP and/or DPS.

Thornburg reported on her work in the Ames Chinese community, along with police and local organizations related to hate crimes against Asians. A group came together to create a survey and sifted through the resulting responses. This was compared with Ames Police Department data to learn exactly what types of incidents involving Asians are taking place. Data indicated that in the period from September 2020 through March 2021, seven of a total 506 reported incidents involved Asians to the Ames PD. As of October of 2021, 16 of a total 573 reported incidents involved Asians.

Asian-reported incidents did not involve hate crimes, but did with burglary and domestic, family disputes. Thornburg surmised that if hates crimes are occurring, people are not contacting police to report them. On the campus of Iowa State University in Ames, Chinese professors and students established a crime and assault reporting system to ISU campus security. Several hate incidents were reported in 2020 via a survey sent out on WeChat app. widely used in the Chinese community. Of the responses, six were verbal incidents and car honking, one Chinese professor experienced having animal organs thrown on her driveway in Spring 2020.

Other incidents were targeted at Chinese students. Disparaging comments were hurled at them along with, “Go Back Home!” According to the survey responses, the latest reported incident happened in October 2020.

Thornburg stated that the City of Ames and its police department are aware of the anti-Asian animosities nationally and has been hands on and engaged with the Ames Chinese community. As evidence of this, the Mayor of Ames sent out a press release to support the Asian community. The Ames Chinese Language School has great relationships with the city and provided translations to help faculty and staff protect Asian children in the K-12 Ames public school system. Shaw contacted ISU campus chief of police and will provide that data once it is received.

Thornburg cautioned that sometimes we do not have enough information, and it may be too quick to jump into the Hate Crime narrative as it relates to Iowa. She urged that more time be spent to educate the community and develop a better way to report incidents. Thornburg is working with the City of Ames to create a nonemergency number or dedicated hotline.

Vince Furlong, public guest, asked why Asians will not call 911 when an incident occurs. Thornburg said most are doubtful if it is not an obvious emergency. Yoshimura-Smith added there are many reasons why people do not call the police, of which, many do not want to stick out and prefer to keep to themselves, as well as the general mistrust of government.

Alma Apolonio Bernal, public guest, added that she is ethnically Mexican, and the fear of police and mistrust of government is widespread in this community. In Cedar Rapids, Know Your Rights videos are in the works in English and other languages to better educate foreign-language speakers. A summer-release date is expected. She also shared that the Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission will host a May event featuring panelists from the Asian community. Basnet offered his assistance to help promote the event.

La shared that Asian police officers in the Sioux City Police Department with close ties to the community stated no crimes or incidents have been made known to them.

Thornburg added data on Asians must be disaggregated, and victims must stand up and report crimes. CAPI is positioned to educate the at-large community on the differences among Asians in Iowa.

Mark Schmidt, public guest, stated the lack of Iowa data on Asians minimize outreach and education efforts and recommended that better data could help the community and efforts in the Catholic church in SW Iowa and more broadly. Thornburg encouraged his network to consider circulating the survey mentioned earlier more widely. The four-question survey is simple and straight-forward. Schmidt shared that there are four dioceses in Iowa; he is based in southwest Iowa. Mr. Schmidt would like to see about translating the survey in the following languages: Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean, Cambodian, and Burmese.

Jung added that public events increase visibility and let the community at-large know this is an important issue. He voiced that more action items are required from meetings.

VI. Old Business

In the time remaining, Stone provided an abbreviated state legislative update of bills that affect this Commission. Shaw reminded commissioners of the external-facing state legislation tracker they have access to, if they would like more detailed information.

Stone announced the new API Office lead will be decided upon next week, and a start-date will be relayed when available so that efforts to craft CAPI's next Strategic Plan may begin. This work will be deferred until the new staff is onboarded to assist.

VII. Public Comment

Public guests commented on hate crimes, disaggregated data and public education and outreach efforts, above.

VIII. Next Meeting – 2nd Quarter

New API staff will contact the Commission to determine best scheduling options.

IX. Adjournment

Motion by Suong to adjourn the meeting, La seconded. Unanimous consent. Meeting adjourned at 11:35 AM.